

## DMV

by Richard Kadrey

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*900 Words.*

Allegra waits in the line at the DMV, the Department of Meta-Virtuals. Technically, Allegra isn't in line. Technically, Allegra doesn't exist. She's virtual, and not the good kind. The kind where you volunteer to be obliterated, morphed into data, a postmodern wraith. Allegra is virtual because she's a convicted felon, though she can't remember her crime or conviction. That happens to virtuals, she knows. Being semi-non-corporeal can mess with your mind. People forget they're people. They think they're cats or houseplants or the schematics for a fusion fuel cell. Allegra hasn't gone that far yet. She knows who she is. She just can't prove it. Sometime during her court-ordered virtuality, she's dropped off the radar, her name and ID number lost behind some digital filing cabinet. Now that the end of her sentence is in sight, Allegra wants to get back on the books. Stick her big toe back into the river that's real world and wiggle it around a little.

The line shifts and Allegra steps forward. She doesn't recall how long she's been waiting in line. Time moves for her in hallucinogenic bursts. A minute stretches on for eternity, and eight hours can be gone in the time it takes to smoke a single cigarette. It's her own fault. She never liked wearing a watch, and now that it's not an option, Allegra longs for one. The old kind like her grandmother had. Made of metal, with hands that looked like cat whiskers gliding quietly over a neat circle of numbers. Allegra imagines the impossibly thin second hand gliding over the watch face, describing eternity, an endless circle of life that she longs to return to. Each revolution of the second hand is another second closer to her being real again. Allegra drifts with the mechanical movement of the hand, feeling light, feeling high, until another virtual behind her ahems loudly and she takes another step forward.

The DMV is an old building, clad in watery pale green carpet, with a white acoustic tile ceiling and fluorescent lighting fixtures from the last ice age. The DMV is one of those institutional behemoths that gives the impression that it's been there forever. So old, it could have been built by the Aztecs or the space aliens who, her grandmother told her, bought the organic compounds to Earth that would someday grow and mutate into humans. Even back then, they knew we'd fuck up. That we'd need a DMV, Allegra thinks. They built it that so we wouldn't have to construct something so depressing.

Why does Allegra even need to be here? She's information, not a person. People stand in line, not data. Data streams don't queue up at 5 a.m. just to get in the door, but Allegra did. She's exhausted all the normal information channels to get her identity reinstated. Her prison sys-ops weren't a help. Her AI public defender was useless. Her social worker liaison was less than useless. The DMV is Allegra's last and only choice, so she stands in a hall of ghosts waiting to be served by the living. Secretly, she longs to be a real ghost so that she can appear from nowhere and swoop down over the bored clerks in their rat maze cubicles. She'd rain blood on them, and wail like a banshee, all red eyes and broken teeth.

“Next.”

Ahem. Allegra opens her eyes.

“Next.”

She looks up and hurries forward. The clerk behind the glass doesn't look at her. Allegra stands there for a moment before she sees a blinking light in the counter. Holo-text over the light tells her to place her hands over the appropriate scanners. She does so and the light changes. The clerk looks up as Allegra changes. Bathed in heavy UV light, she gains enough presence to feel somewhat solid. Almost entirely visible. Nearly human. Allegra nods at the clerk and the young man behind the Lexan partition smiles back at her.

“I'm lost,” Allegra says. “Me. My identity. I'm off the books.”

“I see. Full name and PIN, please.”

Allegra hates these exchanges. She knows that the moment she put her hands on the scanners the clerk instantly had all of her information on the screen in front of him. He's some kind of little by-the-book quisling, she thinks. Fine. She gives him a friendly smile.

“Allegra Elizabeth Kosinski. A639Y7734-VV.”

“Double V? You're a mandatory.”

“That's what they say.”

“I see the problem. It's our fault. I apologize.”

Allegra's smile widens. “It's okay. Can you fix it?”

“Easy. This happens sometimes with mandatorics, especially when termination might be involved. A system glitch keeps the software running after the body's gone. We've complained to IT a million times.”

“Termination?”

“Yep. According to the records, your last appeal was heard and rejected and your, that is your body, was executed on August twenty-second at 7:12 a.m., Pacific time. That's why your identity is invalid in the database.”

“I'm dead,” says Allegra.

“The system should have deleted you three months back, but no harm done. You just got a little bonus time. Sort of like winning the lottery, right?”

“But. . .”

“I'm sorry for any inconvenience this might have caused.”

“What do I. . .?” The clerk hits a button and Allegra blips out of existence.

“Next,” he calls and the other ghosts move up a step.

About the Author

[Richard Kadrey](#) is a writer and digital artist living in San Francisco. He has written extensively on technology and culture, and is the author of six novels, including *Metrophage* and [Butcher Bird](#). He is also a fetish photographer. His work can be seen at [KaosBeautyKlinik](#).

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