

1. THE TAXI RIDE

Janet and Jason Smart (no relation) had been out together for a night of heavy partying.

“I don’t see a cab anywhere!”

“Let’s walk home.”

“That’s crazy!”

“I could use my cell phone.”

“Use it!”

He dialed the cab company.

“Honey, they’re really busy. An hour and a half at the earliest. It’s late on a Saturday night.”

“I’m not walking.”

“What do you want to do.? It’s night. It’s cold. Nobody is going to help us.”

“It was your bright idea to wear shorts.”

“All the more reason that I don’t want to wait around here. We’re walking.”

They start to head north on Highland Avenue.

“I didn’t wear the right shoes to walk.”

“Quit complaining. It’s not going to take that long. How long do we live from here? Three or four miles at the most.”

“You’re not the one in heels.”

“If you keep nagging, it’s going to make it worse. We can’t wait around here. We’re sitting ducks.”

“You can barely stand up. You’re leaning on me.”

“I’m not drunk. I’m just trying to steady myself.”

“Where did I meet you?”

“We’re going to be OK! We’ll get back to my place. I’ll massage your feet. I’ll get you a drink. We’ll have some fun. We’ll laugh about the time that we walked home.”

“There was a guy trying to butter me up in the bar. He had a car. Now, he’s back at his place.”

“You’re not going to break up with me just to get a ride home.”

“At this point, it doesn’t sound like such a bad idea.”

“He was staring at your legs all night.”

“He bought me a drink when you were flirting with those college girls.”

“I was out of money.”

“How were you going to pay for a cab?”

“Don’t you have money?”

“My money!”

“Are we in this together?”

“I’m not sure anymore. This one is definitely going on the shit list. I should have never started hanging out with a guy without a car.”

“I have a car.”

“It’s a great car. It’s just in the shop a lot.”

“A lemon.”

“It’s new. And it’s really nice. What more do you want?”

“I want a ride back to your place.”

“I thought that it was our place.”

“I’m just trying to see how it sounds if I actually break up with you.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I still have my condo.”

“I thought that it was sold.”

“No, the market is still like shit. Some guy from Chicago looked at it. And he was going to buy it if his job came through. But it didn’t happen.”

“Bum market!”

“How long have we walked, anyway?”

“Two blocks. You’re going so slow.”

“You’re the one who’s fallen twice, and I’ve had to pick you up. We should have waited for a cab.”

“I told you that none are coming!”

“You shouldn’t have drunk so much. And we should have left a couple of hours ago.”

“That guy was chatting you up. And you had a twinkle in your eye for him.”

“How old were those two girls that you were talking to? Seventeen.”

“Twenty-two, thank you. They were both in college. They wanted some help with their accounting.”

“Sure, just like the guy that I was talking to needed some help with sex ed!”

“You shouldn’t wear such short skirts.”

“It’s not like those girls were dressed as nuns.”

“It doesn’t hurt to look. It just gets me wanting you more.”

“You struck out so you come back to Mommy.”

“That’s about the size of it.”

“I told you that I’m not going to be around forever. You’re going to have to fight your own battles without any hope of me taking you back.”

“We’re together right now.”

“That’s what you call it. We’ve been exiled to hell together. Hardly a glowing endorsement.”

“Do you want to make out right here? It would be kind of romantic.”

“Like having a hot poker shoved up my ass. The only thing that I want right now is a hot shower and my warm bed.”

“Then we should walk faster.”

“You’re the one who’s still leaning on me.”

“I’m just pointing us in the right direction.”

“Lead on Rudolph with your red nose.”

“My nose is not red.”

“It always gets red when you drink too much.”

That’s a mean thing to say.”

“You can’t take a little teasing. Now you know how it feels.”

“How what feels?”

“Your flirting with those twenty-year old nuns.”
 “I wasn’t flirting.”
 “What do you call buying them drinks.”
 “And the guys who buy your drinks?”
 “You were ignoring me.”:
 “You’re the one who always talks about us breaking up.”
 “It’s not the same thing. I want to break up because you’re acting like an asshole. Then
 you go act like an asshole to prove my point.”
 “Nothing ever comes of it.”
 “How am I supposed to know that? By checking to see if your nose is glowing.”
 “Lay off the nose.”
 “I could get more graphic.”
 “If we had sex a little more, I wouldn’t be such a stiff ass.”
 “If you didn’t drink so much, maybe you could stay stiff a little longer.”
 “Uh Uh!”
 “Or you just pass out half the time.”
 “I only drink when I go out.”
 “You’re the one who wants to go out all the time.”
 “It gets rough at work. I just don’t want to go to sleep after I have a late dinner.”
 “We could do what we used to do?”
 “I’m trying to keep it together. It’s just not the same.”
 “We’re not the same.”
 “I know!”
 “What goes on in that office?”
 “Work!”
 “Are they passing out perfume samples?”
 “What are you talking about?”
 “You coming home smelling of perfume.”
 “Some of the girls in the office are a little over friendly with their hugs. It’s not like
 anything is happening.”
 “All your best lines getting shot down there as well.”
 “You really think that I’m with other women. Is this what all this is about?”
 “I don’t know. You’ve gone all weird on me recently.”
 “We could change all that.”
 “I don’t find it very romantic having you fall on me smelling like a brewery.”
 “We’ve had our best sex after a couple of drinks.”
 “I’m not sure if that’s enough for me anymore.”
 “What more is there? We’re together.”
 “Maybe this was enough for me when I was in college. Just to have a guy that I could be
 with. But we don’t really talk that much.”
 “We’re talking now.”
 “This is more like combat. We don’t have real conversations about art or the state of the
 world. Who are you?”

“I’m not on the UN. I’ve got a job. I work hard. And I like to party a bit.”

“That’s not enough.”

“If you want deep discussion, join a book club. Take some more classes.”

“Why are you such a jerk?”

“I’m doing what I can. You want me to be some kind of deep thinker. I’ve never sold myself that way.”

“I just want you to act more adult.”

“Like one of those freaky hipster boys who’s going to spend his life washing dishes.”

“I want to be with someone who makes me happy. Besides, they’re not my type.”

“Am I your type?”

“We’re not talking about that. You were the one who brought up other guys.”

“You have been thinking about it.”

“Right now, I’m just thinking about getting home.”

“So quit bumping into me.”

“Isn’t that a cab?”

“Flag it down!”

“You’re the guy!”

“You’re in a short skirt. Use your charm!”

“Damn!”

“I could have sworn that it was a cab.”

“There ought to be a law that no car can look like a cab at this time of night.”

“How would we ever figure out which was a cab?”

“You know what I mean. Only cabs would look like cabs.”

“You’re slurring your words again.”

“At least, I’m not leaning on your anymore.”

“You’re not looking good.”

“I’m not feeling good.”

“You’re not going to puke.”

“Don’t worry about that.”

“At least we’re not in my car.”

“I don’t need to be reminded of that. That was a long time ago.”

“What was your excuse that night?”

“I didn’t have one.”

“Let me give you a hand.”

“I’m going to be OK. This sidewalk is all uneven. It makes it hard to walk.”

“Just don’t fall again.”

“I’m trying not to. I could use this tree to keep me up.”

“Watch out!”

“I’m going down!”

“Give me your hand. I guess that I was too late.”

“I could still use a hand.”

“You’re all dead weight down there. I don’t need you pulling me into the mud.”

“I’m not in the mud. Just help me.”

“You need to sit yourself up.”

“I’m trying. I feel hurt.”

“The only thing that’s bruised is your male ego. And there’s no one around here but us two.”

“You could call an ambulance. It would probably get here a lot faster than a cab.”

“You’re drunk. And you’ve fallen down again. I can hardly call an ambulance for something like that.”

“I might have broken something.”

“Grab a hold of my hand.”

“It’s slippery.”

“Quit that, or I’m going to push your back down.”

“Let’s make love here. No one can see us. We’re hidden by the tree.”

“You’re such a pig!”

“You were the one complaining.”

“This is what I hate about you. Get up, or I’m going to just leave you here.”

“That’s a great idea. You go get the car and come back for me.”

“When I get home, I’m going to bed whether you’re with me or not.”

“I don’t think that I can walk anymore.”

“You’re such a bastard. I’m not going to leave you like this. I’d sooner call the police.”

“You don’t have to play the part of a stuck up bitch.”

“I’m not playing the part. I really am too stuck up to deal with this kind of shit. Either get up immediately on your own. Or I’m leaving you here!”

“I can’t get up.”

“You are hopeless. I curse the day that I first talked to you.”

“Wait for me!”

“You’re not even making an effort.”

“I’m going to try.”

“I’m not going to wait around for your shenanigans. Get up, or I’m gone.”

“We should have waited for a cab.”

“It was your idea to walk. Get up!”

“Be patient. I might have hurt something.”

“Your fat ass. But you’ll live.”

“Don’t keep walking.”

“I’m not waiting.”

“I’m sitting up now. I’m on my knees. Just give me a hand.”

“You’re doing all of this on your own.”

“I need your help!”

“The only thing that I’m going to do is wait a few extra minutes. If you’re not up, I’m finished with you.”

“For good.”

“For now. Quit making excuses.”

“I slipping here. I need you.”

“Find a way to support yourself.”

“Quit being a cunt!”

“Don’t call me that. That’s reason enough to walk away for good.”

“OK. I’m sorry. Now will you help me up.”

“You’re apologizing for what you said. But that doesn’t cover the nuisance that you’ve been.”

“You’ve been dragging your ass in those damn heels of yours.”

“I could take them off and show you a piece of my mind.”

“OK, OK! I’m almost up.”

“Almost isn’t going to cut it. “You’re not even up on your knees yet.”

“Yes, I am. At least I was. Then I fell again. That’s why I need you to help me stand up.”

“No amount of begging is going to help. And you’ve just used up your grace period.”

“Hold on! I’m getting there.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Look, I’m standing.”

“No, you’re not! Quit lying to me.”

“I’m trying to stand.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? You look like you’re going to topple over.”

“If you just give me your shoulder, that should make it all right.”

“Walk over to me.”

“Do you got me?”

“I don’t know what I’ve got. But if you keep leaning on me like this, I am going down.”

“OK, OK, OK, I’ve got it!”

“You can walk on your own?”

“Sure.”

“I can’t deal with another episode like that!”

“I totally understand. You’re not going to leave me.”

“This is not the time to talk about that. We need to make it home.”

“I just don’t want you to hold this against me.”

“I can’t think about that now. I have to much to figure out.”

“That sounds ominous.”

“I’m not your Mom. You can’t talk me out of punishing you or some such nonsense.”

“You are going to punish me.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. I just can’t relate to you if you keep acting like a child. I didn’t sign up to discipline you.”

“This is just a bad night.”

“No, it not. You do this all the time. Now, you’re trying to get me to argue with you. I want to go home.”

“I do, too. We’re almost there.”

“We’ve barely walked a mile. How long has it taken up?” An hour. We’ll make it home by dawn. If we make it home.”

“Quit talking like that. “You’re being a defeatist.”

“You were the one wallowing on the ground a few minutes ago.”

“We don’t need to talk about it if we’re going to make it home.”

“All right, we won’t talk the rest of the way. We can save out energy for walking”

“That sounds good. From this point on, we won’t say anything.”

“That’s reasonable.”

“Why do you always have to have the last word.”

“I was just agreeing with you.”

“Great. Let’s get going.”

“You’re hardly moving. We need to get home. It’s chilly out here.”

“Let me warm you up,”

“I don’t want you touching me.”

‘Just to help us stay warm.”

“You’re looking for any excuse in the book not to get your ass in gear. Step it up.”

“Is that some kind of pep talk that you used to get from your Dad.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Touchy subject.”

“No subject at all. The only thing that we have to be concerned with at this moment is the walk home. Everything else is extraneous.”

“You don’t like to talk about your parents much.”

“I like my parents. We get along. But I’m an independent girl. I’m not someone who goes running back to Daddy to ask for money.”

“He has enough to spare. He doesn’t mind helping out.”

“I don’t want to talk about parents.”

“What do you want to talk about.”

“We agreed that we weren’t going to say anything until we got home.”

“Talking helps while away the hours.”

“Not talking about bull shit. It only makes me feel more miserable.”

“You can dish it out. But you can’t take it.”

“Jason, you have done nothing so far to make me feel any better about you. I’d advise you to shut your mouth while you have the chance.”

“I’m sorry if I’m being such a jerk. I guess that I’m just drinking a little too much these days.”

“Apology accepted. I just hope that you’re going to remedy the situation.”

“It’s all not me! I can’t change if you don’t do something too.”

“You told me that you’ve been drinking a little too much. What do you want me to do about that?”

“You could quit being such a flirt.”

“We’re not getting into that again. If you have a problem with alcohol, it has absolutely nothing to do with me.”

“You don’t help!”

“I’m not your parent, your therapist, your teacher, your minister, your social worker. I’m not even sure if I want to be your lover.”

“You’re breaking up right now.”

“I didn’t say that. We don’t have to bring it to that point. A lot has happened tonight.

And I'm confused about things. But our only goal for the time being is to make it home."

"I just don't to wake up tomorrow to some kind of surprise."

"It is tomorrow. And the longer that we take to walk home, the less time that we're going to have of the rest of the day."

"I'm only want to tell you how I feel."

"I don't think that we know how we feel at this time."

"I guess that sound better."

"Still, I'm not sure who you are anymore."

"Would you have gone home with that guy if I wasn't there tonight?"

"Jason, that is a silly question."

"Why? I asked it."

"But you were there. Nothing was going on."

"I saw him touching you. He gave you the pick-up artist's touch."

"Huh?"

"You know how he rubs you on the back."

"You've got to be kidding!"

"For real!"

"If you weren't seeing things."

"Admit it!. He touched you, and you liked it."

"Yeah, baby! I told him that I'd such his cock in the washroom."

"You're being a cunt again!"

"Me? You practically accused me of fucking him in the bar."

"You just make me jealous. It's because I love you so much."

"If you really meant that, you'd quit flirting with other girls all the time. A girl walks by in a short skirt, and you track her with your electric eye. And I'm supposed to play along. I may talk to someone. But that doesn't mean that I'd ever go home with him. I'm not so sure in your case."

"Quick, it's cab!"

"How can you be sure?"

"I can't"

"You've got to flag him down!"

"I'm trying!"

The driver saw them waving and stopped. Jason and Janet hopped in the back seat. He mumbled something to the driver. Then he took off.

Jason was lying down in his seat. He wanted the cab to get home as soon as possible. The driver drove rapidly. Jason was having trouble accustoming himself to the ride. He suddenly felt like puking. He wanted to say something to the driver. But he didn't want him getting all sensitive about the inside. His nausea increased. And he started taking deep breaths to ward off his need to throw up.

Janet didn't notice how bad it was for him. She was worn out from trying to walk all this way in heels. Her patience had also worn thing from Jason's escapades.

The warmth of the car brought them both back to life. Their arguments were now bruises on their bodies that would settle in and eventually heal. The bigger questions were getting lost in

the night.

“You missed the turn.”

The driver didn’t hear a thing.

“You, missed our turn,” he repeated.”

“Honey, is something wrong?”

“He missed our turn.”

“Didn’t you say Druid Hills.”

“I thought that I said it was off of Clairmont.”

“You can go this way.”

“This is the long way. I don’t want to pay extra for your stupidity.”

“Jason, don’t yell at him. He’ll get us home.”

“But he’s going to charge more!”

“I’m paying anyway. So don’t worry about it. Does he even have meter?”

“Sir, where’s your meter.”

“Flat fee, I’m going by the odometer.”

“I don’t know what he’s talking about! He doesn’t speak very good English.”

“You’re slurring your words again. “

“I know what I told him. I didn’t tell him to take this way.”

“Just as long as we get home. That’ all that matters.”

“You have no right to say something like that to me.”

Jason turns to the cabbie, “Did you say something?”

“You have no right to say something like that to me.”

“Janet, I don’t know what the hell he’s talking about. He doesn’t speak very good English.”

“You’re being rude to me. And you’re being rude to your lady friend. I don’t have to take this.”

“It just seem to me that you’re not taking the proper way towards our place.”

“I know this city better than you do. I was born here. I grew up here.”

“So why don’t you speak better English?”

“Honey, quit being so harsh.”

“You see how he’s treating us.”

“He’s the driver. It’s a tough job all hours of the night. Dealing with drunks like us.”

“I’m not drunk now.”

“You were the one falling over yourself fifteen minutes ago.”

“A little reality does enough to sober me up.”

“Your still leaning over yourself as if you’re about to throw up.”

“He just missed our turn.” Jason motions to the driver, “You missed our turn.”

“Quit being so impolite.”

“I would be polite if I really thought that you were taking me back to where I live. Where is this?”

“You told me to turn.”

“You’re going to have to turn around.”

“I’m not turning around. I know where I am.”

“I don’t. You missed our turn.”

“Let him drive. He probably knows a shortcut.”

“This is no shortcut. Where are we? Is this Clifton Road? I can’t read the street signs.”

“I am taking you to your destination. So shut up, smart ass.”

The driver ignored his passengers, and he continued to drive on his own. Jason was becoming angrier. But it made little difference.

The driver took a couple of quick turns. All of a sudden they were in total darkness. He turned off the car and sat there for a few minutes.

Jason was dumb-founded. Janet got angry at him.

“You should have kept your mouth shut.”

“Where the hell are we?”

“Be quiet. He’s probably mad at us. Let him calm down.”

They sat there in silence for five minutes or so.

“I want you both out of the car.”

“What’s going on?”

“Out of the car.”

Janet is stubborn, “I’m not getting out of the car until you get us home.”

“I’m not taking you home. You’re getting out here.”

She defended Jason, “He’s a little unruly. But he’s not that bad of a guy.”

“Get out of the car.”

“I’m not leaving the car.”

“Get out, or I’ll make you get out.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“He’s too messed up to help you out.”

“What are you doing this to us?”

“You’re drunk! You’re stupid! You’ve got money.”

“We’re good people.”

“But you have bad attitude. And you think the world owes you something.”

“You’re the one who’s taking our money. You didn’t earn it. It’s not yours.”

“It’s mine in the most basic of ways. At this point, I’m stronger than the both of you. I have more street smarts. And I’m tired of people like you who think that you own the world. I’m taking back what I think is mine.”

“You’re not going to get away with this.”

“We’re good people. You’re not allowed to do this.”

“It’s dark. We’re isolated. I’m remaking the law. You both are going to have to deal with this.”

Jason spoke up, “We’re sorry for being so nasty to you. I don’t have any money. I spent it all at the bar.”

“You were looking for a cab. One of you must have money.”

“I’ll give you all my money if you just let us go.”

“That’s no longer your choice.”

“What are you going to do to us?”

“Just take our money.”

The driver looked down at the ground and then up at the sky. He didn't say a thing. He used the ruthlessness of time in his favor.

Jason was not aware enough to really deal with the situation. Janet recognized how far things have gone. They should have been more careful.

Janet wondered how far he was going to take his threat. She hadn't noticed a gun. He didn't seem armed in any way. Even if Jason was incapacitated, it was still two against one. And they could run.

"Don't even think about it!"

"Think about what?"

"Trying to escape."

"Surely this is some kind of joke."

"I'm sorry for what I said. We could go to an ATM and get way more money."

"This is going to be satisfactory. Besides, I don't want my face on camera. How much can you really get in one night?"

"I've got jewelry at home. I've got a car."

"I've got what I want."

"Does this get you off to make other people afraid? What kind of person are you down deep?"

"I'm someone who doesn't have to answer your college psychology questions. The world isn't like your university classroom."

"You do have a conscience."

"And this seems like the right thing to do. Something to restore the order that is lost in the universe."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that you should have never flagged me down. You thought that I was a cab driver. You wanted me to be what I am."

"What are you?"

"The angel of death!"