

Consent In The Age Of Kevin Spacey

by Jennifer Donnell

Consent used to be not saying no. Aaron thought of this as he read her text message to him, all the while imagining how she'd looked that night- her freckled skin and orange-red hair illuminated by the moonlight through his oblong living room window, as if the perfect spotlight for whatever they did next...

Though, "next" became a lot of nothing...

She'd complained of a headache. He'd suggested it might be all the champagne and drove her home, as he still felt sober enough and it was cheaper than calling her an Uber. She'd hugged him goodbye and ruffled his thinning brown hair, though it was vaguely reminiscent of a hair tousele from his Aunt Glenda.

She seemed fine until a few days later when she cancelled their previously arranged second date. And, now, a week later... suddenly, ***this***.

"I didn't ask you to unhook my bra." her words were blunt and bitter in blue and white iMessaging font.

A gap of an hour went by and he grappled with what to say in his defense.

"I'm sorry." was all he finally came up with. "I thought you wanted me to. You said we should leave the bar and go back to my place. I thought you wanted more to happen?"

"NO. I thought we'd talk and get to know each other. It was our FIRST DATE. I didn't say you could touch my breast. You groped me against my will. I felt so horrible the next day that I had to stay home from work. I talked to my therapist and it fits the definition of assault. I'm going to the police."

He imagined her again. How she'd leaned back against the couch cushion as he slowly circled her areola with his thumb and middle finger. Her white skin a beautiful contrast to the tan he'd acquired on his work trip to Miami.

He mentally recalculated the angle at which she leaned back into his mahogany leather couch. Hadn't that implied consent, even pleasure? He thought the light shudder she gave as his lips approached for the first lick. Wasn't it one of orgasmic sensation... the way the first touch of a future lover can feel? Or, oh god, had he misread the signs?

And with less immediacy, he thought of his father, the cop. Would he have defended his son to others or told him bluntly that he was an idiot for trusting a woman he met through a dating app. And what about the the police... would they care that her profile said she liked kissing, would they see it his way?

Aaron thought, or had until this point, of himself as a feminist, and yet -here he was- justifying that she had shown up in a mostly see through blouse that glimpsed her bra, a skinny miniskirt that showed every curve. He told her so, against his better judgment, but her expletive reply let him know she didn't agree.

"#!@* * *

"Fuck you! You're victim shaming me. I am the victim! Not you! I bet you've done this to many more women. It's almost never the first time when something like this happens! I've read that one

perpetrator can have up to a hundred victims. I should have been able to go over to your apartment naked and you should have shown me respect!"

He thought of his mother. How would she view him now, her son, the "rapist". Would past girlfriends talk about his penchant for rough sex, the gentle (he thought) pull of their hair or slap of their ass.

"I've never assaulted any woman. Ever. I'm sorry you felt bad, but you should have told me. I can't read minds." he retorted, his eyes smarting with tears for the first time in years.

Before she could reply, he shut off his phone and turned off the light on his bedside table. "I've never assaulted any women." he reassured himself.

Though, as he lay there, for the next hour and two after that... unable to find peace or sleep, he began to wonder. Had he not assaulted any women, ever? Or had he assaulted every single one, believing that consent was the absence of saying no.

