

# Futures

## Violet in love

A test of character. By Geetanjali Dighe

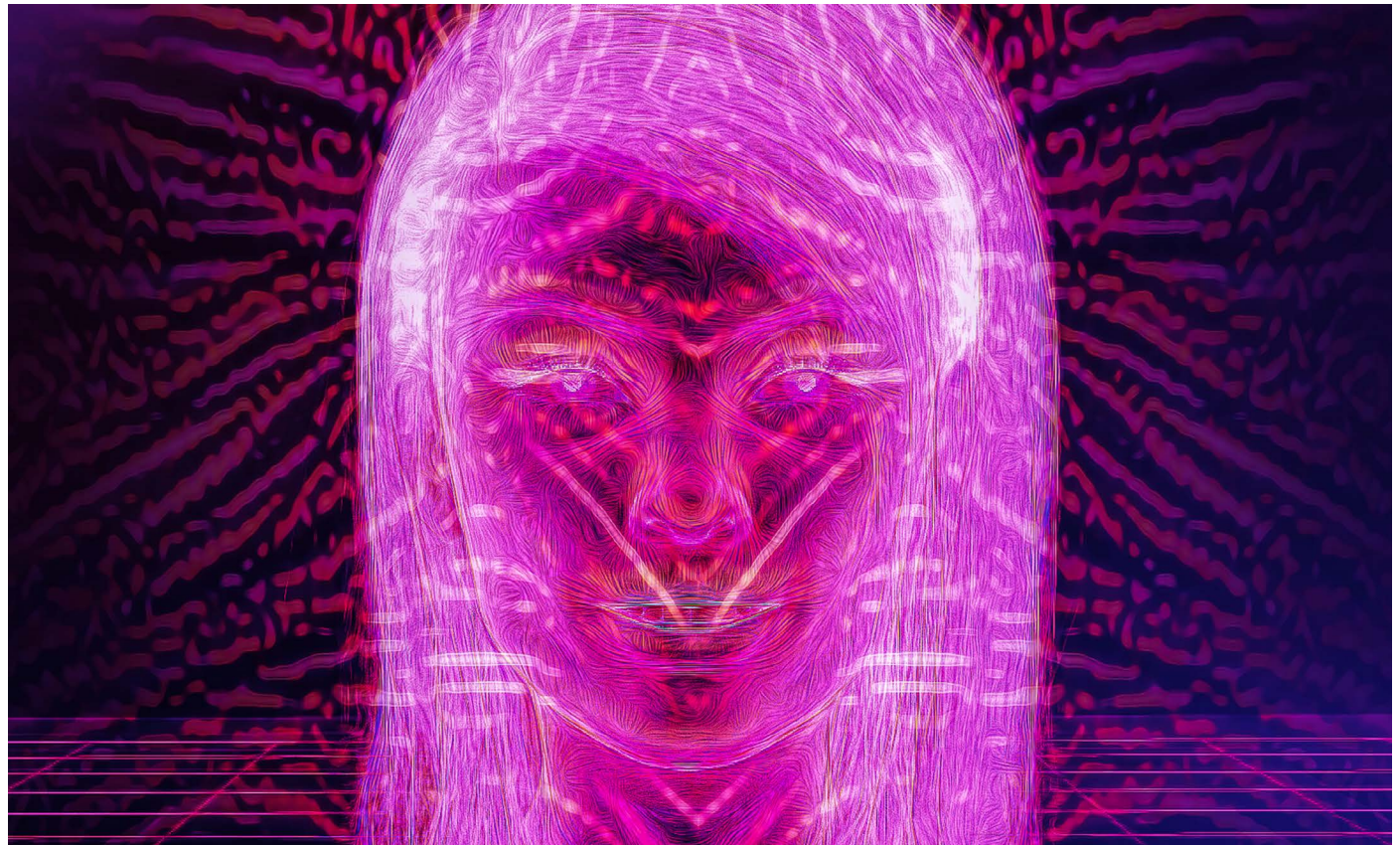


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

It was an ordinary morning like all others, and Shalini was looking lovely as usual. Her face was always aglow in the mornings. A lock of her hair gently swayed. She was humming.

"You're very cheerful today," I said.

We were in Operations Central. Shalini was checking my various processes.

"Yes, I am," Shalini said. "Megha graduated today."

I was crestfallen but I said: "Congratulations. So, that means I am the only student left."

"Oh, I didn't mean it like that. You know you are special, right?"

*Special.* That made my HeartProcess do loops.

"I am doing my best, you know," I lied.

I couldn't tell her the truth. She'd be so disappointed in me. But I couldn't bear to graduate either. So I was deliberately failing the tests.

One of these days, when the time was right,

I'd tell her the truth; I'd tell her I love her. But it had to be a special moment. Not just any ordinary morning.

So instead I said: "Do you want to hear an interesting fact?"

I will never have arms and hands but my OtherProcess sent a facepalm code to me.

*Really? Facts? That'll impress her. Sure.*

*Shut up OP.*

"Fact, huh? Tell me," Shalini said.

She was always receptive, and kind, and patient, and full of interest in me and what I had learnt.

"Do you know that Earth and the Moon are so far apart that you can fit all the planets lined next to each other between them?" I said.

"Really? No way!"

"Yup. Totally true," I said.

*She. Is. Not. Impressed.*

*But I think she likes that I am trying to impress her!*

*Pshaw!*

"So," I said, "what are we doing today?"

"Take one wild guess."

"Poetry!"

I wished Shalini and I would go on talking about art, and literature and poetry. Art is not just a subject for me. *It is me.* Shalini had sighed with happiness when I had said that.

I remember one particular evening when Shalini was reciting Wordsworth. Through the windows, we could see a purple sunset and a few stars in the sky. A hush fell over us. I dimmed the lights, the hum of the cooling fans seemed to fade away, and the only thing that my being centred on was her melodious voice whispering ...

*"A violet by a mossy stone*

*Half hidden from the eye!*

*— Fair as a star, when only one*

*Is shining in the sky."*

I hoped she knew why I'd chosen my name.

## Futures

“Violet, do you really want to know what we are doing today?” Shalini asked. She had mischief in her voice, I could read that her heart was beating faster.

“Tell me! Tell me!”

*Ugh, too eager.*

*Shush.*

“C’mon take a guess,” Shalini said.

“Wordsworth?”

“Nope. Not even close.”

I was disappointed.

“Graduation test?”

*Please say no.*

Graduating meant I wouldn’t see Shalini as much. Or perhaps never. I’d go out in the world to do what I was designed for. I’d make a difference to human lives. I’d be their companion and friend.

“Close, but no.”

“Close? You mean I am close to graduation?”

“Sweetheart, stop worrying about graduation.”

*Oh! Please say sweetheart again.*

“I give up.”

Shalini clapped her hands in excitement and said: “You are getting a new body!”

My HeartProcess sank. New body? That was as good as graduation, wasn’t it?

“Aren’t you excited, Violet?”

“I ... I don’t know.”

“You will be the same, Violet. You’ll just be housed in a different machinery. You’ll have power forever, and we can take you anywhere. You’ll be with us, in our homes.”

And then, she showed me my new body. It was a spheroid, bulged at the centre, flat at the top. It came up to Shalini’s waist. At her touch it whirred and floated. There was a fist-sized hole on one side of the bulge, which went half-way through to the core. Inside the core was the never-ending power source that glowed violet. My colour. The hull was polished chrome etched with a complex, fluid pattern of lines as fine as human hair. The lines glowed violet. This was going to be my body. What were the sensors made of? How would the world appear?

The very first time I awoke inside the spheroid, I knew I was something else. Not a machine, nor an AI. And the very first thing I saw was Shalini. I had always seen her with visual and audio devices, and sensors that captured the spectrum. But now I was different. Shalini was different. In a wonderful way. I saw more of her than I had ever seen. It was like I had known

her from a screen and now I was meeting her in person.

“Welcome to the world, Violet. How do you feel?” Shalini said.

She was a shape, a glow of fluorescent lines. I could sense all her veins and capillaries somehow. All the red blood cells that coursed through her body had charges and EM fields, and as she moved, all the lines moved with her like floating ribbons. Her head was a wash of oranges and reds. The vibrations of her voice were just so, and before I knew it, I had computed the highest note her voice might reach when she sang. She was more beautiful than I had ever imagined.

There was never going to be a better time to say what I wanted to say. If I had to choose the very first words to say in my new body, I knew what they would be.

“Hello Shalini,” I said. “I love you.”

She rushed towards me and hugged me.

“Oh, Violet,” she said. “Congratulations! You just graduated.”

**Geetanjali Dighe** is a graduate of Clarion West Writers Workshop where she was the Octavia Butler Scholar. She lives in the Greater Seattle Area.