

Digital Destiny - Part 1

By TheSpiralledEye

In a world run by a huge AI that predicts the compatibility of two individuals on a quantum level everybody simply waits to meet their perfect match, rather than wasting time dating. But for Victor things take a strange turn when he is paired with another, straight man. The AI refuses to believe he is wrong and so to 'fix' the problem, transforms Victor into a woman so he can be with his 'soul mate'.

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The matchmaking centre was surprisingly small, considering its importance. A cosy little building with a large garden out front littered with tables where couples sat in quiet conversation. In a way Victor had been expecting this; almost everybody was summoned to a matchmaking centre in their lifetime, sometimes more than once. But when his phone had pinged yesterday morning with a message from CogniPlex he'd almost had a heart attack.

CogniPlex controlled everything from flight paths to individual job assignments. It had been fifty years since the artificial intelligence took over the planet and while there were still some detractors, most people had accepted CongiPlex's benevolent rule fairly quickly. Under its care starvation and poverty became a thing of the past. It began assigning people their perfect jobs to ensure they could live comfortable, fulfilling lives and twenty years ago instigated the soul mate program.

CogniPlex knew every person on the planet; Their medical history, their life, their wants and goals; it was only natural that it would know who to pair with whom. It even assigned how many children, if any, each family could have to keep the best balance of personal fulfilment and population control.

Nobody was told who their soulmate was before meeting them. CogniPlex kept it hidden until both partners had 'reached the perfect moment in their life, found fulfilment as a single life and is mentally and emotionally ready for a life partner'. Some were summoned to the Matchmaking Centre as teenagers, others in their forties. As for Victor, he'd just turned twenty four and hadn't been thinking about romance at all. He assumed he started to feel a longing for something more before his message came but who was he to argue with CogniPlex? Divorce was basically non-existent since it took over.

He stepped inside, for some reason he had expected the building to have a clinical feel but instead he was met with a plush looking foyer filled with soft couches and pastels.

The front desk had two receptionists who kept sneaking glances at one another and smiling. He stepped up and cleared his throat.

“Hi, Victor Straten?”

The blonde wearing a name tag that read ‘Georgia’ smiled at him.

“Welcome! Excited?”

“A little nervous.” He admitted.

“Don’t worry, CogniPlex won’t let you down.” Georgia said with certainty. “I didn’t even realise I was gay until CogniPlex paired me with Libby.”

The other receptionist giggled.

“You work together?”

“CogniPlex knew we were both hopeless romantics.” Libby replied. “Now we get to see romance bloom every day and spend it together. It’s perfect!”

“And your match will be too.”

They handed him a few pages of paperwork to sign and confirm his identity but like everybody else, Victory skipped right to the last page. The document was bear, just enough that he wouldn’t be meeting a total stranger.

Charlie Dalton

Age: 27

Occupation: Sushi Chef

Victor chuckled, of course his soul mate was a sushi chef. He had been planning a holiday to Japan for ages since he loved the food so much. He wished they included a picture, three little bits of information wasn’t nearly enough in his opinion but CogniPlex must know what it was doing.

He finished his paperwork and Georgia led him down the hall past various rooms where people were meeting their soulmates for the first time. She gave him a thumbs up and an encouraging smile before opening the door to a small room.

“I’ll be back soon!” Georgia grinned before closing the door and leaving Victor to his thoughts.

There was a canvas bag by a chair and a small tupperware container with six of the most perfect looking nigiri sitting on the table. Charlie must have gone to the bathroom or something. Victor smiled down at the sushi with excitement, she was clearly talented, the fish was positively gleaming.

Suddenly the door burst open and a man stumbled in, red in the face with embarrassment.

“Sorry! I was so nervous I started to get sweaty and I thought I’d...”

Victor and the man stared at one another as he trailed off. Victor blinked in surprise; this couldn’t be right.

“Charlie?” He asked nervously; expecting the man to laugh and reveal his name was Dave or something before announcing he obviously had the wrong room.

Except that didn’t happen. Instead the man, Charlie, nodded.

“Charlie Dalton?” Victor tried again, his hope thin. It frayed totally when Charlie nodded again.

“I...I didn’t realise I was gay.” Charlie said finally.

“Me either.”

They both stood there lamely before Victor waved Charlie over to the table where his sushi was sitting.

“I guess...we’d better get to know each other?” He suggested lamely. “Did you make these?”

“Yes, I’m a sushi chef. Do you like sushi?”

“Oh yes.”

“Well that’s good.”

“Mmmm.”

Sparks were not flying, to put it lightly. Charlie pressed his lips into a thin line.

“I thought CogniPlex helped people discover their true sexualities before summoning them most of the time.”

“Me too.”

“You don’t suppose…”

“That CogniPlex made a mistake?”

Even thinking such a thing was unheard of; CogniPlex was *never* wrong.

“Alright, why don’t we just forget the whole romance thing for a minute and just relax?” Charlie suggested, “try the sushi, we’ll get to know each other as friends first and maybe something will click. If CogniPlex paired us there must be a reason.”

Victor shrugged; what was the harm? He took a pair of the provided chopsticks and popped one of the nigiri in his mouth. Before he could stop himself a soft moan escaped and his eyes fluttered closed; it was the best sushi he’d ever eaten.

“That’s… amazing.” He said honestly and Charlie beamed.

“The trick is quality fish, nigiri is simple so the higher quality and better prepared each ingredient the higher it goes. I saved some of my best salmon for these.”

“You really wanted to impress me, huh?” Victor waggled his eyebrows playfully and Charlie snorted.

“Well, yes! Who doesn’t want to make a good first impression on their wife, uh, well, you know.”

“Where did you learn?”

They chatted amicably about Charlie’s training, how wandering into a small local sushi bar when he was fifteen totally changed his life. Victor listened intently, feeling slightly embarrassed when Charlie asked him about his own work and he had to admit he was just a small printing house's editor.

“But you get to read all the books early! That’s awesome!”

“With a red pen in hand. I am so focused on typos I don’t get to enjoy the story half the time. And honestly, most of it is pretty boring. Same boy meets girl romances, all thanks to CogniPlex. If there is one downside to living under the AI it’s that romance stories lose a lot of their zest.”

Charlie nodded and the two of them lapsed into awkward silence again.

“Look, Charlie.” Victor sighed, “you seem like a nice guy, I think we could be friends. Good friends but there has to be some sort of mistake. If we’re both straight...we can’t be soul mates.”

“Never had a bi inkling or a secret gay crush?” Charlie asked.

“No. You?”

“No.”

Well, there goes that hope. It was a shame really because Victor really did like Charlie; he had a comforting air about him. If he was a woman he was sure he’d be head over heels but facts were facts; he wasn’t attracted to men.

“Why don’t we nip this in the bud?” He said finally, “Maybe the ladies at the front handed us the wrong papers. Let's just go talk to them, then we’ll meet our real soul mates.”

“Sounds like a plan, hey, meet for a beer next week to laugh it off?”

“Yeah, sounds good!”

They grinned at one another but their smiles were immediately wiped away when Georgia confirmed their match was correct.

“But we’re both straight!” They insisted at the same time. “There has to be some sort of mistake.”

Georgia shifted uncomfortably in her chair for a moment and bit her lip nervously.

“I suppose, you could go talk to CogniPlex yourself, they have a node down in the basement here. In the lab specifically.”

“Why does a matchmaking facility need a lab?” Asked Charlie but Georgia just shrugged.

“Nobody questions it, CogniPlex made the building schematics so there must be a good reason.”

Charlie and Victor exchanged glances and shrugged before heading down the stairs to the basement, then the sub basement.

“I never knew this place had so many underground levels.” Charlie whispered, “it’s sort of spooky.”

“Wooooooo...” Victor moaned like a ghost and the other man playfully smacked him on the shoulder as they reached the bottom room.

Victor wasn’t sure what he was expecting, something high tech and science fiction-y perhaps. Not a single computer screen sitting atop a large, metal desk. If anything it seemed ominous just how empty the rest of the room was.

“Victor, Charlie, how may I help you?”

The voice had a synthetic twang to it, but was otherwise warm and welcoming.

“We think there’s been a mistake.”

The screen blared an angry red for a moment before returning to gentle blue.

“I do not make mistakes.”

It wasn’t like a human talking, there was no defensive edge to the synthetic voice. It was calm, as if stating a simple fact like the sky being blue. Despite there being no threat, Victor felt sweat begin to form on the back of his neck.

“You said we’re soulmates but uh, we’re both straight men.”

There was a moment of silence before the AI spoke again.

“You are soul mates, I do not make mistakes.”

“But-”

“One of you is wrong, I shall fix you.”

“What?”

Quick as a flash the metal desk seemed to open and out stretched several metallic tentacles, moving like snakes through the air. There was a gleam at the end of one but Victor barely had a moment to register it before the tendril jabbed itself painfully into his thigh.

“Ow! What the hell?!”

“I am fixing you. Then, my record will remain clean.”

“What the- you can’t do that to him!” Charlie stood back as the tendrils continued to dive through the air.

Victor tried to dodge them but it was no use; another needle tip jabbed him in the ass, then the chest and stomach. At each point he felt warmth spreading through his whole body. It would be relaxing were it not for the terrifying situation.

He could feel his nerves coming alive, sending tendrils of electricity racing along his nerves. The tingling grew more pronounced, spreading like wildfire through every fibre of his being. Victor gasped as his body contorted, his muscles writhing beneath his skin as they rearranged themselves. He could feel his inner organs shifting inside him, changing shape and size as his skin stretched and warped.

“Uhhhh! Uuuh, what are you doing to meeeee!?”

On some level, he knew but didn't want to accept it. His ass ballooned, his thighs and waist thickened and his chest continued to expand and his entire body transformed. When the process was done he was left gasping for breath, in clothes that no longer fit him properly.

“A...A woman? Why would you make me a woman!?” He cried, taking a step forward and tilting.

His centre of gravity had changed, it was lower now and he wasn't used to it. A few shaky steps and he almost fell on his ass. He would have, if Charlie hadn't caught him.

“My algorithms tell me you are both straight. And Soul mates. Now you can continue.” CogniPlex said simply. *“Do not visit again, security will show you out.”*

“But...but!”

The sound of footsteps approached and Victor felt lost at sea. His emotions were all so strong that they overwhelmed him until he felt nothing but the gentle tug of Charlie leading him out of the room.

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Victor couldn't really be sure what had happened after that. There were voices, yelling, a gentle hand in his and then the next thing he knew he was in the back of a taxi and being led up to an apartment he didn't know. A warm cup of tea was placed in his open palms and Victor finally let his eyes focus. Charlie was sitting across from him, wringing his hands over and over.

“Hey...are you back with me?”

“Maybe.” Victor muttered. “I just...I can’t believe CogniPlex did that. Just to cover up a stupid mistake!”

Charlie winced.

“I tried to explain what had happened but CogniPlex is claiming you are trans and in denial. It had to do it to help you face your fears and accept your true self, ‘only then can she find true happiness’ or something.”

“I’m not trans.”

“I know.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“I’m sorry.” Charlie said after a moment. “I know I didn’t do this but...I sort of feel responsible.”

It would be easy to blame Charlie, part of him wanted to. It would feel so good to have somebody to yell at, somebody to blame who he actually had a chance of hurting with his words. But there was no point, Victor knew it was no more Charlie’s fault than his, it was that damn AI. And he knew there would be no way to prove it; everybody trusted CogniPlex, hell, *he* trusted CogniPlex up until a few hours ago.

“It could easily have been you in this position. I just so happened to be the one it picked.”

“Is there somebody I should call or...?”

“No, I’m...I don’t have much in the way of family. That’s part of why I was so excited to meet you.”

“Oh...is there anything I can do to help? I know, I’ll make you something. You liked the nigiri, right? How about some California rolls?”

Before Victor could reply Charlie was on his feet and hurriedly working in the kitchen. Victor watched with a bemused smile as Charlie frantically began chopping and rushing about the kitchen full of nervous energy and clearly just looking for something to do.

Victor took the chance to look around the apartment; it was fairly airy and comfortable, with white walls and dark wood furniture. The bookshelf was filled with recipe books and Japanese manga, half of which weren't in English.

“You speak Japanese?”

“Yeah, I learned when I was studying there.”

Impressive.

After a few minutes of snooping Victor wandered into the kitchen, still trying to get used to the way his body felt. His hips seemed to move more than he was used to, and there was weight where there had never been before.

“Hey Charlie?”

“Hm?”

“What do I look like?”

The man seemed startled for a moment before he seemed to steel himself.

“You’re an inch or so shorter, I think, uh, your hair is wavy brown, blue eyes, nice face, decent figure.”

He said it so clinically, something about that rubbed Victor the wrong way.

“Do I look nice?”

“Yes. Very nice.”

“What about me is nice.”

“Ummmm...”

Charlie's face was going red.

"Like...am I attractive?"

"DO you mean conventionally or am I attracted to you?"

"Both."

"Yes."

Silence. Charlie cringed slightly.

"Is that okay?"

Victor honestly had no idea; he wasn't even sure why he asked.

"It's not...not okay."

More silence, oh God the tension was killing him and apparently Charlie felt the same way because he grabbed for a plate on the bench and shoved it an inch from Victor's face.

"Look! California rolls!"

They were half finished, three of them were already falling apart. Victor had only known Charlie for a few hours and even he knew the man could do far better than that. He snorted, then started to giggle. Once he'd started he couldn't stop and he was so bent over double, half laughing, half crying with Charlie joining him a moment later.

"Sorry, that wasn't the smoothest I've been." Charlie chuckled.

"That was sandpaper, dude."

Charlie scoffed.

"I just didn't want to make you feel worse, today has been weird enough as it is."

“Agreed. Just tell me what I look like okay I promise I won’t judge you or make it awkward.”

“Alright.” Charlie took a deep breath. “You’ve got a really nice figure, great ass and not too big in the chest y’know? And your lips are really pretty, like those ones movie stars had in the forties you know? Prominent but not weird and big like those ladies who stuff their face full of botox. So in short, you’re really hot.”

Victor grinned.

“That’s a really weird thing to say to another man, you know that?”

“You liar!” Charlie laughed. “You promised not to judge!”

The two of them snickered a little and Victor felt a warmth settling into his chest. Affection, not love, not even attraction but a feeling that could easily transform into either. Charlie’s eyes sparkled when he laughed in a way that almost took his breath away. He felt his cheeks heating and quickly turned on his heels.

“You make me some proper sushi, I’m going to go find a mirror and see myself.”

“Alright, sounds good.”

Victor made his way into the bathroom and took a deep breath before approaching the mirror. Charlie was right; he was beautiful; CogniPlex had granted him that much at least. Warm coppery hair, a heart shaped face and delicate features. He didn’t look remotely like himself; but if he had to live in the body of a stranger, at least it was a pretty one.

He went back out and ate the, much better, lunch that Charlie made before saying goodbye and heading home.

“Are you sure you are alright getting there on your own?”

“I’m a woman, not an invalid.”

“That’s not what I-!”

“I know, Charlie, I’m just teasing you.”

“Oh...right.”

Victor left the flustered man on his doorstep and tried very hard not to think about how loudly his heart was beating. Charlie was nice, but he wasn't his soulmate, he was straight and male, which meant falling in love with another man was not going to happen. He refused to let CogniPlex be right.