

Dream Date

“Honestly, how does it even work? Aren’t dreams like *totally* different every night?”

“All I’m saying is that Stan did his first dream date a few weeks ago. He’s already obsessed. Fuckable, lovable—total connection. First try.”

“Whatever. Anything to avoid another awkward *bro*-ster pretending he has something to say to me. The worst.”

Maria sat, sipping Camomile tea on a black leather sofa, eavesdropping on two twenty-somethings who were likely to know more about the technology behind dream dating than her. Widowed five years ago last Tuesday, her period of mourning had elapsed. She felt the duty to simulate the deepest hardship a few years beyond being sincerely devastated. Families preferred it that way.

Rave online reviews and more than one friend commenting on her need to “treat herself” persuaded Maria to move to the cutting-edge of falling back in love. She cleaned her nails while scanning around, accumulating evidence on whether or not she was the oldest one in the room. So far it seemed, *yes*.

Relaxing electronic tones eased through the waiting room at *Mindful Romance*. Gazing blankly at the scintillating star field along the ceiling, Maria smoothed out non-existent wrinkles in her white cotton pants. They were specifically told to dress comfortably. Yet, besides her, and a dopy-looking man with an unkempt beard who kept wiping his palms on his sweatshirt, the room gave her the impression of a sleepy cocktail lounge. Quiet giggles, breezy summer dresses, and the electric glow of screens illuminating youthful faces.

An unconscious tick brought her phone out of her purse so she checked to see if the babysitter had texted anything. Nothing. A quick refresh of her inbox provided some aggregated news to divert the latent age-based insecurities bubbling up through her thoughts.

Moments later, two employees, looking like nurses, padded through the spacious waiting area. Silently materializing at the back of the room, one began moving through the space clockwise, the other counter-clockwise, whispering to each customer while handing them a paper survey and a pencil. “If you don’t mind filling out a short historical survey, it will further improve the quality of your experience. This falls under the same privacy policy you signed online.”

“Didn’t we already give you our information when we signed up?” Maria asked when it came her turn.

“If you read through the *Processes* page on our website, you will see that your service - Dream Matching - requires another in-person survey,” said the woman, raising

her eyebrows and grinning.

They already have my dreams, why do they need to know about my prom night? Maria thought while jotting down that she is **[95%]** sure she remembers dancing with **[7]** different **[boys]** and eating **[london broil with scalloped potatoes]** before going to **[Doug Lewis's party]** where she felt **[bored]** like because she didn't drink until age **[20]**.

"Right this way," the smiling woman in navy blue scrubs took Maria's survey and guided her into the next room. Maria crept on the front of her feet so as not to make any noise or disturb the pleasantly soporific surroundings. Looking behind her, she noticed a craggy moon hovering below the ceiling. Drifting on whether it was in phase with the real moon above them, the smiling woman closed the door and nodded at Maria. There was another man and woman, both in blue scrubs, seated behind a tinted window on the left. Straight ahead and to the right were long hallways of closed-door rooms lit only by amber floor lights. A slow piano could be heard from somewhere and the scent of lavender trailed any swift movement.

"Can I get a warm mask for Miss Constenuela?" the smiling woman whispered through a vent in the glass. The man asked if Maria would like a book or music selection to aid her to sleep. "We recommend something that may induce nostalgia or arousal to achieve optimal results," he bellowed like a voice from the radio.

"Love in the Time of Cholera, if you have it," Maria said.

"An optimal choice," he slid the book through a hole above the countertop.

The now-only-grinning woman led her into room 8 where a concave bed, looking like a coffin with no lid, sat centered between two nightstands. A pink, glowing salt rock sat atop the right surface and a panel with a call button was mounted on the left. The grinning woman opened a wooden cabinet underneath the nightstand and removed several squishy, padded instruments wired together by what appeared as a nest of cords. Other than the human harmonies still audible by the soft piano, the atmosphere eerily suggested that Maria was about to take part in an alien experiment.

"Now if you just lay down, I'm going to have to put some gel on your scalp and chest before attaching the monitors."

"How many monitors do I wear?" Maria ran her fingers along the silk pillowcase. A cold white surface that immediately gave to touch.

"You'll wear an EEG net on your head, a heart monitor on your chest, a moisture and temperature sensor on your upper right arm, and an engorgement pad."

"I've never heard of an engorgement pad."

“Oh,” chuckled the woman, “you’ll place it above the upper labia on the clitoral prepuce—where the clitoris engorges outward. It’s a thermal monitor to track when you’re aroused.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Not at all. In fact,” the woman smirked sheepishly, “some women have said it feels really good.”

“Okay,” Maria said and pulled out her phone to make sure nothing had come up with the babysitter at home.

“I’m going to need you to do one last check of your phone and then shut it off for the night. The blue light may affect your sleep rhythms and we want to ensure you get plenty of REM sleep in order to receive optimal results.”

The babysitter knew, of course, that Maria would be spending the night, but it worried her that she’d be entirely cut off from her precious son. She can’t remember the last time she missed kissing him before bed. Now she couldn’t even send him a little puckered face or a smiling kitten that might make him laugh. Her phone was off and in the nightstand’s drawer. Growing uncertain about her choice, she picked up her book and got into what turned out to be an extremely comfortable bed.

Before she read of Fermina’s father disapproving the young Florentino, Maria was fast asleep. The lights dimmed in a calculated transition toward darkness while the cushions of the bed slowly modeled the traces of her body. It was the first 9-uninterrupted hours of sleep she had since coming down with the flu last year.

Soft lighting slowly warmed the windowless room as would a sunrise. Her eyes were heavy and her head still tingled with lulling draw of sleep. Then, on the wall in front of her, above the sunrise, it was as though dark red clouds were telling her the time. *8:15 AM.* She twitched in an unthinking gesture of hurry. *Did it all go smoothly?*

“Good morning Maria. There is water, tea, and yogurt to your left. Take your time. Someone will be in to aid you shortly,” the bodiless voice vibrated the room slightly.

Maria stretched in satisfaction, cracking her wrists, shoulders, and back. If nothing else, it was worth the amazing sleep. She pulled her phone out of the drawer and turned it on. No messages. He probably hardly noticed she was gone.

“Hi there,” a soft knock on the door. A different smiling woman now wearing red scrubs entered.

“How did you sleep?”

“Oh it was so good. I don’t know what this bed is, but I want it at home,” Maria nodded.

“I’m so pleased. You did fantastic. Very clear signals. You had *five* full cycles,” she said as though she was a proud parent.

“I uh, is that good?”

“Absolutely. Our system evaluated you with a very high confidence,” the woman placed a hand on Maria’s covered leg.

“When do I get my results?”

“By the time you get home, you should be able to log onto our website and start browsing. On your way out, you’ll receive a pin to access your custom recommendations from this session.”

“And these are men I’m compatible with?”

“Yes. There are many dimensions of compatibility. You can filter the results by subconscious characteristic. When you log on they will be ordered most complimentary to least. Using the full profile, it’s rare to have more than five matches with over 90% mind balance and live within 25 miles. At least not in a city this size.”

Maria slid her socks and shoes on with the room’s lights evolving from gold to white. When she took all her body weight off the bed, the cushions moved into alignment then tightened back as they were when she entered. The sheets were hardly disturbed besides a ruffled impression in the center. A man with no smile came in and pulled the sheets off the bed. He quickly smiled and raised his eyebrows as he turned to leave.

She received a small engraved token, etched with an 8-digit pin number, before being led back into the waiting room. Across the room, a young man opened the front door, letting in a squint-inducing beam of true sunlight. The room was mostly empty. One girl in leggings and a tight exercise shirt poured herself coffee from a metal carafe. The dopy guy from last night was reading a screen and patting his beard. He looked less dopy now that he wasn’t constantly wiping his hands.

Taking a cup of coffee to go, Maria drove home eager to see her son, Manny. The trip should have only taken 15 minutes, but took 30 because of an annoying bridge issue. Luckily her map knew and gave advanced notice that detoured her nearby an ice cream shop Manny loved. She made a short stop. *Mint Chocolate Chip! He’ll be so happy!*

Entering her home, she checked in with what looked like a thermostat on the

wall. The trash was taken out last night and her room was a cozy 69, a break from this blistering heat.

“Manny! Mama’s home!”

“We’re in the kitchen,” the babysitter’s voice came down the hallway.

6-year-old Manny focused on a game projected on the kitchen table. His brow lowered with determination. The polished, oak table sat six and was hovered over by a wide lens mounted on a track. Cast on the surface was a jungle of numbered animals. Seven monkeys in a tree were front and center above instructions to *Knock as many monkeys out of the tree as you can in 30 seconds*. Sherri, the babysitter, reminded Manny how to throw the melons at the monkeys by tapping the melon basket, drawing a melon, then flicking her wrist at the tree. Two monkeys crashed through the branches.

“Look at the two of you having a blast,” Maria got their attention while snapping a picture with her phone.

“Mommy! Sherri knows magic!” Manny jumped off his seat and bounced into his mother’s arms where he was handed a napkin-wrapped ice cream cone.

“Magic, huh? Do you have some news to tell me,” Maria winked at Sherri who wore a pair of skintight black shorts and a silver shirt with wide, draping arm holes.

“Oh yeah, big news. I called Manny in last night for a PB&J and there was an army of peanuts and grapes marching around the table, guarding his sandwich. And you know how an army of sour grapes can be?”

“Sherri waved a magic carrot and they ran away. Can we go outside and play?” he twiddled his mother’s hair.

“Not until it cools down a bit. How about we let Sherri go home and get you a bath?”

“I already took one!”

“Not according to Beth,” Maria pointed out that the highly capable thermostat informed her no showers or bathtubs were used. Manny turned his head and stuck his tongue out.

“Manny!” Maria placed him on the ground, allowing him to take off back to the table. Sherri and Maria pulled out their phones and settled up the babysitting bill. Sherri, a local college student, explained that Manny fell asleep playing his castle game on the floor of his room maybe two hours after Maria left. They began discussing Sherri’s classes, when an alert buzzed on her wrist reminding her to get coffee with a friend. A hug for Manny, and Sherri was off out the door. Exiting, she paused as if remembering

something.

“I forgot to ask. How was it?” Sherri rocked back through the open doorway.

“Everything went fine. It’s very different. It feels like being in space, but my goodness the beds were fabulous.”

“Well if it’s everything I’m hearing from my friends, you’ll be needing a babysitter more often.” Maria felt a butterfly through her stomach. She walked through the door with Sherri, immersing herself in the sun-covered stoop.

“We’ll see soon, I guess”

“My status will say unavailable, but DM me if anything comes up. I get so much homework done watching Manny, I don’t mind coming out again,” Sherri smiled and walked to her car at the sidewalk. The sun was bright and the concrete stairs radiated heat making Maria’s shins sweat. Covering her eyes, she retreated into the house.

Running the bath water, she helped Manny undress and let him choose from a basket of toys under the sink. He took a boat and a space ship explaining that only the sailors knew about the aliens. She got him in the tub and asked Beth to keep an eye on him while she checked some emails.

Grabbing her purse and a tablet, Maria sat upright on her firm-seeming bed. She had never felt her bed as hard before, but compared to the gentle give of the one at *Mindful Romance* she noticed a stiffness. Paying little mind to this, she already had the token in her hand and was browsing to their website. When she entered the confirmation number, two brains looking happily at one another shared electric impulses while loading.

After the brains bonded with one another, the screen loaded a single, horizontally-aligned brain with many outlined regions filled in purple. Underneath were 7 male matches. Dragging the slider to include men within 50 miles, the number went up to 12. The top one, 37, only a year older than Maria, was lean and tanned. She tapped on all of his brain regions. In his subconscious perceptions she found he had a fondness for children and an optimistic view of work. His subconscious drives included a fear of being conquered and a need for his life to be at ease. Though the reading was low-confidence, his subconscious desires suggested he liked sex in the shower and spanking.

Did they really get all of this from those sticky sensors? Maria browsed through a few more men, believing it most judicious not to jump at the first choice. Some of them were cute, a few had an *exploration drive* that she thought was exciting since she always felt she liked outgoing, curious men. But most of them were young, in their mid-20’s, early 30’s at most. Of the 12 only one other man besides her top match was older than her, but he was really kinky and had a fear of being wrong which didn’t strike

Maria as optimal. Reconsidering whether she could trust the analysis, she browsed around the page looking for her own profile. *What was my reading like? Could they tell if I was still mourning? Did having a child dry out my sex drive?*

She found nothing. Browsing through text and infographics for a few minutes, landed her confused and a bit frustrated. *What were men seeing about me?* Then, omniscient and tonally flat, Beth informed Maria that Manny was done bathing and wanted to get dressed. Maria didn't know what to do so she clicked the *Matches* link and turned the *thinking* flag on for her top match. According to the *Finding Matches* guide, this let him know that she was thinking about him but hadn't decided to make contact yet.

By the time Manny got dressed in his canvas shorts and astronaut t-shirt, Maria had a response from her match. Beth notified her of this, having previously requested her cyber-companion to monitor her *Mindful Romance* stream. She quickly began generating illustrious storylines about him in her head. If he really was fond of kids, maybe she could introduce him to Manny soon and get past the awkward kid conversation she dreaded? Or maybe he already knew since the program matched her with his fondness for children?

"Mommy, let me go to the moon with my friends," Manny pleaded. Maria was making him sit at the table and do his spelling exercises with butterflies while she prepared a fruit and nut mix.

"Eat up and I might tell Beth to give you 20 minutes. Mama doesn't want you off on another planet too long. You still have plenty to learn about Earth," she smiled and stroked his fine hair.

"On Earth, I can't even go outside," Manny protested. Not long after, Maria told Beth to let him play Moon Discovery for 30 minutes. Once he was happily crawling through moon rocks on his wall, she ran to check her notification. The match, Bruce, said he was "stunned by their compatibility" and would be open to "trying things out in person", offering a Sunday night request for "coffee or something stronger?" She accepted the calendar request, but elected coffee for a first meeting. On her way to check on Manny, she requested Sherri for Sunday and began wondering what she could learn about him that the program didn't know.

Bruce and Maria met at a hip coffee shop near downtown. Maria kept it casual, wearing jeans and an asymmetrically-lined, black top. Bruce arrived collared and prim in creased khaki's and a vest. Appearance alone had cleared the first hurdle and a mild, polite tone the second. They immediately recognized each other among a crowd of roughly 20 others scattered around the coffee shop. The room was a perfect square lined by booths and accented with rustic decor. People were sipping tiny cups of espresso and snacking on desserts while channeling the ever-present digital enterprises online.

The two took a booth near the back where the grainy vocals of an indie guitar player was less intrusive. Each took turns smiling at the other while drifting in and out of eye contact. Bruce showed Maria a picture of his daughter and cat cuddling together on a couch. This excited Maria who now felt the ice had been broken and children were on the table as OK and maybe even a bonus. She mentioned Manny and his obsession with other-worldly video games.

“I do my best to restrict Tasha to thirty minute intervals with those immersive games. I’m worried she’s forgetting what’s real and what’s imaginary,” Bruce elaborated. Maria blushed and her stomach churned. This was proving to be a promising match. It turned out they both had acquired a bout of severe loneliness after losing their spouses —him to divorce, her to a car accident. “I just didn’t have people I felt comfortable around,” they assented. Each of them had invested significant money into a *Habitat* smart-home system to bolster their single-parenting ability. And, importantly, they felt an obligation to their exes’ families.

“And to think, I almost backed out of the whole dream analysis thing. None of it made any sense to me. Like how could a bunch of sensors really know anything important about me. Plus so many forms and foreign terms. I don’t know. Sometimes I think the new generation is already beyond me,” Maria now felt comfortable relaying her honest views of the process.

“I completely agree. I was lost trying to sign up. And once I got my matches, the details are so specific. It was alarming at first.”

“Have you been out with another match before me?” Maria cocked her head signaling a friendly investigation may occur.

“Yeah, I’ve gone out twice. They were younger, more energy, you know? I had a lot of fun, but was put off by their lacking seriousness about anything.”

“Were the matches based on high-confidence?”

“Oh don’t tell me you believe in these confidence markers? Personally, I think they use all the social and historical data to infer most everything. The sleeping at their office is some kind of ritual to, you know, amplify the whole feel of it.”

“Then why did you even do it?”

“It’s popular. I figured a lot of women were on here. I may not of had I realized they limit you to so few matches. I waited awhile to get a match your age.”

“That’s what I’m curious about. It’s so specific. I mean, I felt like I knew you sort of personally before I came into this.”

“Really? Anything juicy?” Bruce laughed a bit, sipping his latte.

“Yeah, kind of actually. It told me you have a fear of being conquered.”

“See the things I learn matching with an older woman. Most of the younger women felt like they were using me. Older, well-off man with a decent body. They wanted the fun, but never got into the details of the connection.”

“Were they *conquering* you?” Maria poked.

“I don’t know. Did I break any of your precious *habits*?”

“Habits? What *habits*? What do you mean?”

“Don’t get all worried, it’s just one of these subconscious traits they sell you on. It said you have a fear of breaking habits. You need routine for security.”

“What? Really? Fear seems like a strong word. I have a child, I mean..”

“No need to get defensive. Like I said, I don’t really buy this stuff.”

“Well it sure was spot on about you. What else did it say about me?”

“C’mon can we not get into this? We were having a great night not talking about what some computer thinks about your flaws.”

“They aren’t *flaws*, it’s our unconscious drives. Stuff you hardly know about yourself. This information is fairly private come to think.”

“If it were private, the public would be having a cow already. It’s not like they tell you someone’s medical history or anything. It’s childish stuff like being insecure and how you want sex to be. The kind of stuff adults can figure out on their own.”

“Well I want to know. Maybe not all adults are as certain as you.”

“If it’s that important to you, why don’t you ask them for your full analysis?”

“I think I will,” Maria punctuated the comment with a careless turn of her head. The two sat in silence, fenced in by screens and faces without emotion. Bare steel beams overhead allowed everyone to see the internal structure of the space. No one looked at it. Maria excused herself a few minutes later saying she’d be in touch, but needed to think about this whole dream dating thing a bit more.

“I understand,” said Bruce, not understanding.

Over the next few days, Maria cleaned the house fervently and reprogrammed

Beth to work in more exercise for Manny. She read every last word available on the *Mindful Romance* website, but found nothing about seeing or even purchasing her own dream analysis. As a last resort, she read through the entire terms of service. There she learned that upon signing she gave away “exclusive rights and ownership” of the results obtained by their patented analyses to “The Company.” Further they were allowed to “anonymously share and sell” analyzed data to “authorized parties and third-party vendors.” Exhausting her capacity, she set up a call with a lawyer.

“The agreement does not permit you to see the post-processed data. I’m sorry,” said the lawyer.

“What about the pre-processed data then?” Maria requested.

“If you want, I can file a request, but you can do that yourself.”

Maria immediately wrote the company an inquiry email to find out what she could get. Meanwhile Manny had explored the entirety of the moon from his room and was hoping to purchase a Mars upgrade.

“Manny, darling, Mars is very expensive and the ratings say it’s more for adults. Besides, don’t you have plenty of learning to do with Beth.”

“But the Moon Gnomes said I could learn the True Essence of the Universe on Mars,” Manny pleaded. Maria didn’t budge, telling Manny she’d rethink it when he had progressed all his math skills on Number Jungle.

Within a week, she heard back from *Mindful Romance* who agreed to send the pre-analyzed data. Unfortunately, it was nothing more than the surveys she had filled out, profile information from her other accounts, and a bunch of meaningless quantities that apparently described her sleep rhythms. Luckily, they said they do provide doctors with the data to aid in treatment. So, Maria called her Primary Care Physician, asking them to request her records from *Mindful Romance*.

A few days later, she was again in a waiting room. This time it was the familiar white, sterile confines of a doctor’s office. Her heart was racing a little. The pursuit of this information had turned into something of an obsession over the past weeks. She hadn’t responded to any of her *Mindful Romance* notifications as she was committed to finding out what any future man, or even Bruce, knew about her before she agreed to meet them in person. With relief, a nurse was calling her name, signifying it was her time.

Dr. Morris was a thin, pleasant woman who always spoke in a calm, thoughtful tone. She entered and greeted Maria warmly, tapping away at a tablet that likely contained the payload Maria desired. After going through the perfunctory checks—blood pressure, height and weight, breathing, and heart rate—Maria eagerly asked if she had obtained the records from *Mindful Romance*.

“Yes, they sent over their analysis. I scanned through it before you arrived. It’s a whole new world to me, combining sleep biometrics with social informatics. Several of my patients have inquired about it, and I’m still figuring out the best way to use this information in my practice.”

“I bet. Excuse me for being forward, but, can we get into what it said?”

“They didn’t tell you? I can’t give you details of the report since it’s proprietary; however, I can recommend treatment based on my interpretations.”

“Treatment?” Maria’s eyes glazed over. The mystery eluding her once again.

“Yes. From my best reading of their analysis, I’m happy to introduce you to a therapist. I know several who I can confidently recommend. Some even offer complimentary first sessions to make sure it’s a good fit.”

“I’m sorry. I think I’m misunderstanding. What would the therapy be for?”

“Again, I apologize, but I can’t disclose that information. Once you seek a therapist, he or she will be able to give you details of the effects they see. Revealing the causes is prohibited as a matter of law.”

The appointment ended, but Maria hardly paid attention to the remainder of her doctor’s advice. She was still in shock after being offered therapy for an unknown condition with unknown severity, whose cause was uncovered by her sleepover at *Mindful Romance*. In a final, desperate attempt to discover what *Mindful Romance* teased out of her sleep rhythms, she contacted Bruce. He reached out several times since their first date. Even one respectful caution that he was going to seek other matches if she didn’t reply. That was a week ago, but she had no concern whether he was with other women or not. All she wanted now were the results of her dream analysis.

Bruce arrived to find Maria and Manny in the backyard pulling browned weeds from their attempt at a raised-bed garden. Manny appeared to be on autopilot, absently ripping away wrinkled tufts of dead plant matter.

“Pretty rough drought this year?” Bruce had entered the backyard through a side fence.

“Yeah, I’m hoping for even a drizzle today. At least the heat’s bearable,” Maria responded without looking away from her crusty garden bed. Bruce looked up at the sky. It was grey and cloudy, offering hope for much-needed rain.

The three went inside where Beth announced that Manny had exceeded his amount of scheduled outdoor time for the week. Inside the kitchen was painted a dull blue and the table showed notepads of Maria's investigation into *Mindful Romance*. Embarrassed, she stepped toward the table and waved her arm to brush away the digital scribblings.

"Manny, go ahead and play your Mars game." She didn't want him seeing his mother worked up about whatever she may discover. Manny ran to the hallway and up the stairs.

"You bought him the Mars game?" Bruce inquired.

"He wouldn't leave me alone about it. I don't see the harm. He's been doing his exercises and getting more time outside."

"You didn't hear? *Umbra Interactive's* whole business plan got leaked and is under scrutiny. Turns out Moon Discovery was free so that they could learn the preferences of children then target them with personalized offers for their *very expensive* solar system series. People are saying its predatory because it targets kids."

"Oh my god," Maria froze then sat down. Her mind spinning as she realized she knew nothing of what Manny really did during his video game time. Beth never mentioned that there may have been ads or data being collected on him. But this was a distraction, Maria's primary goal, first and foremost, was for Bruce to log in to his account and show Maria her subconscious traits.

"I really appreciate you doing this," Maria looked at Bruce sincerely. They sat down at a couch in the living room where Bruce powered on his tablet.

"Are you sure you want to do this? Maybe it's not healthy for you to know what they know. It's only a bunch of programmers after all," Bruce warned. He agreed to do her this favor, but now was worried he was about to step into a larger drama than he anticipated.

"It's not about who knows. They tried to sell me therapy for fuck's sake. It's about what they can do," her voice was coarse and emphatic. Bruce logged into his account, clicked on *Matches*, found her profile and turned the tablet to her. She browsed her brain regions. It showed her subconscious perceptions that people were trustworthy and laziness should always be avoided. Her subconscious drives said she needed routine, feared the breaking of habits, and required detailed perfection. And, apparently her drive in bed was to be dominated and restrained so that she could enjoy pleasures where she'd otherwise hold back.

"This is just what matches for me. Who knows what other people see," Bruce added as she read.

“I don’t get it. Why would you even go on a date with me when it makes me sound OCD?” Maria, sobered by the finality of the moment, asked.

“Because I’m easy going and need some discipline. They don’t call it *mind balancing* for nothing.”

“So you’ve changed your mind then? You thought this was all BS. Cherry-picked inferences from the surveys.”

“I mean, I don’t know. I’m not a computer or even a programmer for that matter. Who knows what these things think. All I know is having seen both profiles, it kind of makes sense.” Bruce took the tablet from Maria and placed it on the coffee table. The room was growing dark as the sun set. Beth adjusted the lights accordingly.

“Beth, lights down,” Maria called out, disregarding the optimal amount of light for reading and maneuvering the house. The two sat there in the dark. They could hear the bumping and jumping of Manny upstairs exploring undiscovered worlds. Her anger washed out into a stale confusion. She had no obvious thoughts about what this information meant. In fact, her mind was flailing around for a word or a metaphor, something to appease the desire for closure.

“I’m glad we met,” she sidled up next to Bruce on the couch.

“I feel bad I got so touchy about you needing to know about the profile. It’s reasonable to want to know things. I just wasn’t sure you’d really understand, and might, I don’t know, get all narcissistic and crazy about whatever it said.”

“You’re a good guy. I don’t know why I needed to know your sex drives to figure that out,” Maria joked, lightening any remaining tension in the sunless room.

“Well some of that data may get put to good use,” Bruce returned the wit. “They say we’re in the age of data, but I think we just gotta read it for what we think it’s worth. You know, look at the analysis and see what makes sense to us.”

“But how do we know when what it says is real?” She asked the open space of the room and leaned her head on Bruce’s shoulder.