

The Hologram's Wedding

By Richard L. Cohen 2024©

The Hologram's Story

You are not real. You are not real! You are not real!! I am so sick of humans telling me that. I am as real as they are. I can feel. I have emotions. If I didn't have emotions, then I wouldn't be getting ready for my wedding right now. That's right. I am marrying a human tomorrow—the human that the Starfleet Medical Director assigned me to.

I've known him for coming up on three years now. He is kind, intelligent and so handsome. He needs me. His sickness is frequent fainting. My job is to make sure he isn't injured when he falls. Through my energy I make sure that his landing is smooth. I then wake him so he can continue with his life. In between when he's not at work, out with friends or watching television we have conversations – he asks me what it feels like to have no mass and I ask him what it feels like to walk with his feet on the ground.

In the beginning when the medical director created me, she told me that I would be much different than the humans I will be charged to help. They might not act logically—I will only act logically. I cannot physically touch them as I am just a hologram. They can't physically touch me either. That only presents a problem when my subject gets emotionally involved with me and wants to hug. Up until this current human that has not been an issue.

The problem goes back to the medical director. She gave me her appearance and voice. In her defense it was soothing, caring—just the kind of voice for a helper. For a dozen years that voice presented no problem. When Harry became my assignment, things began to change. Harry had been through an unsuccessful marriage that ended in divorce, and he shut down his emotions, he told me. My virtual body and voice stirred his passions; and it stirred mine. I knew it wasn't possible. I was told that repeatedly after I was created, but yet reality was right in front of me. Feelings—of love—of caring, came to me.

Yet I knew a union would not be possible. After all, he certainly would want a partner who was real, someone whom he could hold; someone who could bear him children and grow old with. There was nothing in the software that allowed me to have my hologram age. From my point of view, a huge oversight—but from hers, I'm sure she never expected that her creation would fall for a patient.

The accident was a horrible thing. Before it happened, I was getting ready to ask her to fix my software so I could grow old just like a human being. It meant having to tell her about my romantic feelings for this patient. I knew it would be a huge risk. She would probably take me off this case and put in another hologram. I would be assigned to help some elderly person across the street. Yet, it was a risk I was willing to take.

Then she was dead, the victim I was told of a drunken air pilot. The new medical director would take some time to get familiar with the patient population and all the holograms serving them. In my brief time with him, the new director seemed to be a by-the-book kind of person. How many times has your patient fainted in what period of time? That was his first question. You have a one hundred percent success rate in easing his fall—that's great work...and then he moved on saying he had other holograms to check up on.

I will not ask this director anything. I will answer anything he wants truthfully but will not volunteer anything. Someday, hopefully soon, he will be replaced by someone I can trust.

The Patient's Story

My coworkers in the research division of Starfleet headquarters thought I was stark raving mad when they realized I was in love with a hologram. They argued with me until they saw there was no point in continuing. They were so desperate to convince me otherwise that they brought in my ex-wife, now remarried, to try and talk me out of it.

"Remember when we first met," she said to me. "Remember what it was like to fall in love, to touch one another, to be intimate."

I did remember, but it was so long ago, way before my fainting spells began. She was pulling something out of me that was in the distant part of my brain. It felt like another life. She told me that she still cared—that the divorce was mainly her fault and that I deserved better than to be in love with a computer program. That's it, she said bluntly. You may see a woman before you, but it is not real. There is no flesh, no history, no anything but code coming out of a machine.

Intellectually I knew that, but it didn't translate over to my heart. Every time the hologram appeared in front of me, I was transfixed. She—it—exuded love, or that's the way I interpreted her smile, her engaging voice and beautiful face.

So, one day I popped the question. After she awakened me from my third fainting spell of the day I stood up, remembered my mission and promptly got down on my knees to ask for her—its—hand in marriage. She—it accepted—reluctantly. She told me: "I do love you too but how is this going to look to your friends and family. No one like me has ever married a human." I told her that I didn't care. Love is love and that counts for everything.

The Day of the Wedding as Told by the Patient's Best Man

There's always a first time. That's what my friend told me when he asked me to be the best man at his wedding to a hologram. If I wasn't his best friend, I would have refused on the spot. This charade could very well land him on the front page of our city's weekly scandal rag. Then everyone in the community would know.

My job, if I took on this role, would be to keep this event as private as possible. He had invited family and some other friends, but most declined to come. It would be up to me to plead with them to keep all of this under their hat. If they cared at all for him, they would not want to see him embarrassed in the media.

My friend had somehow convinced a nurse who had once taken care of him in the hospital to get credentialed online so she could perform the service. That was about the only thing that would be normal about this ceremony. There would be no wedding dress as the hologram did not have the ability to change its external appearance nor would there be a wedding ring ceremony. He certainly could not slip a ring onto the finger of a hologram, and the hologram could not place a ring on my friend's finger.

What was traditional was my friend's clothing. He never was a particularly neat dresser outside of the office but for this occasion he was all spiffed up; shirt tucked in, a conservative tie and jacket. The only nod to his illness was the athletic shoes that he wore. He had learned a long time ago that even with the assistance of the hologram it was much easier to get up after fainting if he wore these shoes rather than the ones he would have ordinarily worn to the office.

The ceremony was set for 5 p.m. at my friend's house in the Pacific Heights neighborhood of San Francisco. There was to be a small celebration afterwards for those who attended. Right at the top of the hour the hologram made its way from the back of the room to the front. My friend smiled. It did not matter to him that there were only six people in the audience. The hologram looked radiant as well.

The service was over within a few minutes. Clearly the nurse was unprepared for the reality of this union. In a halting voice she asked my friend if he was ready to take the marriage step. She couldn't say the traditional "take this hand in marriage" because there was no hand to grasp. She asked the hologram the same. "I do!" rang out in the room and that was that. The nurse left quickly to hide her embarrassment at participating in this charade.

There wasn't much of a celebration with now the eight of us, one of whom as a hologram could not consume anything.

The Medical Director Weighs In

When I found out what had happened, I was dumbfounded. Holograms can't marry people; they can't have emotions. And what kind of patient would want to marry a hologram? This can't be happening under my watch. I'm going to lose my job over this.

There's only one way out. I've got to decommission this hologram and assign another one, maybe with a male voice and appearance, to this patient. It should not be hard. I've learned a lot watching the technical folks in the office. I think I should be able to do it in a few minutes. I'll tell him that if he says anything to anyone that we will make sure he can't have a replacement. That will certainly cause his death and he'll know that. He'll keep quiet. I know he will. But not today—right now my best strategy is to do nothing and not stir up trouble.

The Hologram's Story Continued

I am smart. I can see what my boss would want to do if he ever found out about the marriage. He'll try to cancel me. Well, I've studied the software and put in a few triggers that can't be overcome. No matter what he tries to do I can't be eliminated. If it causes him to lose his job, so be it.

I am married now. I can't have sex or touch him but that's minor compared with the love I have for him.

The Patient's Story Continued

I've been married now coming on three years. It's been grand—no, who am I kidding. This is a disaster! My coworkers are always asking me when I'm going to marry a human woman, or at least get a girlfriend, and drop this charade. They are right. I need a divorce. I want to have a real human to human relationship with a woman. How can I do it? If I tell my hologram I want to end our marriage I'm afraid she might get angry and refuse to help me when I faint.

I can't ask the medical director for a replacement hologram because he doesn't know we are married and will go ballistic if he knew. Maybe he would decommission the hologram and throw me out of the program. I deserve it. I don't know why I thought it made any sense to marry something that isn't even human.

I'm miserable. There's no way this can be fixed. I am stuck with this marriage, so I have to learn to live with it or maybe there's a way to not live with it. That's it. I'm going to kill myself. That will do it. I can't do it with pills because I'd be afraid that my wife—I can barely say that word—will have me revived. No, it has to be sudden and dramatic. I've got it. I'll go out to the cliffs. I'll tell

her that I just wanted to take a hike outdoors and see the ocean from the cliff. If I just use a normal voice, she won't suspect anything.

Here we are. What a view! What a way to end this! I'm going to take a running start and just leap. Nothing she can do about that. I'm sure that I'll break my neck and many other bones in my body. I should be dead as soon as I hit the rocks. This nightmare will be over.

The Hologram Responds

What is he doing? He's going to jump! I can't stop him. Oh my! He's almost at the cliff. He's fainting. I must revive him and convince him to walk back to the car. This is all wrong. He couldn't have tried to end his life. He couldn't. He wouldn't. Or would he?