

HONEY, I'M NOT FROM AROUND HERE

By Adam Aresty

"We need to talk," I said. My gut was totally twisted, my hands cold and trembling. She'd brought pizza over, peperoni, which she knew was my favorite. And I'd been nervous to tell her the truth since the night we met - I just didn't want to break her heart.

"Okay," she replied. "Let's talk, baby."

"This past year has been amazing."

"It has, hasn't it?"

"And I'm totally head-over-heels in love. I've found my best friend. I'm happy. But I haven't been... completely honest with you."

She frowned, her brow crinkled in the same way it might if she were trying to figure out the angle of a triangle without any knowledge whatsoever of trigonometry.

The words were on the tip of my tongue, but I paused. I looked down at my slice of pizza with one bite taken out of it and I realized something: technically speaking, I should be able to know how this conversation goes. I could just call the whole thing off, go and see for myself, then come back and... ah, hell, that would break my one rule, which made me laugh. She was not expecting laughter.

"Okay, I'm not sure what's going on--"

"Just, sorry, I didn't mean to laugh." I took her hand. Then I let it go. "Do you want me to just not say it?"

"No!" she said. "Fucking - say it. Say it right now!"

For some reason that made me snap my jaw shut, my teeth clacking. My stomach rumbled so I took a bite of pizza. I knew exactly what I was doing. I was stalling. I swallowed my half-chewed bite and it went down like a hot ball of molten metal. "I don't want to hurt you," I said.

"Okay, now you're making this worse. My mind is going to all these fucked up places."

"Okay, wait, I'm just trying to find the words."

"Holy shit," she said. "Are you breaking up with me?"

"No! Oh my god, no, not at all. Well, maybe, after you hear what I'm about to say." Would she ever be able to understand? "Honey, listen, I'm not from around here."

Her face got even more confused-looking. "I know. You're from Cincinnati."

"No, I mean - sorry, that didn't come out right." I licked my lips and finally said what I wanted to say. "I'm from Cincinnati. In the future."

She waited precisely five seconds before laughing. The laughter made that pit in my stomach shrink, but it was also off-putting. I guess I didn't expect her to just *believe* me once the words tumbled out of my mouth. But this was going to take more convincing, I could tell.

"Okay, har, har," she said. "Phew, you got me there, buddy."

"I need you to believe me."

"What - that's - come on. This is weird." She picked up her slice and tried to change the subject. "How was the rest of your day? Didn't you fire what's-her-name?"

"I didn't fire anybody. I don't really work at a bank. I put on a suit and tie every day, walk out that door, and hop through time. I say I work at a bank because my real job is kinda like that, but instead of managing people's money, I manage their time. It's all complicated, corporate type shit. Today I time-traveled fifty-three years, two minutes and twenty-one seconds into the future - which is technically when I'm from - I had to feed the dog."

"You have a dog? I love dogs. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, it's - because dog's can't time travel and I didn't want to get your hopes up."

"Dogs can't time travel. Mhmm," and her lips got thin like right before that argument we had around last Christmas.

"Can I see a picture, at least?" she asked.

I showed her a picture of Hawking, a mutt with one floppy ear and one straight one. "Aww, oh want to mush his little face."

"See, and you can't, because he can never come to this time."

"Dude, what the fuck is this time travel shit? Okay, give it to me straight." She gasped. "Fuck me. You're seeing another woman. Er - you're seeing another *man*!"

"I'm not lying to you." I reached into my pocket and removed my TimeJumper, a small white remote that looked like a garage door opener. "I just press this button and I can go backward or forward." I knew she would need some convincing, so I quickly jumped two minutes and five seconds into the future - which was a terrible idea, because we were fighting then, she punched me right in the nose, which was scary, so I jumped back to her time, where she looked absolutely shocked.

"You vanished."

"Well," I said, "the guys in optics would *technically* say that you vanished and I just kind of - like a rock in a stream? And you're the water flowing around me? You know what, it's not important."

"So, wait, I have lots of questions." She seemed calm now.

"I bet you do," I said.

"What does the future look like!?"

"Which part of the future? Like ten seconds from now? Or ten thousand years from now? It's a lot."

"So you've been to every moment?"

"Not me alone, exactly, but a lot of my coworkers tell me stories."

"Back in January, when you called and said you needed to extend your work trip?"

"That wasn't a lie, either. I just extended it by three years, not three days."

She paused, thinking about something that obviously caused her a bit of distress. "What about - us?"

"What about us?"

"You know what I mean. Do we make it?"

"I don't have a crystal ball."

"You literally do!"

"Right, I have a rule. I never look ahead at my own life, at least not intentionally. Keith from accounting did that and he went crazy. Like, a doctor actually diagnosed him."

"So why are you telling me this?" she asked.

"Because I care about you and I want you to know me for who I really am. I think we have a future together."

"You think."

"You know what I mean."

"Can I go, then?"

"That would... be messy. I mean, yes, you can, you're not a dog. But I'd get in heaps of trouble. Lose my job. Fuck, I think I'd go to prison."

"Well, I want to."

"I understand, honey, but you can't."

"That's bullshit. You can't dictate my life."

"I'm not dictating anything."

"Yes you are. You're saying you get to time travel and I can't and that goes against everything I want in this relationship."

"You just have to trust me on this."

"Give me the thing."

"What - oh, it's called a TimeJumper."

"Give me the TimeJumper."

"Look, I know you're upset about this, so maybe I should just go and we can talk about it when we've both had some space."

I pulled the TimeJumper out and held my thumb above the button. "Oh," I said before pressing it, "How much do I owe you for the pizza?"

Instead, she leapt up and punched me in the nose. It had been two minutes and five seconds exactly. My mouth filled with blood and the shock made me drop the TimeJumper, which clattered across the floor.

She bent and picked it up, marveling at how small yet heavy it was. All the new hires always said the same thing.

"Please, don't press that," I pleaded. "My life will be over."

"The pizza cost eight bucks," she said. "But you know what, it's on me."

Click. She vanished into our future.