

## The Price of Advancement

The door to a small two-story college house swings open. A synthetic female voice greets “Welcome Home Laura. Reminder. You have your next class in multinational accounting compliance in thirty-five minutes. It is recommended that you depart in twenty minutes to arrive on time.”

Laura, a supple female British woman with long flowing black hair, her green eyes, a unique trait even within her family. Her modest sized breasts are contained within her sweater. She lets out a long drawn out sigh, her voice is full of frustration and exhaustion, “Yes I know Shirley. You don’t have to remind me the moment I get in,” she grumps, tightly gripping her backpack that is slung over her shoulder, tossing it to the side, beside the couch, collapsing onto it.

Within moments her phone vibrates and pings, pulling it out of her pocket, she types in her passcode, reading her newest text, “Laura you’re home? I thought you were at the library to study between classes.”

She responds, “I needed to lay down. This school load is getting to me.”

“I was about to order some food, did you want me to get you something?”

“Where from?”

“Golden Wok down the street.”

“Sure, you know what I like.”

“Awesome, it’ll be here in about fifteen minutes then. I hope it’s not cutting it close to your class.”

“I’ll be fine, I can eat the rest on the way.”

“Got it,” the one on the other end responds, ending the conversation until there’s a knock on the door, the house bound computer system saying.

“Your door delivery from Golden Wok is here.”

Laura cracks open her eyes, standing up, getting her food, “Thank you,” she says, taking the bags, closing the door. Placing the food on a nearby coffee table, when a young lithe girl with blond hair and blue eyes pops in from upstairs. She watches her enter the living room, “Thanks Mila for the food. I really needed it.”

“It was good timing. If you came in a few minutes later, I’d have had the food ordered already,” she says, sitting on the couch beside her, the two grabbing their food and a set of chopsticks, “Laura, this isn’t like you. Normally once you go to campus you don’t come back till all your classes and activities are done. What happened?”

“Life, that’s what’s happening. All I’ve been doing is studying and going to these classes just to get a good job or otherwise I’ll be stuck flipping burgers for the rest of my life. I don’t want to be flipping burgers, but is being some soulless businesswoman the way to go?”

“It was the vid-c from your parents, wasn’t it?”

“You heard?”

“I haven’t heard any parent yell and complain over one of those over being just short of first? That’s just insane.”

“They only want what’s best for me, so I must do the best for myself,” she remarks, eating her food, enjoying the comfort of the delicious meal for a few minutes before saying, “But honestly, I’m not sure if what they want for me is the best, but at the same time, after all they’ve done for me, I don’t want to disappoint.”

Mila nods, eating her food, thinking over what’s said before responding, “True, but you have to do things for you as well you know? Your family won’t always be there, but you will always be there, for doing what you feel is right for yourself is also important.”

“Yeah, true.”

Shirley says, “Laura, you need to depart in the next three minutes if you want to make it to your class of multinational accounting compliance on time.”

“Yes, I know that Shirley, thank you,” she responds with a tone of annoyance, “I’ll just have to think on what you said as I eat. I’ll see you and the others later tonight.”

“Any time and remember. The person, who knows what’s truly best for you, is you,” she says, giving a quick hug before Laura grabs her things, heading out the door.

She makes her way toward the college campus, students are either rushing to or from class, tables are set up with weights placed on the papers to prevent them from flying off as an occasional wind blows through. They all call out to people, vying for the students’ fleeting attention, calling for some kind of work program, study abroad, some campus activity, and the like.

Often Laura ignored these tables, they had nothing to offer her, that she wasn’t already supposed to be doing as per her parent’s wishes. But as she’s about to step into the couple century old stone building, one table caught her eye, not for the signs on it, which showed a dazzling logo, saying “Neu U! Synthetic Enhancements for a better future you!” But the person at the table made her stop and take a second look.

A silver haired blue-eyed wonder of a woman, dressed in revealing but not too revealing clothing that would result in her getting booted from the college compass. At first glance she thought she was a normal human but now that she looked, she could see the segmented parts of her body, the servos and black joints on her fingers, gave the hints that she’s not entirely a natural human being. She smiles at people, moving with a perfect elegance and smoothness like no other. Black lines outline panels and plates that can be removed to get access to her synthetic interior. Her body is perfect in its craftsmanship and design, so Laura found herself perhaps questioning what she thought was attractive, for just a moment.

Their eyes met. Those blue eyes, perfectly crafted, too good to be true, made that part of her brain tell her that that isn’t real, that isn’t natural speak out, it was too close to reality but not quite there, but on the other hand, this is real, this is reality, and it hushed that little part of her mind, drawing her in.

The woman spoke with smooth with perfect utterance of her words, much like Shirley but this was even smoother, and more human in nature. The words rang out like songbirds singing

to a new day, “Hello, are you curious in our Neu U program?” she asks her directly, jolting her out of a moment of her trance, not even remembering that she approached the table.

“Huh? What?” she asks, putting down the last bit of her Chinese food.

“Sorry, did I startle you?” she asks, moving smoothly, leaning across the table, allowing Laura to have a good look at the purely synthetic body before her, which made her heart flutter with excitement.

“N-no, no. I’ve heard about this on the internet. You do the body enhancements? Banned from all sports competitions.”

“We are, and we understand the decision. Are you curious in a new self?”

“Ah... well..., I really should get to class,” she mutters to herself.

“That’s alright, we’ll be here all day.”

Laura looks to the school, then back at the beauty before her, the confidence she extrudes is beyond anything she’s ever witnessed before, “But I have time. So what do you offer?”

“We offer various body enhancements from minor boosts to one’s strength and physical fitness. Need more hours of the day? Our neural clean up enhancements can reduce the number of hours you need to sleep safely by a full two hours. Having heart problems? We can fix that too. We specialize in not only life improvement body enhancements but cosmetic features, with variable plans to pay for the surgeries,” she says, sliding a pamphlet over to her.

Laura reads through it, noticing one thing isn’t there, quickly asking, “What about something like you? Or are you just a machine?” she inquires.

“I’m real. As real as you. Most of my body has been synthetically enhanced with most of my internals still intact, as I underwent a total body replacement surgery.”

“How is it?” she asks with a hint of nervous excitement, that she is surprised herself to have.

“It’s wonderful. I’d never go back if given the choice, which I would warn there isn’t one, and not something to be taken lightly.”

“I noticed it wasn’t here in the pamphlet.”

“Fully body conversion surgery is a pricey endeavor. Anyone interested would need a sponsor.”

“A sponsor?” she asks.

“Are you seriously considering this?”

“Well... I never really thought about it before now, but if I am to be honest. The life before me as is, is not something I’ve been too inclined to. Perhaps this is something better.”

“This would be a big choice. I can’t recommend you on a confused feeling.”

“No, nothing like that. Everything before me has been decided what is best for me, but I want to decide what is best for me. I will admit I’ve admired the Neu U bodies; on occasion I see some from a distance. The anthropomorphic ones are kind of neat even if a little weird. But this is the first time I’ve gotten to see one up close, you know?”

The cybernetic person nods, keeping up her smile, reaching out her hand, “Do you want to touch it?” she asks.

“Really?”

“Of course. I want you to have a better understand of the wonders of the Neu U body.”

“T-thanks,” she says, reaching out, feeling the soft facsimile skin. It’s smooth, warm to the touch, much like a human, but in a way it's too perfect, which makes it feel all the better, if albeit a little weird. Something clearly to get used to. Only the indentations made by her panels felt in a way, more natural, a ‘flaw’ that puts her mind at ease as she runs her fingers across her hand, and along her arm, “It feels amazing.”

“Neu U prides their bodies on their perfection and attention to detail while ensuring that the human mind can handle such perfection without triggering the uncanny valley syndrome,” she explains.

“I can understand that. It’s rather a delight and at times a little unnerving to see something so perfect before you that is sort of defies expectations,” she replies with a smile which quickly fades upon realization of what she said, “I’m so sorry I didn’t mean to sound rude or overly complimentary.”

She waves her off, “Relax. I’m not going to get offended. It’s normal for people to be curious and surprised at how my body is. In my opinion it's worth every penny.”

“Could you tell me more about it?”

“Are you really that curious to take such a big step in your life? A full body though not as massive as a full conversion to a Neu U body, it's still a big step that I can’t stress that it is a big decision.”

“What do you mean between full body and full conversion?”

“Full body is what I am. My exterior is fully synthetic, which allows for different looks, and model changes as I desire.”

“And the full body?”

“You are fully synthetized into a Neu U body, adding greater versatility and in theory immortality, but the legal steps to undergo the process significantly adds to the cost of conversion. On top of the massive amount needed to convert the brain into a synthetic replicant of itself.”

“Is that really living still?” she asks curiously.

“Not sure, that’s why it's an even bigger step than just getting a full body. If it was more common, I’m sure there would be more people who’d question the morality of it.”

“That would make an interesting research paper,” she says with a smile.

“Maybe.”

“So... how do I go about getting a sponsor?” she asks.

“Are you serious in considering this?”

“I never knew how much I wanted this till I knew it was possible.”

“Sponsors or a fully body conversion are few and far between, given how just expensive the process is.”

“Oh...” she says, her shoulder slumping.

The synthetic human monitors her body language, “But if you are sure you want to go about this. Come here tomorrow. I might know of a sponsor, who could be willing to take you, but I will warn she’s rather different than normal sponsors.... If you can call any of the Neu U sponsors normal.”

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“You’ll see. Come to this location at nine PM,” she says, handing her a card with an address on it.

“Really?” her eyes light up, reading the address, “Thank you.”

“Don’t be late. It would be a shame to give a bad impression to your sponsor. It’s rare for one to be in the area, let alone already looking to sponsor someone.”

“I understand. I’ll be on time.”

“And look your best.”

“I will. Thank you, thank you,” she says, noticing the time, “Crap, crap. I’m late for class, got to go. Thank you, it was nice talking to you!” she says, rushing off.

The synthetic girl waves back, keeping that perfect smile, “It was nice talking to you too,” she replies, her attention quickly turning to another student, eager to draw them in close and advertise all that Neu U has to offer.

After classes she returns back to her home, which greets her, “Welcome home Laura. Your first class is at eight am tomorrow. Please get some rest by eleven pm in order to be well rested for your class.”

“Thank you, Shirley, I appreciate the reminder,” she says, heading upstairs passing Mila’s room as she is busy typing on a computer, working on some kind of project while listening to music via her earbuds.

Laura stops in the door frame, knocking on the door, “Mila?”

She turns around, pulling out her earbuds, “Laura, welcome home. How did the rest of your classes go? Feeling better?”

“Long and boring as ever, but yeah I’m feeling a little better I think,” she says, one hand in her pocket, gently rubbing her fingers over the business card, “Where’s James and Adam?”

“Did you read the house chat? They ran into the guys and are out to enjoy themselves.”

“Oh, I forgot to look,” she says, pulling out her phone, holding the business card to the back of it, quickly reading through the chat, “Ah there it is.”

Mila gets up from her chair, “Are you okay Laura? You’re not acting like yourself. Did something happen?” she asks, approaching her.

“Well... yeah, you can say that. I was late for class today.”

“That’s nothing to get yourself worked up for. You were stressed out, and were eating your lunch on the go, what’s being a little late for once class be in the grand scheme of things?”

“It’s not that, it’s more of why I was late for class. I got caught up in one of those information booths, you know the ones they have all lined up in the main courtyard to the old center building?”

“Yeah, I know the one. They always have a bunch of things going on there. So what new activity caught your fancy? I thought you were full up on extracurricular activities.”

“This isn’t an extracurricular activity, more like a life changing decision that I think I really need.”

Mila raises an eyebrow, “What kind of life changing decision?”

“I was talking to the Neu U representative, and she presented me with an opportunity to explore myself in a way that I never thought possible.”

“What?”

“I was talking to the representative, and you know it's amazing how those Neu U bodies work. I never got so close before, but when I was there with one of them in front of me, something about the whole thing just clicked inside of me.”

Mila gives her a look of concern, “Wait, wait, wait just a moment. Are you talking about getting body modification enhancements?”

“Well... yeah.”

“Why do you think you need a new arm or a leg? Those things are expensive, you know that? And this isn’t like a tattoo you can get laser removed later if you don’t want it. This is permanent body changes that will make you permanently tied to that company. Did you know that they are the only ones allowed to work on you for any kind of maintenance? You’d be signing yourself over to them for the rest of your life.”

“I know you are concerned about this and I understand where you are coming from Mila, but I was given an opportunity here. And they didn’t approach me, I approached them and asked the questions.”

“Ah huh? Did you ever think they could be leading questions?”

“They weren’t leading questions. I know all about those. But I’ve been lost and aimless Mila. And as I was thinking about what you said and then this once in a lifetime opportunity is presented before me? I feel like it's fate or something that I should take it.”

“A once in a lifetime opportunity, eh? Laura,” she says, gently placing a hand on her shoulder, “Honey, when I said earlier, it was for you to explore and discover what you feel is right for yourself. Not to stop at the first Neu U booth and get yourself a body modification.”

“It's more than just a body modification, it's freeing myself from the confines of what’s set before me. I feel I could do so much more than just being who I am now.”

“And you can do that without risky surgeries or completely altering who you are as a person. Do you even realize just how big of a change this would be?”

“Yes, I know. And it's bigger than just a simple arm and a limb. I’ve been given the opportunity of a full body makeover.”

“Full body? Did you just say full body?”

“Yeah. I was talking to her and she mentioned that in order to undergo it, I’d need a sponsor.”

“And they just so happen to know a sponsor for a super expensive not to mention a super risky body modification?”

“Yeah, they did.”

“Laura darling, are you listening to yourself? There are so many red flags here. How long till you are going to get this Neu U?”

“I’m not sure when I’ll be getting the new body. It will probably not be anytime soon, but I’ll be meeting the sponsor tomorrow night.”

“You’ll be meeting someone about this tomorrow? Isn’t that a little fast?”

“It is, I will admit. I feel a little overwhelmed and excited at the prospect, but all my life, I’ve been told where to go, how to act, what to do, what to be in order to succeed. For once in my life I feel like I can make my own decision to carve out a future I want for myself.”

“I admire and understand where you are coming from Laura but take a moment to just think this through. There are long terms implications for a decision like this. If it goes poorly, you could ruin your life in one swift go.”

“I know of your concerns Mila, and you’re my best friend. It’s why I came to you with this. I wanted you to know what’s going on, and why I feel I need to do this.”

“You never need to do anything except eat and sleep. You don’t need to go to school, like you don’t need this to know who you are. I know who you are. An awesome person, who is kind, outgoing, an amazingly hard worker, and so intelligent and funny that it’s a crime that you still have another year of being in here with me before you get your degree. But you know what?”

“What?”

“I’m glad to have you here with me as we forge ourselves for a better life.”

“Awe, thank you,” she says, giving her a big hug, “That means a lot to me, but I am still going to go see this person about the sponsorship.”

“Laura…”

“Look, I am not going to rush headlong into this. All I’m going to do is see who this person is and what they will want for a sponsorship. I need to explore the option at least. Otherwise, I will never fully know if it’s right for me or not.”

“I don’t think getting your entire body modified is a good idea. They’ve only been around for what? Fifteen years? We don’t know the long-term implications about the process.”

“When did you get so caught up in the long term?”

“I’m majoring in business management, remember?”

Laura chuckles, “Right, how could I have forgotten about that exciting subject.”

“It’s not any more exciting than your degree.”

“True.”

Mila smiles for a moment before letting out a soft sigh, “Look Laura. I won’t stop you with whatever you decide to do. I’m not the kind of friend who will call your parents and let them know that you are even thinking about this. But I am worried about you, you know?”

“I know, and I appreciate your concern.”

“Whatever you do decide, when you decide it. I’ll be there to support you. Always.”

“Thanks,” she replies, giving her a big hug.

“What are friends for,” she says, squeezing back.

Before Laura knew it, she was on her way to the place on the business card. An automated taxi driver, took her to the place outside the city about a half an hour’s drive, into the countryside. The glow of the city can be seen through the back window. She’s dressed in an elegant business suit, one she’s used multiple times for national business club competitions. Her hair is nicely combed, tied up with invisible scrunchies. She sits nervously in the backseat, fingers tapping across her black dress pants, heart racing a little.

“I wonder what she’s going to be like?” she mutters to herself.

The android that sits in the front seat to look like there’s an actual driver turns its head to her, asking in a British-synthetic accented voice, “Who is what going to be like young Miss?”

“Oh, uh the person I am going to see. I’m just a little nervous.”

“Don’t be. You’ll do fine.”

“I hope so.”

“As long as you relax, you’ll show the confidence you need to succeed.”

She smiles, “I know you are a machine just saying what I want to hear, but thanks. I needed that.”

“Aim to please Miss. We’ll be arriving at the destination in five minutes.”

“Thank you,” she says, the taxicab pulling into the front gate of a large gated estate a few minutes later. The car stops at the front entrance, their way blocked by the gate and the guard that’s there. The human dressed in black, with a security guard badge on their chest approaches the vehicle, “Name?”

The Taxi-cab says, “Greetings. I am here to drop off Laura.”

Laura quickly rolls down the window, “I was talking to a miss... uh... oh no I never got her name... but she gave me this business card and said to be here by nine pm? To meet someone here about a sponsorship,” she explains with nervousness and unsureness in her voice, thinking, *“I never asked her for her name. I was so enthralled with her, that I completely didn’t do the basic human courtesy and ask for her name.”*

He walks up to her looking her over, “May I see the card please?” he asks, holding out his hand.

“S-sure,” she replies, giving it to him.

He looks over it for a moment, looking at the front and the back, “One moment as I make a call.”

“Sure, no problem,” she replies.

The taxicab driver says, “The meter will still be running while I am idle here.”

Laura says, “I know, just give them some time to work this out,” she says, watching him go to his security booth, making the call.

“Yes Miss,” the taxicab driver replies.

She waits, shifting in her seat, a few minutes pass when he returns, handing her the card, “You’re free to enter. Stop at the main entrance, she’ll be waiting for you there,” he explains.

Laura tentatively takes the card back, “Okay, thank you.”



“Just doing my job,” he replies, heading back to the security box, opening the gate.

“You heard the man right?”

“I did.”

“Take me to that location.”

“Yes Miss,” the taxi responds, driving up along the massive estate’s driveway, where carved hedge bushes with fading green leaves, showing the season gave only hints of the grandeur they had during the summer. Like a stereotypical rich person there was a large water fountain that the driveway went around. Depiction of goddesses anthropomorphized as dinosaur raptors was a curious alteration to the trope.

The car stopped at the set of stairs that lead up to her home, “Here we are. Shall I wait here? Please note, keeping me on idle will cost you a minutely rate.”

“I can call another cab, you may go,” says Laua as she steps out of the cab.

“Yes Miss, have a good day. Thank you for using Automated Cab Service,” he says, the cab driving off.

Laura turns to the mansion. She swallows a lump in her throat looking around seeing no one, but the glow of the lights from the tall windows was a welcoming sight. Swallowing her fear she walks forward, about to knock on the door when it automatically opens.

A smooth female voice speaks, “Welcome Laura. Please come in. You’re right on time, I do like that. Go to your right and sit on the couch. I’ll be there shortly.”

“O-okay,” she replies, looking at marble tiled floors, the fancy carved furniture, the hanging chandeliers. Everything about this screamed someone who had money and loved to flaunt it. The living room was as large as her house, a glass surrounded fireplace in the center of the room where the long, elegant leather chairs were positioned around. She looked around in awe, sitting down.

Her hands gently drummed across her clothes, her toes clenched, a moment later a well-dressed human butler with swept back black hair, a few wrinkles on his face, but his perfectly dyed hair hid most of the effects of his age. He holds out a silver platter with a wine glass on it, “Care for a drink madam?”

“Oh, why thank you. Don’t mind if I do,” she says, taking the glass, taking a sip.

“The madam will be down shortly. Please relax and enjoy yourself till then,” he says, walking off.

“So far so good Laura. Just take sips, show appreciation of her hospitality. Talk over what is required in the sponsorship. Get a better understanding of what it all means. Head back, and then? Well... then we’ll see,” she says, taking another sip of the wine.

“I am glad you are thinking this out. I prefer those who use their head,” says the same female voice he heard before.

Laura turns her head seeing a peculiar sight that came right out of a fantasy sci-fi story. A sleek, slender green synthetic scaled with darker green perhaps black striped, well-to-do dressed anthropomorphic Utahraptor with glowing yellow predatory eyes.

She walks elegantly, smoothly on high heeled shoes that manage to hold her synthetic body's weight, while showing off sleek black sharp claws that reflect in the light. Her body moves so well and so calculating that in her mind she gets the sense this can't be reality but perfection standing before her. "H-hello" she says, standing up.

"You must be Laura," she says, smirking, getting closer, having a clear three inches in height over her before the high heels were considered part of the equation.

"Yes I am. And you must be the sponsor I was told about."

"I am. My name is Tarria Protishk," she says, giving a courtesy bow.

Laura quickly responds in kind, "It's a pleasure to meet you Ma'am."

She reaches out with her claws, the ebony claw tips shine in the light, giving hints of their sharp and deadly nature, her well-crafted round bust was a model of femininity that was nothing to sneer at. Laura stiffens when the claws run across her skin, feeling how sharp they really are yet how expertly she uses them to prevent injury, "My, what lovely green eyes you have."

"T-thank you."

Tarria pulls her hand back, "I know what you are thinking. You weren't expecting to see a living dinosaur before you, were you?" she asks, walking around her, stalking her like she was her next meal.

"I have never seen an anthropomorphized synthetic body up close before."

"And?"

"It's rather amazing what one could do with such a body. A compliment to the engineers that made your body."

Tarria smiles, "There's a reason why I am a sponsor. I've undergone the process myself, liberated myself from my mortal coils, embraced the person, who I was meant to be, not dictated by what society or nature has deemed what I ought to be."

Laura's heart races, "I can understand the appeal to it Ma'am."

"Do you now," she says, running her claw across her chin, the claw tip following the grooves of her synthetic form, "Tell me, what do you expect to gain from your Neu U body?"

"Ah... well... after what you said. I think you nailed it on the head. All my life I've been told what to be, and not allowed to be who I want to be, who I think I should be."

"You do realize that as your sponsor, I will be in charge of you, making you work for that body. You'd be indebted to me, to do what I will you to do. A very powerful contractual job, that if you break? We'll let's just say it's best not to even think of that possibility."

"That's why I am here ma'am. I want to learn more about the sponsorship, and not just think if it's for me, but know."

"Teresia has given me your profile, and I will say I am rather impressed. Someone like yourself is not always wanting such a change. You have a bright future ahead of you."

"A bright future that blinds me to the emptiness of it all till I get there. Everyone just talks about how wonderful it will be when I'm done. But I can't help but feel there is more to this life than just working hard, getting a good job, having kids and a family."

“All those are fine goals for anyone to have... but you are right. There is more to this life than just that and I can show it to you, if you really want it. But it will be a life that takes work and dedication, much like the one set ahead of you. There are no easy roads in life, just alternate paths with different destinations.”

“I know. I never considered this some kind of easy out of my current life. Even if I were to go through this, I don’t think I’d abandon everything about myself, simply building myself a different life that I want.”

Tarria continues to stalk around her while she slowly spins in a circle to keep herself facing toward her as much as she can without being too awkward, “Are you saying you’d still go to school? Return to that deary life that you are so desperate to get away from that you are willing to give up a large portion of who you are to reach a higher state of being?”

“It’s a process. I can’t throw out all my options and hard work that I’ve done just to dive into this. But that doesn’t mean I don’t feel I really want this to be my reality. To be more machine than man? To see and experience the process, to know that I am not who I am being told to be but becoming what I want to be.”

“I see... Well, I think I could sponsor you, if you are willing to accept the contractual agreement that will ensure that you will work off your debt to me, a daily sizable one to be at that. I assure you it won’t hinder your studies. You’ll be needing less sleep than you used to, that extra time will be put into working off the body given to you.”

“That actually sounds wonderful. So, what kind of work would I be doing?” she asks.

“Congratulations, you passed another test of mine.”

“Another test?”

“Well, it's no fun to tell you are being tested. You might give me prepared responses that aren’t truthful, but you passed the last test.”

“Which is?”

“You’re asking me what you are going to be doing. I like people who can think, ask questions, be oh so clever in what they do. I don’t need simpletons to possess such a form as myself.”

“Will I be coming out looking like you?”

“Like me? Oh good heavens no. You’ll be in a human chassis. You’d have to be fully synthetic to be like me.”

“You’re a full synth?”

“I am. One of the few, but let's not dawdle on me, let's talk about you and what you will be doing for me.”

“What will I be doing?”

“You’d be escorts for my various clients around the city. For now, I’ll be selecting ones near your college campus to limit your commute. Less time commuting, more time working.”

“What kind of escort? I’m not going to be a very good bodyguard. I know some self-defense, but nothing like to be security,” she replies.

“No, no. More like companionship to the clients that really are in need of it.”

Laura's eyes go wide, she tenses a little, "You mean the intimate kind?"

"Yes, I do. Does that scare you off?" she asks, stopping in front of her, giving a sly grin.

"Actually... I think it makes more excited than before. I hope that doesn't make me sound too weird, but with a synthetic body, I'd be less tied down to my biological body's needs, right?"

"Very true, and how very forward thinking of you. Don't worry, what you do for me will be kept private, but that also means you will need to keep what you do for me private. Do I make myself clear?" she asks with hints of dominance in her voice.

Laura swallows a lump in her throat, "I-I do."

Tarria reaches out, gently running her claw across her skin, looking deep into her eyes, making her stare into that predatory gaze she has, "Perfect, just sign here then," she says, pulling out a data pad with the contract right there before her.

Caught off guard she pulls away, looking down at the contract, "Wait, right now? Just sign? Do I get to read this first?"

"Of course, you can. If you just tried to sign it, that would have been the end of it, another test passed," she says, handing her the data pad.

"I thought you said the previous test was the last one."

"Misdirection my dear. It's necessary in my business, but don't worry. You'll learn," she says, giving Laura time to go through the wordy contract, which is made of so much legal jargon that it's hard to fully wrap her head around it.

"How much time do I have to sign this?"

"Before you leave this house."

"That quick?"

"I'm a busy woman. Just because I'm immortal doesn't mean my time is not valuable. But I won't rush you on reading it. Take all the time you need, but if you don't sign it when you walk out those doors. That's it, it's done. No contract for you. You had your chance."

"I understand, just give me a moment."

"Take your time," she says with a sly smirk.

Laura felt the pressure build, the weight of the decision weighing on her mind, but she took the time to scroll through the pages of documents, till eventually she reached the end, with only the most basic idea of what she would be getting herself into, "This is one of the heaviest bits of reading of my entire life."

"It is a life altering document, it should be."

"One question."

"Yes?"

"I'm not signing myself away to be your property or something crazy like that am I?"

Tarria laughs heartily, "Oh good heavens no. That would be very illegal. But I will have significant powers over you till you are paid off, but that's understandable, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," she says, looking down at the spot to sign.

“So what’s it going to be? Will you take the risk? Or go home to your easy boring unfulfilling life?”

Laura tenses, stiffening her resolve upon hearing those words, “Life isn’t worth living without taking risks,” she says, signing the document, “Okay I’m in.”

“Excellent, we’ll get you transitioned right away.”

“Wait, already?”

“Time is money, and I need you to get accustomed to your body immediately. A limo will be waiting outside to take you to the Neu U hospital for transitioning. Any questions?”

“Just one...”

“Yes?”

“This is a crazy one, but will it be possible for me to watch? I know with how technology has gotten that people can do crazy things, but is that one possible?”

“The process isn’t for the faint of heart, are you sure?”

“I want to see myself change. Not simply wake up to it.”

“I’ll arrange for it to happen.”

“Thank you,” she replies with a curtsey, putting down her empty drink, “Now if you don’t mind, I have my new life to meet,” she says, walking to the doors which open, a long black limo waiting for her.

“Of course, and enjoy your Neu U,” says Tarria, smiling with hidden eagerness, watching her rush down the steps and into the limo, “She has potential,” she mutters, turning around, the doors closing behind her.

Excitement couldn’t begin to describe what is going through Laura’s mind. Everything was happening so fast, whisked away to the hospital she was taken to surgery where she was stripped down to her bare skin, hair was shaved off across her body and then a hair removing gel was rubbed on to clean away every spec of hair left. She stood there before the doctors as they inspected and looked over her, making sure every inch of her body was disinfected and cleaned.

Her body shivered as she laid in a hospital bed, an intervening drip placed into her arm, with the initial sleeping liquid placed into her. All of this was done in less than an hour and a half since she got here. All she had to do was do as she was told, and answer questions about her medical history, agreeing again she agreed to this surgery under her own free will, and accepts any responsibility should anything go wrong.

“So... how will I get to watch?” she asks one of the nurses.

She looks at her with shock, “You want to watch this?”

“Y-yes...”

“It’ll be done. Just relax, it will start soon enough,” she says, checking over her vitals, only a thin hospital gown covers her front.

“Okay,” she says, leaning her head against the pillow, looking over to the nurse when she blinked, the next thing she sees is herself. Not from the point of view of her head, but from a hanging camera that shows the doctors crowded over her body, and a large synthetic Neu U body on a nearby table. The chest cavity and the head of the NEU U body was open. Wires and other

attachments eager to grab and hold onto whatever is placed inside. The silver inside lining, and needles ready to be shoved into her the moment she is placed inside.

Time moved slowly for her, she could hear the doctors say in slow motion voices that was just barely intelligible to her, “Visual cranial input connection established. She should be seeing us now.”

“Why would anyone want to watch this is beyond me,” mutters one of the other doctors.

“Cooling the patient now,” says the doctor, Laura’s body is chilled, yet she doesn’t feel anything, but she can see the air around her fogging despite how dry the air is. Her lips become blue, the rate of her heartbeat slows down more and more. The doctors making sure everything is ready as they inject liquids into her.

“Closing off arteries to the extremities now,” says the doctor, as small incisions are made to point where her arms connect to their torso. With the help of a machine for the surgery two doctors work in tandem to find and close off each of the main and important blood vessels and arteries that lead to her arms. The process takes over an hour, but when they are done, she can see her arms grow cold, becoming blue on the fingertips.

The process was then repeated for her legs, the incision made in her inner thighs. Bit by bit her legs were cut off from the main body, her toes twitch, and make subtle movements, reflex reactions that had no bearing on what she was trying to do.

It’s strange, she feels she should be excited, fearful when seeing this, yet she feels like she’s watching a boring show yet while feeling bored, she is drawn into this with unbridled excitement.

“Preparing to cap off the right arm,” says the doctors as they grab a power tool, sawing through her arm, the sound of flesh and bone being cut through unnerving, but the blood splatter was minimal. The moment her arm fell from her body the side of her body was lifted up and a metal cap was placed onto the open wound, which clamped down, attaching itself to her, a moment later glowing with white lights as it was doing its thing, “Right arm capped.”

“Preparing to cap the left arm,” says the same doctor, the process repeating itself. She watches as her extra limbs are simply cut from her body, tossed to the side on a surgical tray like garbage material, no longer needed. What she does catch is that her body barely bleeds any blood before the cap is put into place.

“Vitals are still stable. Proceeding with the right leg,” says the doctor, larger power tool is used to buzz saw through her leg which twitches as its cut clean through, “I’ll never get used to that,” the doctor remarks, “Capping the right leg,” he says, slipping on a larger disk that clamped and connected to the nub.

As her leg is placed with her arms, the last limb is sawed through, taken away, no longer needed. Strangely Laura finds herself unable to think. Her brain is too shut down to be able to do so. She is merely seeing this through a different lens that is not her own.

“Preparing for enucleation,” says the doctors as they use a sharp cutting tool to remove her eyelids. Then a suction machine wraps around her eyes, pulling them forward. Slowly, carefully gingerly they are cut at the base and extracted from her head, leaving an empty cavity.

Her eyes, though unlike her limbs, are placed into an icebox and whisked away. “Enucleation complete. Preparing to transport the patient to Neu U body 116,” says the doctors as they carefully, gingerly, lift her from one bed, placing her into the open shell of the Neu U body, lining her up perfectly with the cavity.

Ironically, it's now she sees that the head cavity has these nubs where the eyes are, and once the cover is put into place, they will slip into her open eye sockets, filling the void. Once she's fully inside and lined up into the Neu U body, modeled exactly after her former self, it latches onto the hubs of her limbs. Wires auto insert themselves into the sockets on the caps, while a series of needs unseen to her are inserted along her spine, causing her to twitch and jerk, her heart rate picking up.

“Heart rate is within normal parameters. Neural connections are currently being made,” says the Nurse.

“Excellent,” says the doctor, as they work to check and ensure each connection within the Neu U body is made, her body twitching ever so often after several hours of work. Watching them cut micro holes into her skull so the suit can slip in and attach itself along her skull, and all around her body, the sexes lining up, providing a perfect shell around her, they close the Neu U body around her, locking her organic body within.

Long black flowing hair, eyes closed, preventing her to see what they look like, but with a perfect supple body, breasts a little larger, hips a bit wider, every flaw she might have thought she had, removed in an instant. She sees the panels along her thighs, arms, “Disconnecting neural connection to visual network,” says the doctor ending the video feed.

The next moment she is conscious she is in the hospital bed, gasping for air, feeling the cool flow of it into her mouth, through her nostrils, down into her lungs, much like it was the first time. Her body twitches, feeling her body move in a way she wasn't expecting.

She sits up, feeling a moment of lightheadedness at the pace she went, the nurse, who is nearby rushes over to her, “Relax. You need to take it easy. It takes your body a little bit of time to get accustomed to a Neu U body. The implants help, but they can't do it all,” she warns, feeling the nurse touch her shoulder. Her smooth human skin against her even more perfect skin was difficult to describe. She could feel more of the Nurse's touch than ever before, while her own body felt alien yet exactly what it should feel like.

“Thank you,” she says, her voice sounding much like it did before, no noticeable changes at least as far as she can tell, she looks at her, smiling, feeling the movement in her face like never before, the sensation of her true self underneath is completely lost to her. If she didn't see herself being placed in there, she'd have no idea that she was even there, “Do you have a mirror?” she asks.

“Sure. To warn it might take you a moment for you to recognize your new face. It is a normal reaction,” she says, grabbing a mirror, showing it off to her. The perfect synthetic face of a woman she now had, that is improved in every aspect she could imagine, complete with those perfect green eyes. She felt a flutter of excitement, her heart skipping a beat, this was her now.

Gently touching her face, simply to establish in her mind that who she is seeing in the mirror is her, and not someone else, “This is amazing,” she mutters.

“Take a bit of time to relax. Once the doctors look you over, your therapy will begin.”

“Therapy? How Long will I be out?”

“A week or two depending on how well you adjust. But relax for now. And enjoy the Neu U.”

“Thank you, I think I will,” she says, looking over her naked form, seeing her perfection for the first time, feeling as if something she’s been missing all her life that she didn’t even know was missing until just yesterday has finally been found.