

Fourth Time's a Charm

by Jim Harrington

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First date

We wait for a server to bring our coconut cream pie. His favorite. I hate coconut. Those little white clumps get stuck in my teeth, and I turn into a tongue contortionist trying to extricate the intruders. I'm not keen on sharing a dessert on the first date, either, but I won't say anything. I don't get asked out very often. My friend Connie says it's because I dress frumpy, not that guys are lined up at her door like she's some sleeping princess.

He reaches across the table, captures my hands in his, and tells me I'm beautiful. Warmth spreads across my cheeks. I'm too nervous to tell him he's handsome in return. Instead, I try not to stare at the dab of catsup on his chin.

Second date

We hold hands walking out of the theater.

"Did you like the movie?" he asks.

I say sure and think, not really. He explains how this version of RoboCop is different from the first. He reminds me of the movie's main character. I smile and nod, ask if we can get some ice cream.

"Okay," he says. "I hope they have peppermint." Rocky Road's my favorite.

Third date

He escorts me to the front door of my building. I ask, for the first time, if he'd like to come in. I don't tell him no man's been in my apartment since Bennie broke up with me and moved to California eight months ago.

He says he has to be up early.

It's nine o'clock on a Friday night.

He kisses me on the cheek. I grab his power tie, pull him to me, kiss him on the lips, and press my body softly against his. He smiles,

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misses the first step, grabs the railing with both hands, and tells me to have a good night. Frustrated, I go inside, drink a beer, undress, and masturbate.

Fourth date

The coconut cream pie sits between us. He doesn't seem to notice I haven't eaten any.

"Do you like my dress?" I ask. It's the classic little black dress, only in dark green. The hem rides to mid-thigh when I sit. The tops of my breasts peak out of the v-cut neckline.

"Sure. What's not to like?"

I lean toward him. "Besides my heels, it's all I have on." I smile. He sits up, fork suspended. "I'll prove it once we're in the taxi."

He leans back, almost tips his chair over. He's become a mime, and I don't understand anything he says.

I look back at the table as I reach for the door. Give him one more chance. A piece of pie slides down his tie like a kayak going over a waterfall in slow motion.

