

# A Simple Dream

by

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It's a simple dream. Pretty straightforward. Not too many twists or turns: the first of which would be that I like to switch it around and play it from her point of view, her lot, her cards, her hand, the better to remember her by.

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It's the last day of school, prom night, or something like that and we're doing it all retro in some ancient Chevy convertible. You know, down by the river or at make-out point, parking and kissing, but not really, mostly just talking, holding hands and watching... whatever there is to watch. You know, the submarine races, the UFO flying by... or if there's a launch, the rockets; and even if there's not, we can just go with the good ole' standby and watch the fireworks in the sky.

I've never kissed her... or I suppose him, before. Now that's a weird one. I mean, there I am, her, flipping through my skins, cycling through, just letting him pick, but I know the one I want him to wear, it's sort of jocky; but then, sort of not. Good ole' American boy in his letterman jacket, complete with dimples. I could go further, you pump up the realism, talk about the smells, the tastes, the tactile sensations, but that's not really where I am. I mean, what I like to linger on is what's going through her mind:

the love, the devotion -- she really loves this guy. I can feel it.  
What more can you say? I can feel it!

But he seems distant... worried. And she's like, "What are you thinking about?"

And he's like, "What I'm going to be wearing tomorrow..."  
And then it all jumps and skips forward.

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I'm still her. It might sound odd, but that's part of the trick, part of the twist. I'm still her. And I'm showing up at college, my first day, unloading stuff, bringing in the stereo, the headsets -- you know, all old school. I guess, I dig the good ole old school ways.

It's always hard to figure out what's she's wearing. You know, what I'm wearing. It could be anything. Declare your colors up front, but that's not her style. Probably something low key, that can be taken any which way. Used fatigues straight from the surplus, that's what I usually settle on, with a nice tank top. Nothing too flashy. Nothing too plain. And, of course, a killer skin. I mean, if you're going to play, go all the way, so it would be totally trick. Make her glimmer.

All the guys would stare. Don't really know how much I'd like the attention. Don't really know how much she'd like the attention, but... if you're going to dream, dream big. It doesn't take long for a total jocko to start hitting on her. "Hey babe, I'm all great. Want to hook up later?"

And what would she do, but smile, keep on unloading her stuff. What was she going to do? Go out on a date with the guy while she still has stuff to unload in the car? And then there'd be the sensitive guy, like there always is. Pardon me, but I really just want to punch the guy. Annoys me. And yes, I am human. I know anger.

And you may have noticed all of this time, I've been sort of pulling back to 3<sup>rd</sup> person. She's there. The guys dancing around, and then I walk up -- you know, my skin, my alter ego. I love it.

I'm just too cool for words. Jocko's stuttering stepping all over his own pickup lines. Nerdo, sensitive New Age man has somehow been corralled into unloading her crap; and as he walks by, I pick a disc off the stack.

“Tommy Two Tone, classic.”

Of course, she doesn't know what to say. Like I said, I'm too cool. I have that effect.

“You ever play it as Brandt. I got this mod, let's you do it from Brandt's POV. Totally kick.”

But she's hard to get (doesn't get it, not yet) or counters with obvious distaste, “Why would anyone want to do that?”

“So you can hack it and load up your own AI,” which like in a word explains it all -- indicates that we are two of a kind, peas in a pod, and made for each other.

OK. Sure. It's not there, not yet, but in the feed, in the subtext, in the flow of the moment, the flow of my mind...

I mean, cut me some slack, it's my dream, so she goes for it... and when she takes the bait, I let my feed waver: drop it, no defense, let her on in.

Or if that is unclear, you know that cool guy?

He flickers.

Just for a second, just the slightest. I like to use a static field, just a B-zzt, but that's all it takes. And she sees me -- I mean like really me - -as I lounge down the way, leaning against the door to the boy's living area.

No need to draw it out. A drop, a second -- pass her the feed -- and she sees me. And what am I? Nothing. Don't get excited. I am nothing, a nobody. Probably wearing the same surplus dungarees as her, but we all wear those. I did trick it out some. It's not always clear how, a medal, a patch, a safety pin here, just something little, something small, something to fly my colors... but not call attention.

The scene ends.

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Pick it up the next day, the next week, we're walking to class. I think we've established I like it archaic, but hey, trick it out, make it virtual -- whatever the case, in my little dream, we're out on the street.

And once again, I could focus on the sensations, the spring in my step, the slush on the streets, the smell of her hair, but those are just details -- unimportant.

She notices me, and for a second, mimics my previous flicker, the static, the lull in the feed, and I see her true form, see her true face: no defenses, let him in, it's all down.

I could focus on it, I really could, but now is not the time, or the place -- walking to class, in the midst of it all.

So I'm Joe Cool, and she's Princess All-That, we embrace the façade. I'm playing her, and she's playing me, and we're going off, planting the feint.

"Oh, I got that program we were talking about," and I toss her the feed.

And you really have to just take a moment and view this from the air to understand it all. She's walking down one side of the street talking to this joker who's dancing around her and flipping her the disc; and at the same time, walking down the other side of the street is this gorgeous babe -- I'm talking utter dream -- and she's throwing herself at me. So like there's me and her, and me and her, and if you can manage it, I'm pretty sure somewhere else there's a me and her, too, all safe and secure. But for now, we'll just let that sit.

Back in the moment, she's got the Brandt hack disc, and I toss her the freebie, the one they were giving away in the Student Union / Study Hall. Not really important; but when I'm playing these things, I don't always scream for the end, so there it is, all you need, as good excuse as any for an extender. Whatever. Play it forever, as long as you like. I mean, the disc is one of those promo deals. You know, plug and play, with a million ways to

save. All the campus -- virtual and ready -- loaded with all the commercial extras... but easy enough to taper away.

See like, 'cause the next stop is the lecture hall. We're a little bit late, and we grab our seats, but its OK. The guy in charge is a robot and he's just a card.

You might want me to fill that in more... but I don't know. I mean I don't. It's just a call. Metal and bones, the guy rocks the hall. Throw in your favorite rant. Patch in whatever EDU you want. It's just not important. Same with the rest of the campus. Same with all those twisty turny side trails we won't take.

You know, 'cause just it doesn't matter.

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What matters is... Reality Matrixing. We're both going for the gold -- the escape. So we study together, program together -- live, breathe, and sleep together.

Do you like the twist? We drop the pretense. After a day, a week, a month, we do the override, and it's her and me together in the same booth night after night.

It can get pretty intense.

Call up the fear.

Call up the passion.

And then, of course, eventually we sleep late -- the night of the test. You know, you can't play it safe. You got to pass. Got to get to the hall. So we just do it. Drop out together and run to the hall.

Robot Man, Prof. Card, sees us entering together, doesn't miss a beat, a servo doesn't even rustle. "No communicating during testing," but that's all just a sham -- I mean, a test. It's plug and play in an electro filled world. How could I sleep late? How could we share a booth?

And I pull out for a second -- right >HERE< mid-dream -- and look at the walls of my coffin, my egg, my controlling environment. I know I'm losing precious time on that test, but

then, this IS the test -- the overlay, the underlay -- the myriad contortions that make it all real.

Those glances not made, those contacts not fostered, make them here, make them now, make them real, in the only way how!

I mean, programming! Reality Matrixing! If you can't mix it up, spread it on thick, so the crane operator continues to move his load as he climbs Mt. Everest or the patron in the restaurant gobbles his food while he's somewhere else... as he squeezes the trigger... or dials in his infantryman's sniper's scope...

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And you fall out.

I fall out.

One of us failed.

The dream's got to go that way. No happy ending. Both of us can't be in control to see the other side.

So, one of us hits the skids.

It could be her, sent to the trenches...

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Yeah, you know, I like choice A:

We had found a way. Don't ask me how. We just had. That night. It was real. In the booth, in the hall, behind the side of the dorm, out in the rain. No subtext. No feed. Just her.

And what's there to say. Pale skin. Blank expression. Acne. Bad breathe... and it's like she had never kissed anyone before... out there... in The Real.

Hey! Foul! That ain't no fun; but then; we're Fleshies, that's where our kicks lie. The more real she feels, the more real she is... and calls just fail. More what? More not beautiful? More not glamorous? No.

More... how it is. More how it really smells, how it really tastes, how it really feels. It's painful. It's distasteful. And at times, it hurts.

But it's real.

Nothing Matrix about it.

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She got sent to the Corps. So, I dropped out, went with her. And we both wound up at some remote outpost where we dropped the feed, forgot about the control, ignored the override, and it's just her and me -- like, forever.

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But that's not how it went. I mean, that's like curtain one, but behind curtain number two -- you know, the one that we hit -- well, I get the shaft.

I couldn't ask her. I couldn't let her.

Not to join me. Not to share my fate.

How could I?

We couldn't even meet -- you know, not even MEET -- one final time, so she patched me a kiss, sent me a feed, cast me a line...

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And from there, you have to realize something about that medal I wore on the first day of class, the location of the rip, the sequence of tears (what a pun) on my pants, and a secret code spelled out in safety pins and thread -- indicating my pacifistic intentions.

You know, having made an oath, sworn a promise before thy and my God -- never to shed blood. Realizing that it was better to

lose my mind than kill someone in the thick of the moment, and end up losing my soul.

And you know, just knowing, I was never going to come back, never return home, not from that...

Well, in that one final kiss, in that one final feed, she managed to enclose a copy of our final. And I patched it through straight to my skull.

A dream to live by.

A dream to die by.

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