I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It turned into the worst night of my life

by Katie Way 1/13/2018

She approached him because she recognized his camera flash — Aziz Ansari was taking pictures at the 2017 Emmy Awards after-party with a film camera, not a digital one. “I stood up, and I’m like tipsy at this point and feeling really confident. I’m in a gown, and I walked up to Aziz and said, ‘What’d you just shoot with?’”

Grace is a 23-year-old Brooklyn-based photographer, then aged 22. We are not using her real name to protect her identity because she is not a public figure. She says Ansari brushed her off at first, but after he realized they both brought the same kind of camera to the event, an old model from the 80s, he was impressed.

They flirted a little — he took two pictures of her, she snapped some of him — and then she and her date went back to the dance floor. “It was like, one of those things where you’re aware of the other person all night,” she said. “We would catch eyes every now and then.”

They ran into each other one last time, right as Grace was leaving. At Ansari’s suggestion, she put her number in his phone.

When her plane landed back in New York the next day, she already had a message from him. They exchanged flirtatious banter over text for a week or so before he asked her to go out with him on Monday, September 25.

The date didn’t go as planned. The night would end with Grace in an Uber home, in tears, messaging her friends about how Ansari behaved. Babe spoke to the first friends she told about it, and reviewed the messages on her phone.

The day after the incident, she wrote a long text to Ansari, saying: “I just want to take this moment to make you aware of [your] behavior and how uneasy it made me.” To that message, Ansari responds: “Clearly, I misread things in the moment and I’m truly sorry.”

The mobile phone number from which his texts to her were sent matches up with his details on a searchable public register.

We spoke to Grace last week. When we met, Ansari had just won Best Actor for his Netflix show “Master Of None” at the Golden Globes, where he declared his support for the fight against sexual assault and harassment by wearing a “Time’s Up” pin on the red carpet.

Grace said it was surreal to be meeting up with Ansari, a successful comedian and major celebrity, and she was “excited” for their date.

Before meeting Ansari, Grace told friends and coworkers about the date and consulted her go-to group chat about what she should wear to fit the “cocktail chic” dress-code he gave her. She settled on “a tank-top dress and jeans.” She showed me a picture, it was a good outfit.

After arriving at his apartment in Manhattan on Monday evening, they exchanged small talk and drank wine. “It was white,” she said. “I didn’t get to choose and I prefer red, but it was white wine.” Then Ansari walked her to Grand Banks, an Oyster bar onboard a historic wooden schooner on the Hudson River just a few blocks away.

She said it was a beautiful, warm September night. They discussed NYU, comedy and a new, secret project he was working on, but she says she did most of the talking.

Grace says she sensed Ansari was eager for them to leave. “When the waiter came over he quickly asked for the check and he said like, ‘Let’s get off this boat.’” She recalls there was still wine in her glass and more left in the bottle he ordered. The abruptness surprised her. “Like, he got the check and then it was bada-boom, bada-bing, we’re out of there.”

They walked the two blocks back to his apartment building, an exclusive address on TriBeCa’s Franklin Street, where Taylor Swift has a place too. When they walked back in, she complimented his marble countertops. According to Grace, Ansari turned the compliment into an invitation.

“He said something along the lines of, ‘How about you hop up and take a seat?’” Within moments, he was kissing her. “In a second, his hand was on my breast.” Then he was undressing her, then he undressed himself. She remembers feeling uncomfortable at how quickly things escalated.

When Ansari told her he was going to grab a condom within minutes of their first kiss, Grace voiced her hesitation explicitly. “I said something like, ‘Whoa, let’s relax for a sec, let’s chill.’” She says he then resumed kissing her, briefly performed oral sex on her, and asked her to do the same thing to him. She did, but not for long. “It was really quick. Everything was pretty much touched and done within ten minutes of hooking up, except for actual sex.”

She says Ansari began making a move on her that he repeated during their encounter. “The move he kept doing was taking his two fingers in a V-shape and putting them in my mouth, in my throat to wet his fingers, because the moment he’d stick his fingers in my throat he’d go straight for my vagina and try to finger me.” Grace called the move “the claw.”

Ansari also physically pulled her hand towards his penis multiple times throughout the night, from the time he first kissed her on the countertop onward. “He probably moved my hand to his dick five to seven times,” she said. “He really kept doing it after I moved it away.”

But the main thing was that he wouldn’t let her move away from him. She compared the path they cut across his apartment to a football play. “It was 30 minutes of me getting up and moving and him following and sticking his fingers down my throat again. It was really repetitive. It felt like a fucking game.”

Throughout the course of her short time in the apartment, she says she used verbal and non-verbal cues to indicate how uncomfortable and distressed she was. “Most of my discomfort was expressed in me pulling away and mumbling. I know that my hand stopped moving at some points,” she said. “I stopped moving my lips and turned cold.”

Whether Ansari didn’t notice Grace’s reticence or knowingly ignored it is impossible for her to say. “I know I was physically giving off cues that I wasn’t interested. I don’t think that was noticed at all, or if it was, it was ignored.”

Ansari wanted to have sex. She said she remembers him asking again and again, “Where do you want me to fuck you?” while she was still seated on the countertop. She says she found the question tough to answer because she says she didn’t want to fuck him at all.

“I wasn’t really even thinking of that, I didn’t want to be engaged in that with him. But he kept asking, so I said, ‘Next time.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, you mean second date?’ and I go, ‘Oh, yeah, sure,’ and he goes, ‘Well, if I poured you another glass of wine now, would it count as our second date?’” He then poured her a glass and handed it to her. She excused herself to the bathroom soon after.

Grace says she spent around five minutes in the bathroom, collecting herself in the mirror and splashing herself with water. Then she went back to Ansari. He asked her if she was okay. “I said I don’t want to feel forced because then I’ll hate you, and I’d rather not hate you,” she said.

She told babe that at first, she was happy with how he reacted. “He said, ‘Oh, of course, it’s only fun if we’re both having fun.’ The response was technically very sweet and acknowledging the fact that I was very uncomfortable. Verbally, in that moment, he acknowledged that I needed to take it slow. Then he said, ‘Let’s just chill over here on the couch.’”

This moment is particularly significant for Grace, because she thought that would be the end of the sexual encounter — her remark about not wanting to feel “forced” had added a verbal component to the cues she was trying to give him about her discomfort. When she sat down on the floor next to Ansari, who sat on the couch, she thought he might rub her back, or play with her hair — something to calm her down.

Ansari instructed her to turn around. “He sat back and pointed to his penis and motioned for me to go down on him. And I did. I think I just felt really pressured. It was literally the most unexpected thing I thought would happen at that moment because I told him I was uncomfortable.”

Soon, he pulled her back up onto the couch. She would tell her friend via text later that night, “He [made out] with me again and says, ‘Doesn’t look like you hate me.’”

Halfway into the encounter, he led her from the couch to a different part of his apartment. He said he had to show her something. Then he brought her to a large mirror, bent her over and asked her again, “Where do you want me to fuck you? Do you want me to fuck you right here?” He rammed his penis against her ass while he said it, pantomiming intercourse.

“I just remember looking in the mirror and seeing him behind me. He was very much caught up in the moment and I obviously very much wasn’t,” Grace said. “After he bent me over is when I stood up and said no, I don’t think I’m ready to do this, I really don’t think I’m going to do this. And he said, ‘How about we just chill, but this time with our clothes on?’”

They got dressed, sat side by side on the couch they’d already “chilled” on, and he turned on an episode of Seinfeld. She’d never seen it before. She said that’s when the reality of what was going on sank in. “It really hit me that I was violated. I felt really emotional all at once when we sat down there. That that whole experience was actually horrible.”

While the TV played in the background, he kissed her again, stuck his fingers down her throat again, and moved to undo her pants. She turned away. She remembers “feeling in a different mindset at that point.”

“I remember saying, ‘You guys are all the same, you guys are all the fucking same.’” Ansari asked her what she meant. When she turned to answer, she says he met her with “gross, forceful kisses.”

After that last kiss, Grace stood up from the couch, moved back to the kitchen island where she left her phone, and said she would call herself a car. He hugged her and kissed her goodbye, another “aggressive” kiss. When she pulled away, Ansari finally relented and insisted he’d call her the car. “He said, ‘It’s coming, but just tell them your name is Essence,’” she said, a name he has joked about using as a pseudonym in his sitcom.

She teared up in the hallway, outside his place, pressing the down button on the elevator. The Uber was waiting when she left the building. He asked if she was Essence, she said yes, and then she rode back to her Brooklyn apartment. “I cried the whole ride home. At that point I felt violated. That last hour was so out of my hand.”

Babe asked Ansari’s representatives if they wanted to respond to Grace’s account but they have yet to do so. [Update – 10:02pm, January 14: Ansari has released a statement, which you can read in full here. In it, he acknowledges that they “engaged in sexual activity” but says “by all indications [it] was completely consensual.”]

Grace compares Ansari’s sexual mannerisms to those of a horny, rough, entitled 18-year-old. She said so to her friends via text after the date and said the same thing to me when we spoke.

But Aziz Ansari isn’t an 18-year-old. He’s a 34-year-old actor and comedian of global renown who’s probably done more thinking about the nuances of dating and sex in the digital age than practically anyone else. He wrote a book about it, “Modern Romance”, and it was a New York Times bestseller. Ansari built his career on being cute and nice and parsing the signals women send to men and the male emotions that result and turning them into award-winning, Madison Square Garden-filling comedy.

Most people first saw Aziz when he was Tom Haverford, a Parks and Rec fan favorite whose absurd, hilarious phrases were made to be memed. Who hasn’t said “treat yo’ self” once or twice? At that time, he branded himself as the witty, woke alternative to the stereotypical douchebag bro. His early 2010s routines paint him as the kind of guy who strikes out because he actually respects women.

And then, as he rose to prominence, he focused less on his own sexual disenfranchisement and more on pressing societal issues like racism and sexual assault, a move that’s earned him tons of praise. Refinery29 called him “a certified woke bae.”

In the second season of “Master of None”, one episode introduces a macho TV food guy called Chef Jeff, who gives Ansari’s character Dev a huge career opportunity before being accused of sexually inappropriate conduct by a bunch of women.

Discussing the storyline, Ansari said he wanted to examine what happens when much-loved characters are revealed to be creeps, making all those around them who don’t speak out complicit. “So it was like, ‘Okay, what if this is one of those types of guys and we just get the audience to love him? And then pull the rug out from under them at the end and reveal that he’s actually not a good dude?’”

Speaking to babe, Grace mentioned the glaring gap between Ansari’s comedy persona and the behavior she experienced in his apartment as a reason why she didn’t get out earlier. “I didn’t leave because I think I was stunned and shocked,” she said. “This was not what I expected. I’d seen some of his shows and read excerpts from his book and I was not expecting a bad night at all, much less a violating night and a painful one.”

In the Uber home from Ansari’s apartment, Grace texted a friend: “I hate men.” She continued: “I had to say no a lot. He wanted sex. He wanted to get me drunk and then fuck me.” She texted another friend after she got back to her apartment, “I’m taking a bath I’m really upset I feel weird.”

Grace’s roommate, who babe has spoken to, didn’t see or talk to Grace until the morning after. The roommate asked how it went right away. “She said, ‘it was awful. It didn’t feel good at all.’” Grace filled her roommate in on the details later. “I guess it ended up getting really fucking weird, really fucking quick,” the roommate said. “She was really shaken up about it.”

Another friend, who Grace texted on the way home from Ansari’s apartment and spoke to the day after on the phone, told babe she was “so upset.”

Grace says she spent the next day groggy and miserable. When they asked, she told her coworkers that the date had gone poorly. She also reached out to her friends, who helped her craft a message to tell Ansari how she felt about the date. But he reached out first.

“It was fun meeting you last night,” Ansari sent on Tuesday evening. “Last night might’ve been fun for you, but it wasn’t for me,” Grace responded. “You ignored clear non-verbal cues; you kept going with advances.” She explains why she is telling him how she felt: “I want to make sure you’re aware so maybe the next girl doesn’t have to cry on the ride home.”

“I’m so sad to hear this,” he responded. “Clearly, I misread things in the moment and I’m truly sorry.”

This is the text Grace\* sent Aziz Ansari after their date which left her feeling “violated”. She tells Ansari how uncomfortable he made her feel, saying “you ignored clear non-verbal cues” and “kept going with advances.”

Those texts were the last Grace had contact with Ansari. And that night in his apartment was the last time she saw him, until she watched him win big at the Golden Globes.

Grace says her friends helped her grapple with the aftermath of her night with Ansari. “It took a really long time for me to validate this as sexual assault,” she told us. “I was debating if this was an awkward sexual experience or sexual assault. And that’s why I confronted so many of my friends and listened to what they had to say, because I wanted validation that it was actually bad.”

For Grace, the Golden Globes brought the events back to the forefront of her mind. “It was actually painful to watch him win and accept an award,” she said. “And absolutely cringeworthy that he was wearing the Time’s Up pin. I think that started a new fire, and it kind of made it more real.”

She told babe: “I believe that I was taken advantage of by Aziz. I was not listened to and ignored. It was by far the worst experience with a man I’ve ever had.”

Ansari has now released a statement denying sexual misconduct.

He said: “It was true that everything did seem okay to me, so when I heard that it was not the case for her, I was surprised and concerned.”

Update: Ansari’s full statement:

“In September of last year, I met a woman at a party. We exchanged numbers. We texted back and forth and eventually went on a date. We went out to dinner, and afterwards we ended up engaging in sexual activity, which by all indications was completely consensual.

“The next day, I got a text from her saying that although ‘it may have seemed okay,’ upon further reflection, she felt uncomfortable. It was true that everything did seem okay to me, so when I heard that it was not the case for her, I was surprised and concerned. I took her words to heart and responded privately after taking the time to process what she had said.

“I continue to support the movement that is happening in our culture. It is necessary and long overdue.” – Aziz Ansari

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