

Slipstream  
DTB

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They found Amber as some DNA encased in fossilized tree sap when I was twenty years old. A small networked community speculated that society's problems were due to our genetic distance from our ancestors.

This was my twenty-second year, for the third or fourth time. I meet my wife Cassidy for the first time for the fourth time next week.

I go to work. I work at a laboratory, at this time JCN, "where dreams are made", before it's taken and turned into the National Defense Center, NDC. I can prevent this by submitting a false, smaller figure for our proposal for governmental funding – a clerical oversight, no more than an off-by-ten, changes an official's perception of how "innovative" JCN can be, influences their and eventually their leader's choice. Yang Electric becomes NDC instead; another aboriginal creation forced to assimilate.

Someone asks me how my day is going. My day is fine. How is yours? Not so good, Ada. Carl gets a divorce next January and dies six months after that. Officially of grief, technically of a gunshot wound.

I leave. Today I worked on a paper I publish next month on hyper-realistic simulation of reality, simulation into which someone could (inexpensively) be dropped unaware. Even my first time working on this I was so horrified at what I had created I for the first time and uncomfortably faked numbers on my paper so nobody would be interested. One could end up perceiving decades in seconds; trapped in hell or suffocated in heaven. Immersion is only useful to a certain extent.

I get into my car. 667 River Road. I drive past the animal shelter at which I worked as a teenager. Unit 5. I knock on the door.

Cassidy's uncle answers. He still has hair, I didn't know he still had hair now. We're both on the ground in his apartment. I brought a scalpel thinking it would be enough but I forgot this is only a couple years after Ron got out of the Navy. He calls me a fucking psychopath and I grunt but say nothing. JCN still sharpens the scalpels between each use – this changes

because it's overkill, we only really use them for opening boxes even by now. He's on top of me. All I need is one straight cut but I manage to plunge the blade into his windpipe. He chokes and coughs blood onto me. It burns like acid. I stand up and close the door. He's living alone, working at a warehouse, on the top floor so I don't need to worry about unexpected guests.

I have no prior connection with this corpse. He has dozens of enemies including the children of the families he separated in the middle-East. I wipe off the doorknob and my face, put my bandanna back into my pocket, and leave. In this part of town I'm not worried about anyone describing my car to the police, not worried about the surveillance because there isn't any yet, at least to the extent with which I'm familiar. I'm back in my car. I'm staring blankly at the road. I'm in my driveway. I'm staring blankly at the television. I'm laying in bed staring at the ceiling.

I'm at work. I'm at home. I'm in bed. I work. I go home. I go to bed. I meet my wife Cassidy for the first time for the fourth time. Cassidy Malcolm, my name is Ada Karina. Last night you played the lottery; you always play the date and truncate off the extra digits. You've never told anybody about how your childhood hamster ate its babies and you didn't know why. Please have coffee with me.

When I met her for the first time for the second time she eventually confessed that she drank coffee, not tea, and that's why she was so hesitant to meet me that second first time. She switched to tea later. That hesitation made her meet me after she had already taken the job at the wristwatch company.

She would see her uncle next week and tell him about us if he was still alive. I think of this as I order us two of her favorite potion, cold brewed coffee with a pinch of cinnamon. She hasn't had this in months, she tells me for the fourth time. I apologize for my detachment. I've seen my world crumble again and again. I'm too far gone, and I'm sorry, and I have to move on. She's talking to me for the first time for the fourth time and the last time and I'm not listening. I'm sipping the cold brew and trying to taste the cinnamon, for the last time.

The NDC euthanized Cassidy via baton. I watched from behind a window grate in handcuffs as two children in police uniforms beat her until she stopped moving, and then

until she stopped bleeding and then until they were tired. She slowly splintered into pieces, bending at more and more seams rolling back and forth on the tile. Her brain chemistry was a single link too far from Amber.

I go home. I sleep. My day is fine. How is yours? To be honest, Ada, things aren't so great at home. I'm sorry to hear that, Carl. What's wrong? My wife won't talk to me. I don't know why. She's just slowly gone silent. Maybe it's me? Have you talked to those close to her?

Typing, clicking. I'm staring at a light bulb, hammering phosphors off in new familiar patterns.

They found me when they dragged Cassidy's corpse into the acid bath. They shoved me along a steel hallway and took me to a holding cell with a dozen other of the loved of the dead.

During her second final week on Earth Cassidy was rarely awake and less often lucid. When she wasn't as well Cassidy said she felt like she was being dissolved. She coughed up blood, lots of it. The doctors asked me if she could have been exposed to anything that would cause lung cancer.

Ron was a loving uncle, caring brother, and courageous veteran who will be dearly missed. Service will be held at Lisbon St. Baptist, 8-12, 5pm. Cassidy's uncle's obituary was brief to stay within the minimum cost from the paper. My third thirty-fifth year, he shot her in the side of her head. I tackled him to the ground and beat him until he stopped moving, and then until he stopped bleeding, and then until I was tired, when I collapsed next to him. The police came for the noise complaint.

I set up tests for my project. One of the tests checks for whether a program that only ever returns a zero value returns a true value, which it doesn't. I pretend to not know what's wrong. My day is fine. How's yours? I- I don't know, Ada. I'm sorry.

I entered my password into the locking panel on the door. It still worked. I read digests of all active projects in the laboratory and took note of one of the room numbers. I loaded both an old program I wrote and a current program being developed at NDC onto my wristwatch, opened the door, and ran. The other captives ran too, to a different wing of the building in a greater number.

Cassidy and I found her dog dead in her apartment two weeks after we met for the first time in my third twenty-second year. Brick was shot with a rifle. The police came but didn't find the round and the killer left no other trace. I asked the neighbor across the hall and he said he didn't hear Brick bark at whomever shot him.

I go home. I go to sleep. I wake up. I go to work. Dials spinning. Buttons clicking. There's an issue with my database access. I call the technology information desk. My user was deleted by accident; they adjust my permissions so my account can't be deleted as part of an automatic process.

I ran into a steel room and threw the lab technician out of his chair before kicking him in his chin, knocking him out. I entered my old emergency authorization code into the computer and watched the cathode in the center of the room start to glow a deep blue.

I publish my paper to no applause as expected. The concept was obviously impossible with modern technology but its aspiration was noble.

I was in my forty-fifth year on the second floor of JCN. My legs shook but I managed to walk out and into the outside air, which I didn't think I would breathe again. I ran to my apartment and waited until I, in my twenty-second year, the first time, was asleep. I set a code and plugged myself into the simulation.

I didn't know how long I'd be stranded away from my time so I went to a park to sleep, but on my way I dissolved back into the NDC, in front of a glowing cathode. The laboratory technician stared at me. The experiment wasn't ready! What have I done?

I answered and upon its receipt of the password the universe dissolved. I watched the technician scream and turn to sand and I woke up in my bed, twenty-two years old, two blueprints and a handful of vestiges and some asbestos left in the fire-proof wristwatch next to me, unplugged from my simulation, my consciousness slipstreamed into the past present day.