INT CLASSROOM EARLY MORNING
There are the sounds of students leaving the classroom and footsteps as Kai walks over to Adrien.

KAI
You left this. After you came to my office.

Adrien hums slightly.

ADRIEN
Ah, so that's where it ended up.

KAI
Don't.

There's a quick moment before there's a second of something being scribbled on a piece of paper.

KAI
What's-

There are footsteps as Adrien leaves.

KAI
What?

They sigh as they read the note.

KAI
"Second Cup. 6 PM?" Okay, I guess that's how we're handling this.

CUT OUT:

CUT IN:

INT. SECOND CUP EARLY EVENING

Kai sits down, setting a drink down as they do so.

KAI
I really shouldn't be meeting a student outside of school, especially over a note. This could get me in trouble. Do you understand the risk here? If you don't get to the point quickly, I'm leaving.

ADRIEN
You came, though.

KAI
Yeah. I came. You have 5 minutes to explain what you want.

ADRIEN
You watched one of the videos?

KAI
How'd you- Yeah. Looks like...I recognized the supervisor's voice. They were never on camera though I don't understand.

ADRIEN
I've never worked in a warehouse. I refuse to. I don't even like ordering online because of that.

KAI
I mean, you do know that real warehouse jobs aren't like that. These are just...

ADRIEN
Nightmares made real? What were yours like?

KAI
What were my what like?

ADRIEN
Your nightmares. How were they delivered? I've seen everything from radios playing audio, to handwritten notes, to social media going haywire.

Kai sighs softly.

KAI
They /were/ tapes. Like cassette tapes. Just showed up at my sister's house one day. She thought I had delivered them. That I was working on a new project and was testing it on her, or something.

ADRIEN
They were tapes? They aren't anymore? When was the last one you received?

KAI
Monday. It came through an email. The first 10 I ignored even blocked the email they were coming from. I wasn't going to give them any more space in my life. But then I got

one while I was trying to focus on work and...well by then I'd watched one of the videos on that flash drive and I just...

ADRIEN
You had to open it up.

KAI
Yeah. I didn't want to. Before those emails I...I hadn't gotten a tape, hadn't heard from them, in well over a year.

ADRIEN
I looked you up. To make sure you were who you said you were. Found a few articles about you. About you losing your job. And then some undisclosed medical issues.

KAI
Yes. That's...it was related. I think. We still don't know what happened. I also looked you up.

ADRIEN
Right. Should have expected that. Didn't find much, did you?

KAI
(clearly wanting more information, but wanting Adrien to offer it up)
No.

ADRIEN
Yeah. Figured not. I...here.

Ze pulls out a laptop and plugs in the flash drive.

KAI
What, you want me to watch another video?

ADRIEN
A specific one. To show what I mean. Just watch.

Adrien clicks a few keys and starts the video.

CUT OUT:

CUT IN:

INT. THE WAREHOUSE UNKNOWN

the room is filled with warehouse-type noises

THE SUPERVISOR
Your performance is failing. Again. This is the third time this week. Your progress is...lacking.

CCTV!ADRIEN
I know, Supervisor. I've been trying my best, but I guess I'm struggling with some of these concepts.

THE SUPERVISOR
Concepts? Shipping, we are not dealing with abstract ideas here. These are practical skills, executing only the job at hand. And you're falling short, consistently.

CCTV!ADRIEN
I understand, supervisor. I promise I'll do what it takes, I'll put in extra hours as needed.

THE SUPERVISOR
Not doing that, wasn't an option. We've invested a lot in your training. It's not just about time and resources; it's about the company's interests. We can no longer afford repeated failures.

CCTV!ADRIEN
I get that. I do. I'll do better, Supervisor. I promise.

THE SUPERVISOR
(pauses then changes tone slightly)
Shipping, do you ever wonder why you're given these chances over and over?

CCTV!ADRIEN
I... I don't know. But I am grateful for the opportunities this job has offered me so far.

THE SUPERVISOR
(sighs)
You should be. But I have taken a keen interest in your progress. There are whispers about your potential, about untapped abilities.

CCTV!ADRIEN
Untapped abilities? I'm not sure I understand?

THE SUPERVISOR
(with an audible smirk)

It's not about what you understand, Shipping. I see something in you, something that hasn't fully manifested itself yet. That's why I keep giving you these chances to start again.

CCTV!ADRIEN
...I appreciate your confidence, but I can't help but think I'm letting everyone down. That I'm letting you down.

Footsteps approach.

THE ASSISTANT
Supervisor, The Director sent me to see how this meeting was going.

THE SUPERVISOR
Wonderful. I was just explaining that failure is not an option for us, for Shipping. The potential I see, we just need to /extract/ it, no matter the attempts it will take.

CCTV!ADRIEN
Extract? What do you mean?

THE ASSISTANT
Supervisor, a suggestion, perhaps we should show Shipping the next phase of training. Sometimes a... visual aid can accelerate understanding.

THE SUPERVISOR
(smiling audibly)
An excellent suggestion, Assistant. Shipping, follow us. It's time you see what happens when you don't meet expectations.

Footsteps echo as the sounds of the warehouse grow distant.

CUT OUT:

CUT IN:

INT. SECOND CUP, EARLY EVENING

KAI
I'm not sure I understand. And why is the supervisor nice to you?

ADRIEN
I- what? That's what you got from that? That's not nice. Not to me.

There's a brief silence before Kai gets it.

KAI
You hate the idea of failing, of disappointing someone who trusts you.

ADRIEN
(changing the topic)
That isn't why I was showing this to you. How many attempts have I been given? I have 4 recordings of these conversations. Each is almost all the same. And there is no evidence I remember them.

KAI
I mean it seemed like tape!Kai struggled with memory things too. I don't really remember a lot of the details either.

ADRIEN
(stammering)
Tape!kai?

KAI
Yeah. The Kai on the tapes? I mean I needed a way to keep me here and the me on the tapes separate in my notes and just saying "that one" felt wrong after a while. You know?

ADRIEN
I have never felt that. That one has always just been 'that one' to me. Keeping zem separate from myself was important. You took notes?

KAI
Yeah. I...I kept little journals on the tapes, just to keep my thoughts in place. Sometimes they ended up recorded on my computer though. Of research I did. Things that happened. Theories I had. Stuff like that.

ADRIEN
Don't do that anymore.

KAI
Excuse me?

ADRIEN
You said you wanted my help right? Well, here's my first point of advice. That one on the tapes and in the emails is not you. Don't give them that entrance into your life more than they already have. Do you understand?

KAI

I don't think it's that serious.

ADRIEN
Kai, I have been dealing with these for 5 years, getting at least one new video showing up on this USB every week. I've noticed a lot of things in that time. Listen to me. How you react, affects the tapes. Not in any direct or physical way, but your mental state. Mine have always been videos. No change in 5 years. Why? Because I watched them and gave them as little mind as possible as long as I could. In the beginning, things were worse the more I fought. For that one, and inversely for me. The videos became worse. The things in them...they were worse. When things got bad for you too...

KAI
I was about to stop listening. My sister took the tapes. I was leaving it behind.

ADRIEN
I have theories about that, you don't go this long without them. I think us giving up, giving in, forces them into their fate. They didn’t get worse to punish us for stopping but...

KAI
(slowly filling in the blanks)
A final nail in the coffin is a nail either way.

ADRIEN
Exactly. The closer I got to figuring it out, the better things got. Easier to handle.

KAI
A false sense of security. So we would stop caring. Can we stop it? Can we save them?

ADRIEN
They aren't real, Kai. Not in that sense. They're real in the way that water knows fire is real. It can see its light and maybe even feel its heat. But they can't interact. They are nightmares and nothing more.

KAI
Sure feels like more.

ADRIEN
Of course, it does.

KAI
To draw me in. So I let the emails come and just...don't care?

ADRIEN
It's worked for me.

KAI
I can't believe that, Adrien. I can't. This can't be an unending torment. I can't...

ADRIEN
No one would judge you. Well, no one who understands would judge you. And you wouldn't be the first and you won't be the last.

KAI
Judge me for wha- No. I'm not going to do that. I wouldn't do that to Lyssa.

ADRIEN
Lyssa?

KAI
My sister. I've put her through hell. I'm not going to make that worse. Do you understand me? So you can stay fatalistic if you want, but I refuse to believe there is no other option than...dying or living with this my whole life. Thank you for the information you've given me but I refuse to agree with you.

ADRIEN
(Adrien stays silent for a moment before there's a hint of pride in zir voice)
Okay. Do you still have any of your notes or recordings you made?

KAI
Some. A few I recorded on my computer so I could go over them. Went I went into a coma, my sister and Jess got rid of most of the physical evidence anything had even happened.

ADRIEN
A coma?

KAI
Yeah. The medical issues you mentioned? I remember there was a conversation. The last one I remember on a tape. I barely remember what it was about but I...I fell unconscious while listening and didn't wake up for a long time.

ADRIEN
And you don't remember the tape?

KAI
I don't remember most of what happened during everything. It was a lot. And I was out of it for a while after I woke up too. A lot of the details of even my life, my normal life are fuzzy. I remember I was fired. I remember that...my sister...

(trails off)
ADRIEN

This is how it starts.

KAI
How what starts? Look, I've always had a bad memory. Something from my childhood. I don't remember the details, go figure. This really is not concerning.

ADRIEN
(hums, voice full of disbelief)
Right. Your whole life?

KAI
As long as I can remember.

ADRIEN
Okay. Email me the recordings you have, and any emails you get. I want to listen to them. Compare them to the others I've collected.

KAI
The others? You've managed to find others and get them to talk to you? I tried once, and it didn't end well.

ADRIEN
You could say that.

KAI
And what else could I say?

ADRIEN
Do you want my help or not?

KAI
I- yes.

ADRIEN
Then don't ask too many questions.

Kai is quiet for a few moments before sighing.

KAI
(defeated)
Okay. I'll send you the recordings I have. But I want to watch more of your videos.

ADRIEN
Fine. But avoid videos 256 through 341.

KAI
Why? Right, don't ask questions.

ADRIEN
I mean it Kai. Not until you're ready. And I'm ready.

KAI
Okay. I promise. I won't look at those videos specifically.

ADRIEN
Write down the numbers.

Kai sighs but writes them down on a scrap piece of paper.

KAI
Happy?

ADRIEN
No. But close enough.

KAI
Right. I need to head home before my sister calls to ask where I am and I have to explain I'm at a coffee shop 30 minutes out of town meeting with a student in a secret meeting.

ADRIEN
Drive safe.

Kai leaves and gets in the car, turning on the radio when they get a call.

KAI
Right on schedule. Hey Lyssa. I'm just out for a drive. I'll be home in about 40 minutes, assuming traffic isn't too bad.

LYSSA
Okay, just checking in. Jess said you didn't come home after your classes.

KAI
Nope. I had work to do and then wanted to go for a drive for some clear air.

LYSSA
Okay, I'll see you when I get home.

KAI
See you then.

CUT OUT:
KORI
Slowly Unspooling is a podcast licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-Alike 4.0 International License. Today's episode was written by Aspen Rayne and featured Aspen Rayne as Kai, Kori Baylen as Adrien, Haze Peers as The Supervisor, Celeste as The Assistant, and Simon Brooks as Lyssa.

The music is by Aubrey Poppleton, find them at https://soundcloud.com/poppletron.

Follow us on Tumblr at SlowlyUnspooling for updates, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/slowlyunspooling, all patrons at $10 and up get shoutouts at the end of the next episode that releases.