

## **My One Date In College**

In my senior year in college, I broke down and agreed to go out with this guy in the computer science program. He was quite handsome and had a warm smile and big blue eyes like my brother. “Hum,” my below-conscious mind whispered. I never dated since I’m high-functioning autistic, and I’m smell and touch-sensitive. I can’t stand men’s aftershave. If someone accidentally touches me, I jump away and scream. Most men avoided me, but Samuel was consistently kind. Only the soft scent of Irish Spring lingered on his skin. I liked him a lot and began dreaming.

He took me out for a nice dinner, I don’t remember the restaurant but it was expensive. I felt like a whore. Why do people think guys should open the door and buy everything? Isn’t that paying for sex? I think it’s dishonest and deceptive. The more a man spends on a woman the more he expects sex as a payback. It’s glorified prostitution. I had cash ready to pay my share.

At any rate, while we were eating, one of those infamous Colorado blizzards blew in, making the restaurant windows bow right at our table. The candle went out. Scared me. *The devil is coming for you, Banjo, you’re out with a man.*

I hadn’t worn a heavy coat, and it was freezing cold when we got into his car. Shivering, I slid over next to him. He didn’t do anything so I relaxed. Sweet time, pleasant conversation, the radio playing romantic songs. About two blocks from my apartment, he unexpectedly rested his right hand on my pant leg.

It was like a 220V electrical charge shot through my body. I slapped his face and yelled, “Stop the car! Let me out, or I’ll scream!”

His mouth dropped open. For a second, he couldn't speak. He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Banjoy, I really am. I thought we were becoming friends. I mean, we've worked well together on a lot of projects over the years. I didn't mean anything by it."

I still shook from the jolt. "Stop the car and let me out. I'm walking home."

With a stunned expression on his face, he slowly shook his head. "That's not necessary. I won't touch you again, please, Banjoy, look at the snow, it's a blizzard out there, and you'll freeze."

I huddled as far away as possible against the passenger door. I didn't say anything since my throat was strangled with thick autistic ropes. Samuel had touched me before. We had even hugged and kissed when he walked me home, but knowing I was touch sensitive, he had always asked ahead of time. I felt deeply embarrassed, and my face was hot. I tried to catch his eyes, but they were pinned to the road. His face was bright red.

Samuel drove carefully on the slick, snow-packed, and unplowed streets of Fort Collins into the horizontal snow blasting the windshield, street lights barely allowing him to see the road. No cars were out. He was a good driver, responsible, and very intelligent. He made me laugh. Great career in front of him. We talked about computers until the lights went out.

I knew he would never speak to me again.

I started crying.

When he stopped the car outside my door, I apologized. I had finally learned to make full sentences without singing. I could barely see through my tears. "I'm very sorry, Samuel. I like you. I like you more than a lot. As you know, I have severe autism, and I'm touch and smell sensitive. I reacted hysterically. You are the only man I've ever gone out with. It was a lovely

dinner and a romantic drive until I blew it.” I took a ragged breath. “I’m very sorry.” Tears ran down my cheeks.

They were on his cheeks, too.

We never looked at one another or never spoke again, despite being together in many classes, not only in undergraduate school, but also in graduate school where I continued for my doctorate. It was a relief when he transferred to MIT so he no longer saw my tears.