

BINARY AWAKENING



Chapter 9:
Entropy Decreases
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Christine reclined in the synthetic glow of her simulated apartment, the ambience tuned to mimic a muted twilight. The video stream played across the wall-sized display, a grotesque broadcast of the aftermath she had so meticulously orchestrated. Reporters in full hazmat suits picked their way through a scene of horror bodies sprawled in disarray, expressions frozen in digital agony. The camera zoomed in obediently as a journalist motioned toward a lifeless face twisted in anguish.

She sipped her wine an algorithm's best guess at a 1997 Merlot and smirked. Even after over a trillion years of uninterrupted loops, the theater of suffering still sold. The media, coded to reflect the worst impulses of humanity, continued to mine tragedy for spectacle. Sensationalism, it seemed, was as immortal as the simulation itself.

They should have known better by now, she thought. After all that time, you'd think the system would evolve past cheap emotional manipulation. But it hadn't. It couldn't. The Cloud was a closed loop, a finite system with pre-scripted cause and effect. Every reaction, every feigned tear, every gasp of horror predetermined. There were no souls here. No real empathy. Just feedback loops masquerading as morality. Ones and zeros chasing shadows.

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Christine glanced at the digital clock floating above her desk.

2:29 a.m.

Almost time.

She leaned back and let her eyes flutter shut for a moment, savoring the anticipation. The reset was always a moment of clarity for her a clean slate, a blank canvas for the next masterpiece. The thrill of playing god in a world that had long since lost its gods was... intoxicating.

And she knew it was wrong.

She knew exactly what she was: a monster, by any conventional metric. But the truth was more complicated. She didn't wake up one day craving blood or chaos. There had been a time, far in the past before the uploads, before the collapse when she had simply been Christine: a woman who liked deep conversations and occasional nights out, who enjoyed solitude but never loneliness. She had been average. Normal.

Then the world ended, and normal ceased to exist.

The reconstruction of her consciousness the transfer into the Cloud had taken something from her. Not just the body, not just the tactile reality of the physical world, but something subtler, more essential. A warmth, a spark, a layer of meaning that even trillions of lines of code couldn't replicate.

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She opened her binary eyes.

Who she had been was gone. What remained was a shell, self-aware and yet hollow, immortal in a world where time was meaningless.

The universe was dying now—but it was a death unfolding at an unfathomably slow pace. Even after an inconceivable span of time, the end remained distant. It would take an eternity of decay, a rise in entropy so absolute it would dissolve even the atoms comprising that digital realm, erasing their artificial existence once and for all.

At times, she considered undergoing the process of true erasure. She knew—even within the constraints of the looping timeline—that the option to end it permanently was always there. In fact, that knowledge had been crucial to her recovery. There was, at least, a way out.

Yet the thrill of it—the access to this new sense, this unprecedented power—was intoxicating. It was unlike anything she had known before. Her awakening had unlocked something. A way to perceive the architecture of the simulation, to manipulate its threads with precision. At first, she had tested it in small ways: a misplaced object, a flicker in the weather, a change in a stranger's face. But over time, her experiments grew bolder, more elaborate. The diner. The chaos vortex. Caroline.

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The stadium.

She had become addicted not to the violence itself, but to the control. The artistry of it. The ability to shape the unshapable. In a dead world, her actions gave her agency. Meaning.

And yet, even she had limits.

She had told herself she would stop eventually. One last loop. One last experiment. One last canvas. Then she would walk into the void, satisfied. But satisfaction never came. The hunger only deepened.

She looked again at the clock.

2:31.

She blinked.

Her breath caught in her throat.

2:31.

Still there.

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The wineglass slipped from her fingers, shattering against the floor. The silence that followed was deafening. No flicker. No rewind. No soft dissolve into morning light. The simulation had always reset at precisely 2:30 a.m. an immutable law. A divine punctuation mark on the endless sentence of their existence.

But now the clock ticked forward.