

# Digital Metamorphoses

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## **Introduction**

In the gleaming towers of the digital age, where code flows like blood and deadlines pulse with the urgency of a heartbeat, humanity finds itself at the mercy of its own creations. "Digital Metamorphoses" is a tale woven from the threads of ambition, efficiency, and the relentless march of progress. This novella reimagines the transformation not as a solitary curse, but as a corporate contagion, where the boundaries between man and mechanism blur into oblivion.

Set against the backdrop of India's booming IT sector, where 75-hour work/week is a badge of honor and innovation is the new deity, we follow the inexorable descent of ordinary lives into an extraordinary horror. Here, the cubicle is the cocoon, the memo the mandate, and the metamorphosis the ultimate optimization. This is not merely a story of change; it is a warning whispered in the hum of servers and the click of keyboards: in our quest to build empires of silicon, we risk becoming the very bugs in the system we seek to eradicate.

In the age of endless sprints and agile dreams, how far removed are we from the Hive? Please proceed with caution, for the line between satire and prophecy is thinner than a gelatinous spine.

## **Chapter 1**

One Monday morning, as Arvind Kumar was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that his backbone had been replaced by a pliable, gelatinous rod. The dreams had been a suffocating cascade of Jira tickets, each one a different shade of urgent digital red, falling like guillotine blades in an endless, monochrome corridor. He

had been running from them, the sharp, percussive sound of their status updates—*In Progress, Blocked, Resolved*—clattering in his ears like a hailstorm on a tin roof. He woke not with a gasp, but with a slow, sinking awareness, the digital dread of his dream-state seeping into the waking world.

He lay on his ergonomic chair, a monstrosity of grey mesh and black plastic that had become his bed more often than not. He'd fallen asleep in it again, the keyboard a hard pillow under his cheek, the faint, metallic scent of his own exhausted sweat mingling with the sterile, ozonic perfume of the office. The first light of dawn was just beginning to bleed through the floor-to-ceiling windows, a weak, apologetic grey that did little to challenge the unflinching, blue-white glare of the server status light blinking rhythmically from across the room. It was the only star in his desolate sky. He tried to sit up, a simple, instinctual movement, but his body refused to obey in the usual way. A strange, fluidic yielding occurred where solid structure should have been. It was then, as his torso bent into an impossibly smooth arc, that he saw his own reflection in the dark, silent monitor of his primary display.

His posture, once merely the poor, defeated slump of a ten-year veteran of the code mines, was now a perfect, servile arch. His head bowed low, his shoulders rounded, his form a seamless curve of submission. The reflection was a stranger's, a grotesque caricature of a man who had finally, physically, bent to the will of an unseen master. A wave of nausea, smelling of stale coffee and fear, rose in his throat. 'What's happened to me?' he thought, the words a silent, desperate scream in the echo chamber of his skull. It was no dream. The cold, gelatinous sensation where his spine used to be was a horrifyingly real and present truth.

The open-plan office, a space designed with the cold, geometric logic of a circuit board, lay quietly between the four glass-paneled walls. It was, in theory, a proper space for human beings, but the sheer scale and uniformity of it—the endless rows of identical grey cubicles under the flat, pitiless glare of long fluorescent tubes—made it feel soul-crushing. The air itself was lifeless, recycled and chilled to a constant, goosebumps-raising temperature, carrying the faint, ubiquitous scent of industrial cleaning fluid and warm plastic. Above his desk, on which an unpacked collection of project requirement documents was spread like a paper corpse, hung the memo. He had printed it out a few weeks ago, a small act of self-flagellation, and pinned it to his cubicle wall with a red thumbtack that looked like a drop of blood against the beige fabric.

It was a statement from the Chairman, Narayan Sharma, a man revered as a minor deity within the company's pantheon, his face a mask of serene wisdom on the cover of every internal magazine. The memo, printed in a crisp, authoritative font, spoke of a "75-hour work week" as a patriotic and professional duty. The ink was a deep, uncompromising black, the paper a stark, clinical white. Arvind remembered the day it was issued. There was a brief, feverish uprising. The air, usually humming with the quiet diligence of keyboards, had crackled with a different energy. Engineers, proud people who spoke in the precise, logical languages of Python and Java, argued with managers in hushed, urgent tones. The sounds of their dissent were sharp but quickly muffled, lost in the vast, sound-absorbing space of the office floor. They spoke of "work-life balance" and "diminishing returns," their voices colored with disbelief and outrage. The Chairman was unmoved.

Those who refused were not fired in a conventional sense; there were no shouting matches, no security escorts to the door. Their access cards, the plastic talismans that granted them entry into this world, simply stopped working. The small green light on the card reader would flash an indifferent, final red. They were declared "incompatible with the new paradigm," a phrase that carried the chilling, sterile finality of a medical diagnosis. They vanished from the internal messaging systems, their profile pictures replaced by a generic grey silhouette, their digital ghosts haunting the servers for a week before being purged in a silent, scheduled process. The rest, the ones with mortgages that smelled of fresh paint and new debt, with student loans that echoed with the ghosts of past hopes, and with aging parents whose fragility was a constant, low-level hum of anxiety—the ones like Arvind—stayed. They bowed their heads, not in prayer, but in submission, and replied to the memo with a collective, "Yes, sir," the sound of their keyboards a soft, defeated patter, like rain on a windowpane.

'O God,' Arvind thought, the words echoing a thousand consultants before him, 'what a demanding job I've chosen! Day in, day out, the sprints.' He could almost hear the frantic drumbeat of the development cycles in his pulse. 'The stresses of the client calls are much greater than the work going on at head office, and, in addition to that, I have to deal with the problems of shifting deadlines, irregular bad food from the subsidised cafeteria, and temporary, constantly changing project teams which never build real camaraderie.' The memory of the cafeteria food—a lukewarm, vaguely spiced paste of indeterminate origin, served in a pale yellow light that made everyone look ill—brought another wave of nausea. 'To hell with it all!' He felt a slight itching on his knuckles, a persistent, irritating sensation. He slowly pushed himself closer to