

Dream Girl

Faye Valentine

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A faint but unmistakable scent of blood and pus seeping through a veil of antiseptic. The acrid aroma of burn coffee. Phones ringing. Doctors and nurses shuffling about. Visitors rushing by to see their loved ones. When she reluctantly permitted her eyes to open, Eliza remembered she had gone to the hospital the day before to have her appendix removed. Turning her head to the left, she watched the door open and a man she did not recognize walk in.

“Morning, Miss Walsh, how are you feeling?”

“Like I’ve been lying in this uncomfortable bed for a week,” she groaned in reply.

“Three months actually. Your implant is fully healed now and we’ve registered you for...”

“Three months? Implant? What are you talking about? I think you have me confused with another patient because I came in yesterday to have my appendix removed.”

“About that...” pausing to take the deep breath of a doctor about to have a lawsuit thrown at him, he continued. “There was a mix-up with you and another patient and it wasn’t until after the neural interface was implanted that we figured it out but by then it was too late and...”

Bolting upright, I grabbed the cold metal rails of the bed as the room spun out of control. When everything settled back in place, I reached behind my head and felt the small port. “W-What the fuck? How can you possibly confuse an appendectomy with a neural interface? Jesus Christ, did you at least take the appendix out or are you hoping it’ll burst and kill me before I can sue your dumb asses into poverty?”

“Your appendix has been removed and you will not be charged for that surgery, the implant or the two months of mandatory therapy that follows.”

“And what about the three months of my life you took from me? My lost job and apartment? Not to mention you just made me a fucking target! Everyone’s going to think I’m a damn millionaire when they see it despite barely having enough to pay for the damn appendectomy.”

“I understand your frustration, but you’ve been given one hell of a gift and I’m not just talking about more than a million dollars in medical bills being erased. That interface gives you unfettered access to all the world’s information. You can earn degrees in months instead of years. Want to live forever? That implant will allow you to transfer your memories to a clone of yourself.”

“That I’ll be able to afford right after suing this incompetent hospital.”

“Your first therapy session begins in an hour. Someone will be in momentarily to get you ready. Phones are perfectly fine to use but you are not permitted to leave the hospital for any reason until you’ve completed the program.” Turning, the doctor left Eliza to consider the world of possibilities now open to her.

The door opened again and this time a busty brunette wearing a navy blue skirt suit entered. “Morning, Miss Walsh. I’m Doctor Melissa Hughes and I’ll be...” she stopped mid-sentence when she realized her patient was staring at her red-cheeked and confused. “Is something wrong?”

Eliza had seen the pretty doctor before and that is what had her cheeks burning hot. It was not on the television as she was too poor to own one, or on the radio as she only ever listened to her own select playlist. No, she recognized the stunning woman now standing in front of her from only one place and that was her dreams. Dreams she could not recall ever having prior to her hospital visit. “I...I know you don’t I?”

“I am a pretty famous Doctor, I’m sure you saw me on TV more than once.”

“No, I don’t own a TV. You...you were...I had dreams about you and now here you are.”
The blush moved down her neck to her heaving chest.”

“Dreams? What sort of dreams?”

Eliza sat silently on the bed for a moment. “Nevermind. W-What do you want?”

“Well, I was going to say I’m here to personally oversee your therapy sessions but now I’m more interested in these dreams. What can you tell me about them?”

“Nothing. I don’t remember the details,” she lied, too embarrassed to tell the truth. “I want out of this hospital before you people can screw me up any more than you already have so can we please get on with it?”

“I’ve been informed of the mistake the hospital made, but honestly what are the chances of two Eliza Walsh’s coming in for surgery at the same time on the same day?”

“So you removed another woman’s appendix and gave me her implant?”

“That’s exactly what was happening until doctors realized she already had a surgical scar. Unfortunately, by the time they figured out the mistake you were already being operated on and the procedure could not be halted. I’m sure you have a million more questions which I’ll gladly answer, but first why don’t I show you to your new room where you can take a proper shower?”

“Can I call my mother to bring some clothes first, or do I have to wear one of these stupid gowns for the next two months?”

“I’ve taken the liberty of purchasing a few things but if they’re not to your liking you may have something else brought in. Please follow me.”

“Is it true that I can use the implant to learn stuff at an accelerated rate?” Eliza asked as she and Dr. Hughes left the room and made their way towards the elevators.

“That’s just the tip of the iceberg. Everything will be explained in detail during your therapy lessons but what I can say is that you are among the world’s elite now, Miss Walsh, and there’s literally nothing you can’t do if you put your mind to it. Ever wanted to be a doctor? Why spend eight years in school when you can download the information directly to your brain and complete the courses in a year? Nothing can be done to mitigate the residency, but that’s a small price to pay for shaving seven years off the time.”

“I don’t think I have what it takes to be a doctor.”

The elevator doors opened and Eliza followed Doctor Hughes on. “How old do you think I am?”

“I don’t know, thirty-five”

When the doors closed Doctor Hughes placed her thumb on a scanner and a moment later the elevator began descending. “When it reached human trials I was among the first to receive the implant.”

“But, but that would make you...”

“One-hundred-seventy-four years old next month. Well, my collection of memories anyways. This is actually my third body. But you are close in that I was cloned at the age of thirty- eight. Immortality, Miss Walsh, has been the dream of man since we learned to walk upright and ponder our existence and it is now within your reach thanks to a mistake.”

“Two things. First, please call me Eliza. And second, that’s all very well and good, but you’re forgetting one very important piece of information.”

“And that would be?”

“Before coming to the hospital to have my appendix removed I was a cashier at a grocery store. I don’t have the millions of dollars needed to pay for the cloning process. Hell, I can’t even

afford the downloaded lessons to potentially put myself in a position where I one day could, so I'm afraid this is all a colossal waste of time."

"I took the liberty of looking into you while you were in a medically induced coma, Eliza, and with the right incentive I think you can go far, do whatever you set your mind to. That being said..."

"Sorry to interrupt, but how are we going so far down? Where are you taking me?"

"Like I said, I'm taking you to your new room. I liked what I saw in you, Eliza and I'm going to offer you the opportunity of a lifetime. How does one free clone and a million dollars sound?"

"Like you're gearing me up for one hell of a catch I'm not going to like."

"A bit of skepticism is healthy, but I assure you I have nothing nefarious in mind. I'm looking for a new research assistant and I think you'll be perfect for the position."

"You did hear the part I said I was a cashier, right?"

"Did you hear the part where I said you can learn eight years of medical school in one?"

"And if I don't want to be a doctor or you assistant?"

"Then you're free to go after your two months of mandatory therapy. I'm not going to force you to do anything against your will, but keep in mind you'll be turning away the equivalent of about four hundred years of your current salary if you say no."

"And how long will I have to work for you to earn that million, Doctor Hughes?"

After what seemed like an eternity the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened into a long hallway with tiled floor and metal walls and ceiling with recessed lighting. "I'm sorry if I didn't make myself clear. You'll be paid a million dollars a year."

It was more money that the young woman ever hoped to earn in her entire lifetime and she nearly accepted on the spot, but skepticism crept in and stayed her tongue. "What sort of research will we be doing?"

"We will continue researching the neural interface and its possible applications."

"There are scientists out there like you with more than a century of experience. Why choose me over them?"

"I need someone young, unbiased and not afraid to question the status quo. Someone pushing two-hundred simply doesn't fit the bill. Trust me, those scientist plastered all over the TV and internet are only interested in one thing and it certainly isn't helping better their fellow man."

"And you are?"

"I'm offering you a million dollar a year job and a free clone aren't I? That aside, I've dedicated my entire life to making the neural interface and cloning technology more mainstream and affordable, but the wealthy elite have blocked me at every damn turn so I'm trying a different strategy." Stopping at a set of metal doors at the end of the hallway, Dr. Hughes placed her hand on a scanner. When it beeped she let another scan her retina and finally typed seventeen digits into a number pad. There was an audible click from the door which she pulled open.

"What is this place?"

"This, my young friend, is Neurotech and it is where we'll change the world. That implant you have connected to your brain and spine is state of the art and was developed right here in this lab."

"So you used me as a Guinea pig?"

"Not at all. I have seventy-three of the brightest minds in the world working for me and each and every one of them has the latest interface."

“So, you’re going to change the world by competing with a corporation with enough money to buy the freaking galaxy? How exactly does that help humanity?”

“That implant in your head would cost more than a million dollars if sold by our competition and for no other reason than greed. The technology has been around for nearly two centuries and should be available for everyone. That is why we will be offering the next model for only twenty-five thousand dollars.”

“A significant price reduction I’ll give you that, but still hardly affordably to everyone.”

“It will be once we’ve worked out the details of it being covered by insurance. I want you to take a good look at the men and women here in this lab. Do you know what they all have in common besides the implant?”

“No idea.”

“Before working here they were residents of this hospital. The coma ward to be precise. Henry over there spent fourteen years wasting away after an auto accident until I gave him a new lease on life. Rebecca fried her brain using every type of drug she could get her hands on and now she’s one of the most brilliant geneticists I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with and it’s all thanks to our,” she spread her arms to indicate the company and not the individuals “neural interface. But that’s enough sales pitch for one day. Let me show you to your room so you can take a much needed shower and then it’s off to therapy.”

“Two things. Can I get something to eat? And what is this mandatory therapy I’ll be spending the next two months going through?”

“The first few sessions have a way of upsetting stomachs so I would strongly suggest waiting until afterward to eat. As for the therapy itself, you’ll learn how to properly use the interface and care for the connecting port.”

“And it takes two months?”

“There’s a lot to learn. For instance, close your eyes and say: open interface.”

Doing as told, Eliza closed her eyes, said the words and stumbled back in surprise when the darkness was suddenly filled with an intricate interface with dozens of options. “WHOA!” Her eyes opened. The interface was still there though the bluish-white writing was harder to read in the light.

“Close your eyes and use them to move the cursor around the display.”

“What do all these symbols mean?”

“That’ll be explained during therapy. For now just concentrate on moving the cursor but don’t click on anything.”

“No problem since I have no idea how to do that.”

“Think of your eyes as a computer mouse. Left eye for left click, right eye for right click. To click just blink the appropriate eye. Make sure the cursor isn’t on anything and blink your right eye.”

Again following orders, Eliza blinked her right eye and a menu popped open showing a dozen more commands. “That is so cool.” Suddenly feeling a little lightheaded, she opened her eyes, stumbled forward and braced herself against a mostly empty table.

“You okay?”

“I think so. Just got a little lightheaded.”

“Which is another reason you need the therapy. Now say: close interface.”

“Close interface.” And with that the menus vanished. “What’s preventing it from opening every time someone says the words?”

“Did it open and close when I said them?”

“No.”

“That’s because the interface is keyed only to your voice. But you won’t always have to say the commands. In time you’ll learn how to navigate through them as fast as thought without growing lightheaded or getting migraines.”