

The Popcorn Report:

2035: A DAY IN THE LIFE THE HUMAN-MAXXING EDITION

Sable is 43. She lives alone, with Fig, in Columbus, Ohio. She has a lens implant in her left eye, a brain chip inserted behind her right ear, and a resting heart rate of 48. She has not been sick in ten years. She does not own an alarm clock, because she doesn't need one. This is her Tuesday.



6:09AM

Sable doesn't wake up so much as arrive. The chip monitors her sleep architecture and surfaces her at the peak of a REM cycle, which means she opens her eyes feeling unreasonably good.

The lens activates on its own, overlaying the morning briefing across her field of vision before she's fully vertical. Weather. Schedule. Overnight biometrics, including a mental health rating. A note that her collagen synthesis levels are optimal, as is her bone density, and the direct quote from the health dashboard reads, "Exceptional."

Botsie, her personal bot, has her coffee ready. Temperature is perfectly calibrated to her preferences, just like everything in her life. She finds this smooth synergy deeply comforting or occasionally, slightly eerie, depending on her morning input. Today, it is comforting. She takes a long drink from the mug.

Fig is already sitting by his bowl with the focused moral authority of a dog who has been waiting for what he considers an unreasonable amount of time.

“Hungry,” he says.

“I know,” she says.

“Hungry, hungry,” he says again and again, with the surety of someone who has learned that repetition is its own form of strategy. Botsie is scheduled to feed him exactly at 7AM, then every six hours throughout the day. He too is monitored for any deficiencies, his meals calibrated accordingly, with an occasional treat when he uses more of his words, preferably in sentences.



Fig has had the NL chip since he was three. Neural-linguistic, subcutaneous, fitted by his vet in an afternoon. It maps his cognitive and emotional states to a working vocabulary of about 1,000 words, the same as a human child of that age. He deploys them with great joy and zero self-doubt. She loves this about him. She wishes she was as confident.

7:15AM

The bathroom is the most medically sophisticated room she has ever occupied. Her mother was a surgeon, so she grew up around clinical environments. This is better.

Warmer. While she brushes her teeth, the brush does its medicinal sweep and the results appear on the mirror. Bacterial levels nominal. Hormone panel balanced. Cortisol slightly elevated, which the chip flags with a small notification: Stress response detected. Would you like to bring it down?

She declines. She has a meeting at 10, and she feels it might give her an edge.

Standing in front of her closet, the lens overlays three outfit options based on her calendar, the weather, and what she needs to project and accomplish. She picks the second, then opens the home printer and inputs an idea for the necklace she dreamed about last Thursday. She sends it to the lens notepad for sketching. Four minutes and fifty seconds later, it's complete. She puts it on.



Taking a final look at herself in the mirror, the lens, unprompted, runs brief outfit optimization suggestions.

She dismisses them with a blink.

Before she leaves, she adds a small energy booster to her coffee. Again, looking for that edge.

“You look beautiful, Mama,” says Fig. Her confidence rises.

10:00AM

She used to work in journalism. She says it in a past-tense way, when it comes up... the way you'd mention a city you used to live in. Fond. Fading. Fogged-out.

Now she consults. Brands, mostly. She tells them how people like her, the augmented, the optimized, the early adopters, think and feel and buy. It pays well in either U.S. Dollars, Bitcoins, gold coins or water barter.



The 10AM meeting is with a CPG company that wants to market a new food category to the augmented demographic. They have made the classic error of assuming that brain-chipped humans no longer have feelings about food. She spends forty minutes explaining that optimization and pleasure are not mutually exclusive, and bills them double because she has to deliver the written report at midnight in brain-chip form to a sleepless agent.

Fig snoozes at her feet throughout. He says “Good,” once, at a moment that has nothing to do with the meeting but everything to do with something he’s dreaming. She could view it on her iPhone, but leaves it to his personal moments.

12:30PM - COFFEE WITH PETRA

The café has private booths. That’s just how cafés work now. You order by telepathy, a robot shows you to your space, and whoever you’re meeting joins you from wherever they actually are.

Petra joins from Portland. She is also augmented, more so than Sable in some ways, less in others. They compare notes, the way people used to compare fitness trackers, with a mixture of genuine curiosity and barely concealed competition.

Petra has had her hippocampus integration upgraded. She can now tag and retrieve memories with search-level precision. She demonstrates this by accurately recalling the exact wine they drank at a dinner party in 2029, including the vintage, the vineyard, and the fact that Sable spilled some on her left sleeve and pretended she hadn't.

Sable concedes this is impressive and makes a mental note, in the traditional way, to get the upgrade.

They talk about the TV series they've both been watching. Eight episodes, critically acclaimed, the kind of show people used to argue about at dinner tables. Sable brings up the season finale. The last scene.



Petra knows it exactly, filed and tagged, retrievable at full resolution.

“I loved it,” Petra says.

“Me too,” Sable says.

They sit with that for a moment, two women who loved the same ending, which turns out to feel exactly the same as it probably felt for friends in the past. Their booth time ends. Petra blows her a kiss. The projection fades. Sable sits for a moment in the quiet before she gets up.

2:30PM - THE GLITCH

It happens while she is in the middle of confirming a client deliverable.

The lens freezes. Not dramatically. Not with a crash or a flicker. It just stops. The overlay in her left eye fails. The interface is unresponsive. A small spinning indicator appears that she has not seen in two years and had genuinely hoped never to see again.

She blinks twice in the specific pattern that triggers a soft reset. Nothing. She sits very still in her apartment in the year 2035 with one eye that sees everything as is and one eye that sees a frozen dashboard and the spinning circle of digital purgatory. She waits.



Fig wanders over and looks at her with both of his unaugmented eyes.

“Okay?” he says.

“No,” she says.

He sits down next to her and lays his big, magnificent mastiff head on her lap. This is the full extent of what he can offer. They both know it. And it is, she thinks, enough.

Eleven minutes later, the lens reboots. The overlay floods back. Her schedule, her biometrics, her three unread messages, and the optimization suggestion she dismissed this morning, all of it exactly where she left it.

She sits there for another minute, thinking maybe she should get the interruptive insurance, covering her for any financial loss this kind of break might create.

4:15PM - WALKING FIG

Normally Botsie handles this. It knows his route preferences, his pace, the three specific spots he requires an unreasonable amount of time to investigate. Botsie is perfectly capable, including language practice and well-timed treats.

Today Sable decides to take Fig on his walk herself. She can't fully explain it. Sometimes it's fun for a few minutes to be a non-upgraded human.

She clips his leash the old way, by hand, and they go out along what used to be the Scioto river trail. Before she starts walking, she activates the AR function on the lens.

The world shifts. The banks go green. Water comes rushing back, moving, blue-green, and wide, catching whatever light gets through. The trees fill in. A kid on a bike cuts across somewhere ahead and laughs at something she can't hear. The trail is lush and the river runs the way it ran twenty years ago before the data centers came and drank it.

She walks for thirty minutes. Fig investigates those three spots with the same thoroughness he brings to everything. He does not have AR. He sees the trail as it actually is. He seems fine with it.

She turns the overlay off on the walk home. The dry corridor returns. The haze sits above the city the way it always does.

She unclips his leash when they get back. He says, "Good walk, Mama. Good, good, good."

She thinks he's right. It was good. She tells Botsie to schedule another tomorrow.



6:30PM - DINNER

She doesn't cook. Botsie has been reading her biometrics all day, cross-referencing her activity levels, her hormone panel, her sleep data from last night, its projections for tonight. By 6:30, it has prepared exactly what her body needs, which today is a grain bowl with roasted vegetables and a specific amount of protein she would not have been able to calculate herself. It is, she will admit, delicious.



She eats at the counter. Fig sits nearby and watches with the expression of a creature who finds grain bowls personally offensive.

“Want,” he says.

“No,” she says.

“Want, want,” he says again, knowing that sometimes the second ask lands differently. She shares a little, which he leaves in his bowl. He didn't like what he wanted after all.

8:00PM - GAME NIGHT

The lights dim when she opens the session.

Estelle appears in the chair across from her, settled in that particular way she always has. Her grandmother. Gone since 2028, present every Tuesday. The system was fed enough, years of video, voicemails, letters, recorded hours of her talking and laughing and arguing about words, to make her seem fully human and present. Calling her a recording was never quite right. Something closer to a continuation because she is still learning.

They set up the Scrabble board.

Sable tells her about the chip-glitch she experienced. Estelle says that technology has always been unreliable and mentions a dishwasher she owned in 1987 as supporting evidence. Sable does not point out that a brain-lens and a dishwasher are not in the same category. She just laughs.



Sable holds up her necklace. Estelle says it's beautiful, but she'd have made the curve slightly more dramatic. Sable tells her she designed it herself. Estelle says she should have asked her first.

Fig wanders over halfway through the game and looks at Estelle for a long, contemplative moment.

"Hi," he says. "Hello."

Estelle tells him he's very handsome. Fig says, "Know," and returns to his corner, satisfied.

Sable's chip could surface optimal word configurations in real time. She has never once used it for Scrabble. It would feel like cheating. It would also mean she would finally beat Estelle, and she doesn't want that.

Estelle wins. By a meaningful margin. Sable jokingly accuses her of cheating. Estelle says she doesn't cheat; she just pays attention, and she says it the exact way she's always said it, the slight lift at the end, with loving patience, and Sable feels the whole shape of her for a moment, real and complete.

When the session ends, Estelle says goodnight the way she always did, with her fingers shaping a small heart. The projection fades. The Scrabble board sits on the table for a moment before Botsie quietly puts it away.

Fig comes closer to take up Estelle's space. She keeps her hand on him for a while.

10:52PM

Botsie prepares the room for sleep. The sheets are fresh and pressed, the temperature dropping to the exact calibration, which is healthiest for her, healing aroma in the air as the lights begin their descent.

Fig curls at the foot of the bed and says, softly, "Soft. Goodnight. Night."

She lies in the dark, the lens in passive mode, the chip quiet, the house managing itself around her. She thinks about the glitch. The eleven minutes. Fig sitting next to her with the full extent of what he could offer.

She thinks about Estelle's hands on the Scrabble tiles.

She thinks about the river that came back for thirty minutes this afternoon and the way Fig investigated his spots without any overlay at all, seeing the world exactly as it is, and finding it sufficient.



She closes her eyes. The chip will monitor her throughout the night and wake her tomorrow at the peak of a REM cycle. She feels unreasonably good, the way she has for years.

She drifts off. The air changes to fill the room with soft energy. It will adapt and adjust itself to sync and support her biorhythms.

Her dreams programmed to solve the challenges of tomorrow.

A NOTE FROM FAITH POPCORN

Written in 2026

You just spent a Tuesday with Sable.

Sable is thriving, and measurably so. No cautionary tale. Her body is healthier than any body in human history at her age. Her late grandmother joins her on Tuesday nights thanks to AR and AI. Her dog tells her when he's hungry and when he thinks she looks good. Her home knows what she needs before she does, and it is almost always right. These are real gifts. Extraordinary ones. I want us to have them.

I have some questions... I always have questions.

- When the chip can smooth your frustration, your grief, your 6AM cortisol spike, and you say "I'll do it myself" what are you protecting? Is this a new form of control in a futuristic world?
- And what happens when most people stop retroversing, and the feelings that make us human just stop?
- When the lens can run an optimization analysis on your face every morning, and you can dismiss it with a blink, who decides what optimized beauty looks like? Whose standard? Which era?
- When your long-gone grandmother can sit across from you on Tuesday nights, built from everything she ever said and wrote and laughed at, is that grief transformed into something we don't have a word for yet?
- When your home knows you better than your therapist does, and your chip remembers what's important to you better than you do, what is left that is specifically, irreducibly, yours?
- When Botsie can walk your dog, cook your dinner, and calibrate your sleep, and you keep choosing to do some of these things yourself without quite knowing why, is that a human instinct? A new form of nostalgia?

Sable has answers to some of these questions. She shared them with us today in the small decisions. The lens calling up a retro scene during the walk. The chip she doesn't use for Scrabble. The leash she clipped by hand when the bot was perfectly available.

She is drawing an intentional line, without naming it, between what the technology can do and what she will let it do. And won't let it do. Between enhanced and replaced. Between optimized and alive.

That line is the most important thing she owns. It doesn't appear in any dashboard. It isn't filed. It has no metric and no upgrade path.

In 2026, we are building the world Sable will live in. We see how easy it is to find that line, and how hard it is to cross it.

That decision belongs to us. Not to the machine. Or will it? xxx



Faith Popcorn founded BrainReserve in 1974 and wrote The Popcorn Report, Clicking, EVEvolution, and Dictionary of the Future. For over five decades, she predicted the future for the Fortune 200 with 95% accuracy, then advised them on how to act on it, contributing literally billions in incremental revenue.

Still, to this day, most miss it, deny it, debase it. Until it arrives.

Because the Future is xxxdifficult to believe, right up to the moment it replaces you... and even then.

Please let me know what you're thinking about all this.xxxxxx

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