Tears are running down my face. Why am I crying? I just met her. We just had sex, that’s all. But it was beautiful, like a ballet. You don’t even know her name. Dry your eyes and talk to her. “Thank you,” I said. “My name’s Carroll, Carroll Gilpin. Usually introductions come before orgasms, but this was a pleasure.”

"Linda, and I had my share of pleasure too," she replied, "You have moves country boy, but it is time to keep moving." She tossed me my shirt and I slipped it on.

“Without so much as a cup of coffee?” I asked.

Linda bit her lip. “I guess you earned a coffee, one.”

“Is this a real Grossman Brewer?”

Yes

Not a reproduction? It looks brand new.

I bought it new

You found one still in the box? That must have cost a fortune. It has to be 300 years old.

273, but it wasn’t that expensive at the time. I think I spent a couple thousand dollars.

Dollars? You didn’t have credits back then?

We still had physical currency when I was a kid.

How old are you?

Thwap! “Ow! That’s my head.

I’m a time traveler not a crone. I was born in 2721, but I skipped to 3007 when I was a teenager.

"That would be a date and we just had one of those. I don't go on a second date with anyone until I have had a first date with five other people first. We had fun, but I am not the one you are looking for. You may not know much about me, but I can read you like a book," she said.

"I might surprise you," I told her.

"I doubt it, but fine, I will give you a chance. We will play Two Lies and a Truth. You go first. If I guess wrong, then I will tell you mine," Linda told me.

"I thought it was supposed to be Two Truths and a Lie," I said.

"My bed, my rules. Plenty of people can spot a lie, uncovering the truth is harder, but first you have to prove there is more to you than meets the eye," she said.

Deal, but if I win, we go on a second date

After, I go out with five other people

After you go out with five other people, but I get to pick the people

Fine, show me what you got country boy

My parents spent millions of credits to give me superpowers.

I once won a million credits racing a drone I built.

And, at least once in my life, I have eaten more than 2 meals in 24 hours.

That’s sad about the food, but congratulations on the million credits. Too bad for you, credits don’t interest me.

That’s good, because I don’t have many credits, plenty of superpowers though.

Prove it.

I glanced around until I spotted some tacky putty that she had for pinning papers to her walls. I formed it into a ball. I dumped her pens out of a cup and set it in the middle of her desk. I took a few steps back. “See the cup. See the ball. See the ball go in the cup,” I told her. I tossed the ball gently in the cup.

“That’s not exactly a super power,” Linda said.

“No? What if I do it from here?” I retrieved the ball and walked to the corner of the room. I tossed it over my shoulder. The ball landed with a bounce, but stayed in the cup. “Still too easy? Maybe if I don’t look. Got anything I can use as a blindfold?” I asked.

“Will a blindfold do?” she asked then produced one from her bedside table. It was in a drawer atop a ball-gag.

“Kinky. That’s perfect. Put it on me, spin me around if you want, then direct me to wherever you want me to stand. If I make it in the cup, I win,” I told her.

“If the ball lands in the cup, you win,” she agreed. Linda spun me around and left me facing a wall. Then, she moved the cup to her bedside and hurried back to where she was standing.

“Ready?” I asked.

“Fire away,” she said.

Again I tossed the ball over my shoulder. It hit the spot where the cup was, but it hit much harder this time, hard enough to bounce from the desk to land in the cup on the nightstand.

I removed the blindfold to see her flabbergasted. “But how did you?”

“Superpowers,” I reminded her.

She sighed and said, "Fine, but you'll see what I mean. I'm not the girl for you. I skipped with my family to the future. (*She was alone*.) I got this scar at body mod shop while on spring break. (*Someone hurt her*.) And, this was the first time I have had sex alone with a guy. (*We just did something that affected her more than she expected*.)" Each line was like a punch to the gut.

I stepped forward and put my arms around her, squeezed, then rested my head on the side of hers."What happened to your family?" I asked softly in her ear.

"My sister landed 70 years ago. She died before I got here. My dad arrived a couple of years after I did, but as far as we know, Mom is still out there.”

I stroked her scar and asked, "Was it as bad as it looks?"

"I told you, I got it done in a body mod shop. I was under anesthesia. I didn't feel a thing," she whispered. I squeezed her again and she trembled. "Public lashing," she said. I stepped back to see her better. "They demolished our community center, where I went every day after school. They replaced it with a statue of Minister Porat waving and a no loitering sign. I broke off the fingers, except for the middle one. I only got one lash because I was fourteen, but they treated the whip with yrizine to encourage scar growth."

'That's shameful. I can't imagine what you went through," I told her.

"Yes, it is, but it is their shame, not mine," she told me.

I said, “Damn right it is. That’s a sash of courage across your back. I can’t make up for what happened to you, but I can give you a good time. Tell me, what are you looking for in these dates? I’ll find it.”

“Figuring out my type is part of the challenge,” she answered.

“It is, but not for me. I already know exactly what you are looking for in a partner. I’m just waiting for you to figure it out too,” I told her.

“I already know my type, and it’s not some hayseed blown on the wind to the big city.

Yes, it is.

I want someone educated

I’m educated

Sophisticated

You won’t find a cyborg with more sophisticated parts than mine

Not what I meant. Is well-dressed

I look better undressed. Funny?

You’re hilarious, but I want someone who takes life seriously.

You take things seriously enough for two. You need someone who makes you laugh.

I’m the one picking here

As you wish. One seriously sophisticated dandy, coming up. You’ll be begging me to take his place by the time salads arrive.

“I think that sounds like your wish, but hey, keep wishing. Meanwhile, off you go little genie. Make my wish come true,” Linda told me.

When we hugged before I left, I spoke softly in her ear. So she wouldn’t feel uncomfortable by me seeing her face. I said, "I didn't know this was a first for you. I get why you want some space from me now, but I don't think you should be alone tonight. Maybe you can call a friend to come over?" I asked.

"I was going to do that anyway, but if it will make you feel better, I can message them right now," she said. An alert chimed. “They’re coming.”

“I could keep you company until they get here,” I offered.

“No, you’ve got magic to make, country boy. You have to find me the man of my dreams,” she said and laughed.

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Expletive. No answer from Hugh. The one time I actually want to talk to one of his Max Wealth, ‘refined’ friends, I can’t get a hold of him. Every other time I go to a party, he’s waiting with a coffee when I get home. Double expletive. I need to talk to Hugh about our relationship. I have been crystal clear about being non-monogamous from the beginning, but sex is one thing, this thing with Linda might be something, special. Okay, Carroll, think. I can’t talk to Hugh right now, so no to the Max Wealth crowd tonight. Where else can I find someone fancy? Trisolini Gallery, the fanciest place I know, that will let me in, snff, after I shower.

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“Izadbanu, you look ravishing. Who’s on display tonight?” I asked the curator.

“You know my name is Fereshteh. And there is a private showing tonight. Invitation only,” she replied.

“To me, you’re a goddess,” I said. “And I was hoping for a little divine intervention.”

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

“I need someone to go on a date,” I told her.

“That shouldn’t be too hard for you to find,” she said.

“Not with me, with a woman I know. She wants someone serious, well-educated and put-together and not a creep,” I explained.

“Xyen?”

“The BiB? I don’t think so.”

“Carroll! You’re not supposed to call them that,” Fereshteh said, scandalized.

I told her, “Putting your brain in a box doesn’t make you a cyborg. It’s just creepy.”

“Alright, I know one patron here who might fit the bill. He’s an art student. He got in because he’s the nephew of someone rich. He didn’t come with a date. He’s just been looking at the paintings and taking notes all night. I’ll introduce you,” she said.

“See Izadbanu, answering prayers already,” I told her."Wait, tell me about the piece he’s at."

"Gravity's Graveyard. Most people see the macabre iconography and dreary color palate and think that is about the despair over the repeated failed attempts to understand something so basic about the universe, but the theories are a metaphor for religions. Both attempt to find a theory of everything. The single, flickering candle is shining on the fact that we are still here, despite and because of the beliefs we have laid to rest. The point of the painting isn't despair, it's hope, hope earned by those who came before.

Izadbanu, I could kiss you.

“[Contestant 1], let me introduce you to Carroll Gilpin he’s curious about your studies.

Really? I’m researching the impact of the angle of the perspective on the mood of a piece. Did you know that a shift as small as two degrees can change the feel of a work from calming to intimidating?

That’s fascinating, what else have you learned?

For starters, I learned that particular angles can come in and out of fashion. 43° off-center has been surprisingly popular throughout history. Wider than 62.7 degrees takes on a distorted look. There are so many interesting patterns that form,

You are not wrong. I could listen to this all day. You are really on to something. Have you thought about making a podcast? I’m sure lots of people would tune in

He said, “Th-thank you, sometimes I get the impression people find my work boring.” I’m counting on it, buddy.

No, I can see you’re a smart man. They must not have understood the concept,

And what do you do?

I restore antiques. Some say my interests are boring too.

Really? What kind of antiques?

“Recently, a couple of Russian music boxes. I’m a whiz with machines, but I could never do something like this.” I said pointing to Gravity’s Graveyard. “I’m a craftsman, not an artist. This gives me the chills. So desolate and dreary. And the candle about go out and plunge the world in darkness, just terrifying,” I said.

“I understand why people feel that when they look at the graveyard of false starts, but look closer. The light from the flame blasts thru the darkness bringing warmth to stave off the chill.”

He corrected me without belittling? Now I’m starting to like him. “My boyfriend has this friend, a beautiful woman. She’s looking for a date for tomorrow night. Are you available?”

“If she’s so beautiful, why does she need you?” he asked. Yeah, I’d be wary too.

“Poor dear is a time-traveler, barely knows a soul,” I told him. “She also studies art,” I added.

“Really? What kind?” he asked. If this guy says really one more time my head might explode.

Just keep smiling. “That will give you something to ask her about. Seven o’clock tomorrow at Pierre’s across the street,” I told him.

“Okay, I’ll be there,”

“Thank you, that’s great! Just one little thing to keep in mind, my boyfriend is a Sinclair so show his friend a good time, but I don’t want her showing you one. Crystal?”

Why I would- ah, crystal

Nice talk. I’m glad I met you I told him

“I’m not so sure anymore,”

“Buck up. Great food with beautiful company. A perfect gentleman could have a lovely time. Thanks again,”

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Linda called furious. “How dare you? If you did not want to play this game you shouldn’t have started. I knew this was mistake,” she said.

Was there a problem at dinner? I asked.

Dinner? Dinner was lovely. It’s what happened after dinner that showed me you aren’t person for me.

What did he do after dinner?

Nothing. That’s what he did. He almost jumped out of his skin when I touched his arm. If you are so insecure that you felt the need to threaten my date, you really aren’t the one for me.

I’m sorry that was immature of me, but I can make it up to you. I promise, just give me one more chance.

You thought you were a better match for me than Clark. Fine, now I know what you think of yourself. Let’s see how high that opinion is. The next call I get better be you introducing me to someone you think is better than you. Let’s see what that looks like.

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Triple expletive! Now I have to call McGhee Douglas, the only man I know with a more ridiculous first name than mine. I would hate this guy if it was remotely possible. I have physical augments throughout my body and a Net that let’s me communicate with computers on a level most people could only dream of. McGhee is not even refined. He just won the genetic lottery. He sleeps through class, wakes up just long enough to ace every test. He’s athletic to the point that even my synthetic muscles can barely keep up with him. He’s funnier, better looking and taller than me. Worst of all, he’s a better person too. He helps anyone that needs it, stands up to bullies whenever he sees one, and never complains about anything. Like I said, I hate that I can’t hate him. Expletive, if he swung my way, I’d date him.