

It happened to me...

I'm ill - not a CRIMINAL

As I weaved towards the supermarket's fruit, my knees gave way.

'It's a bit early to be drinking,' another shopper tutted. 'I'm not drunk,' I sighed. 'I'm ill.' Sometimes, I tired of explaining. Wasn't a life-limiting disease at 36 hard enough to handle without strangers' prejudice too?

Two years earlier, I'd been diagnosed with both Huntington's and Charcot Marie-Tooth disease, hereditary conditions that affect my brain and nervous system. *Devastating* - but no surprise.

Dad was the fifth generation of our family to die of Huntington's three years before. I'd known for years that I carried the gene.

My worst fear was that my kids might have it too. Stewart was 17, Karl 16, Louise 15. One day, they'd be tested to see if they

harboured the lethal legacy - but for now, life was for living.

I could no longer work as a parts delivery driver as my painful joints meant I couldn't lift.

But I'd passed medicals and was fit to drive. My wheels gave me independence - freedom.

Escape from worry.

Except twice recently, I'd been pulled over by police who'd noticed my unsteady legs getting into the car.

They had assumed I'd been drinking.

'I'm teetotal,' I assured

them, my speech slurring - another symptom. But once the breathalyser tested clear, they'd let me go with an apology.

A few weeks on, I nipped to pick up my prescription for the painkillers I needed three times a day. Pulling out of the car

'Tears welled as people gathered to gawp'



Police thought I was drunk

park, a policewoman stopped me.

'Have you been drinking, madam?' she asked.

Here we go again.

'No,' I replied politely.

'I have a medical condition that affects my walking and speech.

'My doctors and the DVLA have confirmed I'm legally able to drive. I can show you my disabled badge, my medication.'

She looked dubious, called over colleagues.

Soon, I was surrounded by 10 officers - they'd been dealing with an incident nearby.

As people gathered to gawp, hot tears welled. 'Breathalyse me,' I begged. But the officers didn't have a machine.

While one of them took my keys, another searched the

glove box, scoured my purse. 'I've got nothing to hide,' I wept. 'I have a brain illness.'

But after a hushed conversation, a PC declared: 'You're under arrest.'

Then, I was bundled into the back of a police van. *Caged like a common criminal.*

At the station, humiliation burnt as I was led to a cell. *How had it come to this?*

Eventually, an officer spoke to my doctor, who confirmed I had every right to drive. I was released without charge. Mum, 60, collected me. 'How could they treat me like that?' I cried.

I'm still angry three months on. The least I deserve is an official apology from the police.

I'm a single mum, struggling against a degenerative disease.

But ignorance is the biggest killer of all.

LORRAINE PARKIN, 36, SWINTON, GTR MANCHESTER

● A Greater Manchester Police spokesman says: 'When Lorraine explained she had Huntington's disease, officers requested a roadside breath-test kit to help confirm her account but none was available. When her condition was verified, she was released without charge.'

It happened to me...

He cast a SPELL on me

The rugby club hall was decked out with balloons and banners.

It was a christening party for my cousin Craig's little boy. I'd come along with my two daughters, Hollie, six, and Amy, two.

As an extra treat for the kids, an entertainer had been booked.

I was 32, and recently divorced, but over the years, I'd seen a lot of cheesy magicians at kids' parties. I was sure this one wouldn't be any different...

But suddenly, the entertainer bounced in wearing a red polka-dot waistcoat, with a crazy

dog puppet slung round his neck.

'I'm Stu-Di-Doo!' he bellowed. 'Who wants to see some magic?'

'Yes!' the kids yelled. But I just stood transfixed, as if caught in a spell. *Stu-Di-Doo was gorgeous.*

He whipped up magic, made the kids laugh. At the end, he handed out business cards. 'Any single mums, feel free to call,' he said and winked at me.

As Stu-Di-Doo twisted balloons into animal shapes, I walked over. 'Can I have a card?' I asked. And introducing myself, I saw his blue eyes twinkle.

'Sure,' he laughed. 'I'll do you a purple poodle.'

I couldn't stop thinking about Stu-Di-Doo after that. I learnt from Craig his real name was

'I felt a gorgeous tingle run up my spine'



We're so in love



Stu-Di-Doo is a hit with the kids

Stuart Hodgson and he was 35. 'And single,' Craig smiled.

I had to see him again, so next day, I sent him a text...

It's Joanne, fancy a drink?

He replied... *Sounds great.*

We arranged to meet in five days, but spoke on the phone before.

'Any kids?' I asked.

'Jenni's six and Luke's nine,' he said, explaining he'd been divorced for two years.

Finally, we met in a wine bar. 'What a transformation!' I said, seeing Stuart dressed in a plain shirt and jeans.

'I recently lost six stone,' he confided. And gazing now at his firm, slim body, I felt a gorgeous tingle run up my spine.

We laughed and chatted and

at the end of the evening, Stuart produced pink balloons shaped like a bouquet from the back of his car. Then we melted together for a kiss.

Two weeks on, Stuart took me to a romantic ball at a posh hotel. 'I love you, Miss Smith,' he said, as we strolled in the gardens.

And I knew I loved him too. Two months on, Hollie and Amy can't believe their luck at always having an entertainer on hand.

And I can't believe mine. Stu-Di-Doo may impress the kids, but he worked his magic on me!

JOANNE SMITH, 33, PENRITH, CUMBRIA

As told to Christabel Smith and Jacqui Meddings. Photos: Cavendish Press



Stuart lost six stone

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