

O n e

17:45:00 OP Mode Switch: 827.1745.240901

East to west, row after row of Solaray lamps dimmed then shut down. From the void left behind, glittering StarLites sparked into existence one-by-one over the arcology. A sense of randomness was imparted to the emerging night sky, although each StarLite bulb illuminated in the same succession for years until it burned out and was replaced.

Enormous recessed fans pushed cool air (precisely 20.5 degrees Celsius) into Dome 827 from the north and drew Solaray-warmed air into waiting vents to the south. The fresh bacteria-neutralized breeze dissipated the heat of the day as citizens shopped, dined, and worked within their carefully maintained arcology. On the western side of the Dome, near the Medical Plaza Complex (the MediPlaza), a Solaray bulb filament flared and extinguished.

17:47:03 ERROR Solaray 11732,605 LOC: 827-SOL
17:47:09 ERROR confirmed.
17:47:10 EXECUTE [maintenance.prog] LOC: 827-SOL
17:48:07 ERROR Intra-Dome Transit 827-D-1730
17:53:57 ERROR Escalator 827-MPCE-5
17:54:02 ERROR Door 827-MPC5-5
17:54:12 ERROR Door 827-MPC5-5

Another Utopian night had begun.

Remy bounded up MediPlaza's stalled escalator from the ocher-lit-and-shadowed UnderDome toward the Geriatric Care Treatment and Damaged Care Center building, pushing people in brown worksuits out of her way. "Scuse me," she called halfheartedly to a denizen who shouted after her.

She sped around the side of the building and jogged down a slope. Located near the MediVan and Human Sanitation Services loading zone under the building, the denizen entrance was shielded from citizens' view. She wiped her forehead and smiled, slowing to a jog as she neared the open doors. As she approached, the entrance's two doors slid close with the hum and click of internal ratcheting. Startled, sweat-soaked, and wheezing, she sprinted to the doors, reaching them as they met and locked. "What? No!" A two-handed slap (then fist-clenched slam) on the doors netted no reaction. After screaming in rage, she pressed her body to the nearly invisible seam that split the doors.

She pushed off the doors a moment to look up the narrow walkway to see the illuminated MediPlaza clock. The glowing amber display read 17:56. While she understood she was supposed to be already on-site fifteen minutes before her shift began, the doors should not have closed or locked. A sour expression hardened her features; she pressed the call button. Indignant at the inconsideration, Remy flexed her index finger backward on the button, as though intensity of pressure would make the buzzer in the security office louder and more urgent. Glaring up at the clock, she watched it change from four to three minutes before 18:00. "I'm early today; I'm drekking early!" At 17:58, she pummeled the door with both fists, desperate. A brief reverie flitted through her brain – a tall, brawny savior would pass by the door, sense her despair, and let her in. After offering thankful, gracious, and hurried praise, she would arrive at the nurse's station just in time. Remy paused and waited; no one arrived to help.

Pressing the button at precise one-second intervals, she slumped against the door and surrendered to her fate. Someone would notice she wasn't at the Nurse's Station and her absence would be reported. Defeated, she assessed herself in the chromed and polished GERIATRIC CARE TREATMENT UNIT/DAMAGED CARE CENTER, BUILDING FIVE sign on the wall next to the door's buzzer panel. A more than acceptable mirror, the sign reflected a sallow-skinned woman. Her hair was a rich dark brown; her sweat-soaked bangs looked black. Her hair was nearly shoulder length and needed to be trimmed on her next day off. As a female denizen on Level One, she was legally bound to maintain her hair in a blunt-cut bob which could not be cut shorter than her jawline nor grown longer than the base of her neck. Her once-bright violet irises were framed by bloodshot eyes, dark gray pockets, and sagging eyelids. Small creases had already set at the outside corners of her eyes. She turned away

from her reflection in shame, shoulders drooped as she thought about the Inter-Dome Tram wreck she had become. “They’ll come,” she whispered to no one. She began to softly name the constellations in the Dome ceiling above, recalling the location of each associated StarLite’s designation number as she watched glowing seconds tick by.

17:59:59 ERROR Surveillance Camera 827-MPC5-SC5

The MediPlaza clock registered 18:00. Unnerved and afraid of her impending punishment, she stammered over then forgot the constellations’ names. Her index fingertip stung from repeating button-pushing; her head ached from increasing tension. She rested her knuckle on the button and pressed her face against the cold unyielding doors. “Let me wake up. Please let me wake up.” Tears of self-pity chilled as each reached the metal, sending icy droplets down the furrow between her cheek and the surface. Her headache worsened, and she felt rising nausea. Shuddering, she braced for the coming affliction.

Her head exploded into a migraine, the blinding pain released a brief, tantalizing taste of a childhood memory. Unwilling to let up on the door buzzer, she let it consume her, knowing it would pass and she would be left with the clear, precious memory. She coughed then gagged; her stomach’s contents hit the concrete with a wet splatter. The migraine evaporated, but she didn’t open her eyes. She held her breath as a mechanical construct skittered about her feet as it cleaned, brushing past her pant leg as it finished then disappeared. When it had gone, she opened her eyes and exhaled. Assessing her hard-won prize, she wept in stunned and pained relief: her most desired memory was finally her own.

Frame-by-cruel-frame, the plummet from the NuPine that stole her illustrious future played out for her. A misstep because of a pruned branch had destroyed the greatest mind of her generation. Damian (the only other person there) had offered words of comfort as the MediVan arrived to take her to the Medical Plaza. She relived it again and again, then used a self-taught trick to store it in her mind. Her face slackened; she slumped against the door buzzer.

18:14:00 ERROR confirmed.

18:14:00 ERROR confirmed.

18:14:00 ERROR confirmed.

18:14:00 ERROR confirmed.

18:14:00 ERROR confirmed.

18:14:01 EXECUTE [maintenance.prog] LOC: 827-MPC5

“Get off the button, Brown!”

Remy was startled into awareness. Leaning back, she looked up the walkway at the MediPlaza’s main clock. It read 18:15. Her shoulder was stiff and sore as she pulled her curled finger away from the buzzer. Rolling her arm and flexing her hand, she demanded, “Where were you? The door closed four minutes early and locked on me! I’ve been leaning on the buzzer ever since!”

“Name.”

“Remy 827-970315-001.”

A pause. “Next time you’re late, you will be demoted from Level One status and reassigned to the UnderDome.”

“I wasn’t late!”

“The computer says you are. Your challenge, attitude, and lack of reality-sense have been noted.” In response, Remy offered a hasty capitulation and apology. The door parted, sucking in a quick burst of air. “Check in at the Nurse’s Station on the first floor. Have a Domey night.”

“Domey night to you, too.” Pasting on a cheery grin, Remy approached the brightly lit circular desk where the orange-clad shift director (*Director Francine 432-780405-014* read her melon-colored name tag) and a half-dozen other receptionists were working.

Director Francine did not look up from the terminal. “You are late again, Brown.”

“I arrived four minutes early, ma’am.” Remy’s tone was frothed with airy innocence. “The door malfunctioned, ma’am.”

“The computer indicates the door closed at eighteen hours, precisely. Your first call to security was logged at 18:14:23, an answer you ignored for over thirty seconds while you, as the security personnel commented, ‘stared stupidly at nothing.’ Because this is not your first offense of this nature, you are being recommended for a mental health review.”

“That can’t be right.” Remy leaned forward to look at the terminal screen. Director Francine scowled up at her, a stern squint warning Remy to lean back. Remy complied. In a pedantic, pseudo-patient tone, the shift director explained. “Central Computer, not a person, logged all of the times. Central Computer, as even denizens know, does not make mistakes. Therefore, Brown, you are late. And combative.”

“But –”

“You have two choices. One, you can be admitted to DamCare immediately for testing. Two, you can stop lying. If you fight me on this, you will lose Level One status right now, and I will recommend your permanent admission to DamCare as hostile,

delusional, and sociopathic. Arrive for your shift when or before it begins if you wish to stay on Level One!” Purse-lipped, the shift director returned her attention to the terminal; Remy fidgeted a moment, then gambled her future.

Remy leaned forward and spoke quietly and quickly. “I was on time, ma’am. I planned to arrive a half-hour early, but my box’s – sorry, my apartment’s – door would not close. I spent fifteen minutes trying to close it, then just left it open so I could arrive on time. The Intra-Dome Tram I was on missed the Medical Plaza Complex stop; I and two dozen others ran back through the UnderDome to get here. Had one been a GeriCare worker, I could have had my story corroborated. If you check the other MediPlaza building logs, you’ll see that the others arrived at approximately the same time I did – about five minutes before eighteen hours. I admit it was not much time to spare, but I was early. You can check for possible error logs on the door or the door buzzer; any Dome citizen can do it.”

“I’m not going to check –”

Though still soft, Remy’s voice turned threatening. “As a denizen, I still possess my right of consent. Am I part of an in-Dome sociotherapy experiment? Understand, ma’am, you are required under Dome law to tell me; I’m not under contract as a laboratory volunteer. I can call Enforcement in, ma’am.”

“Brown,” Director Francine hissed, clearly frightened. “We have had this discussion before about you using specialized knowledge from your former life; you are bordering on treason against the Dome, and I refuse to be party to it.” The Orange Director of Nursing entered information into her terminal. “No, you are not part of any experiment. No, there are no error logs regarding this building within the last half-hour.”

Remy nodded, starting to lean back. “Thank you. Now –”

Director Francine grabbed Remy’s collar and yanked her forward. “I do not wish Enforcement Intel here tonight to question either of us, so we’re dumping this whole conversation down the recycling chute right now, understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Remy stood back, head bowed in mock penitence.

“Remy, dear,” Director Francine patronized in a loud and clear voice, “thank you for admitting you lied. Of course I don’t hate you. In fact, I think you’re quite clever! The residents have only excellent things to say about you. Despite that, you must understand you are still responsible for what happens to you. Central Computer doesn’t have a sense of remorse or pity. I am so sorry, but if you make one more mistake, you will be reassigned UnderDome. No one can stop your fall but you, dear, because no one else can.”

“I understand, ma’am.” She took the loaned portable and read her shift assign-

ment. “Why am I not on 200 North tonight?”

“Anne arrived on time and requested it.” Director Francine pushed manicured hands (her tangerine nails made Remy think of pills bonded to gnarled sticks) through her styled, graying hair. Tight-lipped and barely masking her temper, Director Francine spoke smoothly and softly. “Remy, if you want the good assignments and shifts, show up on time regularly for the bad ones. You have worked here long enough to be on the day shift and have two days off per week like real citizens have!”

“I see,” Remy replied icily. “Thank you very much for your advice, ma’am.” She stalked to the elevator doors, head down. She entered the elevator, and, as its doors hissed closed, she commanded, “Down: to the Damaged Care Unit.”

Hours later, she stood in the doorway of 221 North. Iram, the room’s resident, looked up. “Come on in, Remy. I was expecting you earlier tonight and was surprised to see Anne instead. She has no respect, treating us like small children. I’m old, not an idiot.”

“It’s good to see you too, Iram.” Remy stepped inside, and the door closed behind her. A small porthole window near the tall ceiling allowed the golden light from the medical plaza’s clock to subtly brighten the room. The room had an eerie glow, almost compelling one to maintain reverent silence or meditate introspectively. Not much bigger than the medical bed occupying it, the small room was furnished with the bed, a broken chair, a small bedside dresser, and a lamp. No VizFrames cycled family pictures on his dresser; no VizTainment unit hung from the wall. The absence of the VizTainment unit was answered for her on her first North Wing shift: Iram refused to have it in the room, calling it an idiot box. Outside of Iram’s carefully obscured secrets, the room held nothing of value except the man, himself. His presence filled the room: a pervasive amplitude of spirit reached into the dark corners and illuminated his surroundings. He found no great joy in being compartmentalized from the world. Though Remy found solace in his presence, she felt guilt as well. Iram’s prison was her retreat.

Over their time together, Remy had told him everything about her life she could recall. Because of the accident, post-operative observation of recordings of her prestigious youth were still her primary source of personal recollection. Instead of dismissing her, Iram listened to her, understood her, and encouraged her never to stop learning. She sat at the foot of his bed; he struggled to sit up with a grunt. She helped him up, and he eyed her critically. “Why are you wet?”

She unpacked her meal tray and opened it, grimaced, then set it on his dresser. “It’s bath night in DamCare. There’s not one dry person working that shift except the Red and Orange nurses. Oh, they’re quick to tell a Brown what’s wrong, but won’t

deign to get in and do their job.” With a beleaguered sigh, she added, “Typical.”

“Typical for someone above you?” Iram watched her carefully. “Or below you?”

“Below me,” she confessed in a guilty whisper.

“So, what happened this time?” He nodded sagaciously as Remy told him her story of ill-fortune and obstacle that led to a challenge and chastisement at the Nurse’s Station. “Though I am glad you haven’t give up thinking yet, playing with treason against the Dome is dangerous.”

Remy scoffed. “They’re more afraid of it than I am.”

“Don’t be coy. Enforcement Intel is not kind to Browns in interrogation situations. Treason is punishable by death, even for the Violet caste. What they would do to a denizen is unspeakable.”

“I know.” She rolled her eyes, impatient. “Everyone knows. You’ve told me time after time after time!”

“Well, it’s not sticking and it needs to! What this civilized society allows to maintain the semblance of civility should make you terrified to be a denizen.”

“I’ll be more careful, then.” Remy stretched, looking over at Iram’s concerned face. “I promise! Besides, it’s no longer a problem. After this next exam, I’ll be a Red citizen for sure. Once I’m a citizen, Damian can administer my tests, himself. I’ll graduate Academy and be attending Uni as a Political Science major before they know it. Then a few years in politics, and I am on to governance of a Dome.” She smiled dreamily. “What do you think of my taking over First Dome. You know – Dome 101?”

Iram shook his head in disappointment. “Remy –”

“I’ve never been, and Damian says it’s peerless. I bet the Vio would step aside if I asked. After all, I am ‘The Remy’.” She paused in consideration a moment. “On second thought, I’d probably do better to mobilize a political block and just oust him instead.”

“Remy!” Iram glowered at her. “Citizenship was not what I was talking about. I cannot believe you still want to be a part of a system that took a mind like yours and cast it aside.”

“The system didn’t cast me aside; the accident caused the damage! Now that my memory is returning, I will find my way back to where I belong.”

“It’s been ten years since you were that celebrated child prodigy. Everyone has moved on but you.”

Annoyed, Remy waved a hand toward him, dismissive. “You have no idea what it’s like.”

Iram sighed. “Did you know that I never received a color designation? That I was a Neutral citizen my whole life, not just when I arrived here?”

“You never told me that,” Remy said. “A Neutral your whole life? How?”

Iram smiled. His titanium-white, perfectly-even NuTeeth contrasted with his blotched, papery skin. “The Dome has perfected fiction, hasn’t it? What’s too real, it shunts aside or eliminates quickly and quietly.” When she registered fear, he patted her shoulder. “I’ll tell you another time. So . . . do you have it?”

Remy strode to the door and checked for Anne; the hallway was clear. She retreated into the room. “Lock door.” She carefully removed a small, thin cartridge from a hidden pocket she had sewn into her pack. She presented it to him; he took it. “Thanks for the cart, Iram.”

“What did you think?”

Remy bit her lip. “Honestly?”

“Of course.”

“Well, the overarching political theory is primitive. Not a surprise, considering how long ago it was published.”

“Is that all you got out of it?”

“Well, I suppose in comparison to today’s works, one could see the development from the central idea to the current known facts.” Remy sat quietly for a moment, Iram watching her expectantly. “There is something I don’t understand, though.”

“Yes?” Iram reclined, bouncing his foot. “Go on.”

“Well, remember when you gave me the texts I’d used in Academy?”

“Of course.”

“There were theories in this book that I never could have learned at Academy. You would think they would have been covered in at least one history of political evolution text, even as a trite anecdote of the previous generation’s ignorance.”

“Not there. Imagine that.” Iram smirked as he nodded. “Where did the ideas go, then?”

“Well, either the data was corrupted in Central Computer, which is impossible because the system is self-maintaining and doesn’t make mistakes, or . . .,” she turned away. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You walked the line of treason not four hours ago in public view without a problem. Why is this making you squeamish? Finish your thought, Remy.”

Remy’s reply was barely audible. “Or Central Computer did it purposefully when it realized society was at an intersection. It wanted to make sure humanity went the right direction; the one it wanted us to go. That would mean Central Computer is willing to lie to manipulate the future.” Cold fear spiked down Remy’s spine as she tripped over the line she had danced for years. “I just spoke against the Dome.”

“And why not? If the truth is treason, what does that make the Dome?” He

leaned over to put the book cartridge behind the false back of his top dresser drawer. "I'll tell you a secret: you guessed right about Central Computer. It has every last document regarding alternate theory destroyed once it decides where we are going and recreates reality in the revised image. It doesn't matter in what field of study. Willingly educated people discard once-revered texts, and one idea is adopted as the pinnacle of evolution."

Remy stared at him, wide-eyed. "What about the authors of different theories?"

Iram tapped his nose then pointed at Remy. "Excellent question. They'd become enlightened drekking quick, wouldn't they? Nonstandard thought guarantees Enforcement Intel will ring at your entry in the middle of the night to encourage proper thought. Doesn't matter if it was a person's life work."

"I really don't want to talk about this right now."

"If Central Computer doesn't want something to challenge its direction, how far do you think it would go to maintain the status quo?"

Remy scraped the grayish-beige nutritional porridge from her dinner tray into the trash, not looking at Iram. "I cannot be thinking this."

"You have to think this! You have to, or else you will never be anything but a spectrum in a brown jumpsuit, and that will break your mind apart before too long. Only a rare few treason cases reach a trial before Politicians at Conference. Central Computer solves its problem in a much more sinister manner. It allows people to slip through the gratings into the UnderDome below. It wants the darkness to kill them or drive them mad; if it doesn't, it will send Enforcement to finish the job." He watched her for signs of worry. "Are you going to turn me in?"

"No; I won't; I can't." She stared at the floor like an embarrassed child. "You're the only person who doesn't talk to me as if I'm just this side of DamCare. Around you I feel sane."

He sighed, relieved. "I often feel the same way. Have a good night."

"I'll see you next break, if I can; we can talk about your citizenship then. Otherwise I'll see you tomorrow night?"

"I'll be here." He yawned. She unlocked the door and picked up her empty meal tray, stowing it in her pack as she returned to DamCare.

Remy was cleaning up after the next-to-last bath she was assigned for the night when three Enforcement officers walked in from the UnderDome service entrance. They spotted Remy and walked directly toward her. Two were seasoned officers and one looked just out of Enforcement Academy. Enforcement cadets were the embodiment of human brute strength, sculpted form, and stamina which marbled and melted away when they evolved into long-time veterans. As they approached, Remy observed

their navy uniforms looked jet black away from the brightness of a Solaray-lit day. She tensed as they reached her. “How may I help you officers?”

“100 West Wing, Brown.”

Relieved, she replied, “Take the elevator at the end of the hallway, go up to the first floor to the Nurse’s Station. The director on duty would be happy to direct you to your destination. Have a Domey night, officers.”

“Thanks,” the youngest of the three offered. He looked at the floor shyly, then back up at her, grinning.

She smiled back at him. “You’re welcome, officer.”

“Logan, what the drek are you doing? These Browns are trained like NuParrots. She doesn’t understand a word of what she just said to you.”

“Yes, sir,” the young officer replied, chastised. The three left, an echoing lecture on Remy’s lack of intellectual capacity mercifully muted by the closing of the elevator door. Remy clenched her teeth as she rinsed the shower-tub, afraid to utter the rebellious thoughts boiling in her mind. When the tub room was clean, she stalked to the room of her final charge. Upon arrival, Remy’s anger metamorphosed into pity.

Once a Yellow runway model, the woman had overdosed on illegal stimulant and depressant patches a decade before. Remy watched the VizFrame on the woman’s dresser cycle through magazine covers, runway shows, and pictures with VizStars. Suddenly, Remy recognized the patient; she had been the hallmark of perfection when Remy was in Academy; in ten years, she had become the ugly reality of DamCare.

Years of recreational dosing had taken its toll on her body and mind; her synthetic aesthetic upgrades were still firm and made her natural features appear even more decayed. Her thick platinum hair had been shorn close to her scalp for convenience. She watched Remy in awe; a delighted NuTooth smile spread across her vacuous face; her sunken eyes sparkled in anticipation. “Is it time? Is it time for the shoot?”

“Uh . . . we’re doing an advert today. For shampoo and, uh, body wash. Can you do it?”

“I can do it!” She giggled with glee as she clasped a hand around one fist and swung her body like a small girl. “I can, I can, I can.”

Mid-bath, Remy regretted putting the idea into the woman’s head. The ex-model splashed, kicked, and turned – sending sudsy water in lapping waves over the sides of the tub. The dry towels, bed gown, and slippers were soaked; Remy’s jumpsuit was saturated through to her skin. “Hold that pose,” barked Remy. The patient froze, a pout on her lips. Remy poked her head out of the tub room and saw a co-worker in an equally soaked-dark coverall crossing an intersecting hallway. “Hey!”

He stopped, looked around, then pointed to himself, puzzled. “Me?”

“Would you go get me a stack of towels from the rolling cart over there? I’m having trouble with my baths, too. Oh, and a gown and slippers.”

“Sure.” He looked around a moment then strode to the linen cart.

She ducked back into the tub room, where her patient was maintaining her pose. A wicked smile crossed Remy’s face. “The director needs a shot of you rinsing your hair slowly. Very slowly and very carefully.” As the model obliged, Remy cleaned around the tub with the damp towels. Just then, the man stepped through the doorway with the items she had requested; she looked up and recoiled, horror-struck.

His overall was not wet; it was the dark brown of Human Sanitation Services. A patch over his left chest pocket was embroidered with a name: Jack B. Nimble. Her blood iced as he looked around for a place to set the towels. Carefully braided and bound with an elastic, eight black cables snaked from the base of his skull; each line had a connector at the end in one of the colors of the spectrum. The last was gray. As she startled, she slipped on the wet floor and fell toward the tub. His right hand reached her wrist at an alarming speed, and his grip was painfully tight as he held her above the bath. With his left hand, he tossed the towels and gown back into the hallway and brought his other hand to hers, pulling her up slowly to him. She regained her balance. “Are you all right?”

“I . . . think so.” She looked up into his face, and their eyes connected. As he stared mesmerized, she pulled her hand from both of his slowly, not taking her eyes from his.

“Who’s he?”

Both turned their heads to look at the bather. “The director. He, uh, he likes your work. He wants to hire you again.”

“Director?” He laughed; the sound was comforting yet sensuous.

“Miss,” Remy said, looking at the patient to avoid looking at him, “it’s, uh, it’s time to return to your room.” The man didn’t leave, even as she dried her patient. “You’re Human Sanitation Services, aren’t you?”

“I’m Jack B.; I *work* for Human Sanitation Services.” He used his foot to sweep a towel through the large puddle.

“Yes, well, thank you.” Remy dressed her patient near the door, where Jack B. had dried the floor with the towel. “I have to go back to work. You do, too.” She sat her patient on a bathing chair at the edge of the room, and stood at the doorway, expectant.

“Hey.” Jack B. took both her hands. Remy looked down and away, and he lifted her chin with dexterous fingers. She looked up at him; he offered her a rogue’s smile. “Go out with me tonight.”

“Wait, what?”

“Go out. Eat. Talk. Laugh. Have sex. You know, go out?”

“Sure,” answered the coquettish patient. “What time should my service pick you up?”

“We’re Browns, Jackaby!” hissed Remy as he looked over at the patient, amused.

“It’s Jack B., not Jackaby. Give me your grid-loc, and I’ll come by your box tonight to get you. I know a place I’m sure you have never been, and the food’s peerless.”

“I’m ready when you are,” replied the patient. “If you take me to the Synapse Room at the Sun Aura, I’ll show you a really deluxe time.”

Remy shook her head and waved her hands, frustrated. “No. I’m not going out to dinner, she’s not going out dancing, and you are going to leave. Now.”

Jack B. shrugged. “Fine. Just sex, then, if that’s how you want it. I’ll meet you in a couple hours. What’s your grid-loc, then?”

“I am not giving you my grid location, I’m not meeting you –”

“Jack! Time to go!” A strong baritone voice echoed down the hallway. Remy peeked out of the tub room to see a muscled, dark-skinned man lead a team down the intersecting hallway toward the UnderDome service exit. His shaved head shone in the light, his skin seemed shades darker than the coverall he wore; his espresso-and-plum complexion made the coffee-colored uniform look lighter than Jack B.’s own. He stopped at the intersection as Jack B. stepped out of the tub room and stood next to Remy, his arm around her waist. Following the commanding man was a ghostly pale woman with a long coppery braid – *against regulation!* Remy thought – who pushed a corpse-laden gurney; gloss-black tape cocooned the body.

“On my way, Supe!” Jack B. turned to Remy and touched his mouth to a spot just behind her ear. She gasped and swooned as tingling pleasure spread over her body. “Think about it,” he said softly in her ear, sending shivers down her back. “You know where to find me. Ask for Jack B., or you might get someone else. Give me one night; I promise you will have a very good time.”

“B.! Supe said to move!” The redhead stared Remy down; her vitriol was palpable from the other end of the hall.

“Coming, Gea.” Jack B. squeezed Remy’s hand then jogged down the hallway. He reached the redhead, and she scolded him in a hushed voice. As the three Human Sanitation workers rolled the black-wrapped corpse out of sight, Remy shuddered. The body would be taken below, incinerated, and its ashes would be stored in a canister until a family member claimed them. If no one claimed the ashes, they would be expelled outside of the Dome into the wasteland beyond the wall.

Suddenly worried for Iram, Remy dressed her patient for bed with shaking hands. The woman checked her dressing gown. “Are you sure this is in fashion? I have a date

tonight, and I need to look deluxe.” Remy guided her to her room and helped her to her bed, turning the VizTainment unit on to the Entertainment channel: VizTainment One. The woman stared slack-jawed at the on-screen images as Remy moved her legs onto the bed and covered her with blankets.

Exhausted, Remy dragged herself up to 221 North to check on Iram just before her work shift ended. She stood in the doorway and watched him sleep soundly. Anne stopped next to Remy in the doorway. “Such a darling, isn’t he? Much more polite than the others, when he’s in the mood.”

“He is one of a kind, Anne.” Remy watched him a little longer, thinking of her most recent conversation with Iram. She followed Anne from the doorway to the Nurse’s Station and hung back as her coworkers turned in their portables. When she reached Director Francine, she leaned forward as she returned her portable. “I thought on what you said, ma’am. I’ll show up an extra hour early next shift to make up for being late today.”

Director Francine smiled, pleased. “That is exactly the work ethic we like to see here, Brown.”

Remy left with the flow of denizens which poured out onto the MediPlaza and down the escalators into the UnderDome. The throng was silent until they reached the Intra-Dome Tram station UnderDome. Animated conversations started all around her; denizens talked and laughed with one another. When the Intra-Dome Tram arrived at the closest station to Darkside, they took people-movers to the escalator closest to their respective homes.

Most citizens lived on Level One in brightly-lit, centrally-located neighborhoods. They rented spacious (though often shared) apartments or owned generous condominiums in color-designated districts. The Blue, Indigo, and Violet classes lived above along the concave walls, in the Havens. Prestige in the elite community was defined by one’s view of the Domescape below.

Darkside, the denizen neighborhood, was shrouded in a constant state of twilight; its tall towers held up the premier Havens housing. Each tower housed thousands of denizens, each in one’s own studio apartment. Between the single-building blocks, narrow streets allowed emergency vehicles to pass through. Most often, the streets were empty; little other traffic was willing to enter. Darkside’s presence on Level One was considered a privilege; that it never had the warm, cheery Solaray light was considered an equitable exchange. Warehoused in identical cells within tenement walls, the denizens’ lifelong drudgery earned food, clean work clothes, a bed to sleep in, and the promise of a Neutral designation at a GeriCare or DamCare – if they survived long enough to be too old to work. Despite the unpleasant environment, it was considered

better than the unspoken alternatives: the UnderDome barracks of Human Sanitation Services or the laboratory housing at the local University.

A Darkside apartment had its own three-coordinate address, or grid location – the sole difference between one and the next. Each had a four-meter-by-five-meter multipurpose area and a one meter square commode (which doubled as a shower stall). In the main room, the bed and table emerged at voice command from the same wall. Two folding stools were provided; they could be tucked in the narrow alcove which held the week's worth of clean uniforms. Its kitchenette had a Qwik-Hot oven, sink, and a cabinet where daily meals were delivered. The dark gray Berber carpet felt pebbly and rough underfoot, and it encouraged one to wear shoes, or at least thick socks, all of the time. Across from the bed's and table's wall was the apartment's VizTainment unit – a meter-square audiovisual display hidden behind a thick, clear resin window – which served as telephone, television, and terminal. A manual override interface panel was on the wall near the entry.

Remy arrived at her apartment; the door was closed. She walked up to it, and it opened to her. She stepped back, and it closed again. Crossing the threshold, she looked around for signs of maintenance robotics. The idea of interacting with possibly intelligent mobile mechanical constructs terrified her as it did many others in the Dome. She heard no sound of machinery; everything had been sanitized, repaired, and replaced in her absence.

She checked her uniforms; it was almost time for her day off. On her one day off in seven, she crossed the Dome to the Uniform Reclamation Center to trade the next week's clean coveralls for her soiled ones. The errand took hours to complete – from the trip across-Dome to the center, to the long lines when she arrived, and finally to the jostling return home.

She checked her cabinet; her meal trays and vitamin shake packets had been restocked. Remy took a shake packet and emptied it into a cup, added water and stirred it as well as she could; powdered lumps still floated on the top but she choked it down anyway, returning her used meal tray to the cupboard for the next pickup.

She rinsed the cup, thinking of Damian. Years ago, he had been involved in the development of the nutritional shake. Remy had read his research and learned the formula contained a unisex birth control. She drank it religiously after that.

Though their meetings were only once every few months, she and Damian maintained the intimate relationship started in Academy. Just the previous year, he insisted that they stop using a barrier method of birth control. He desperately wanted her pregnant, but she knew it would ruin any chance for a future with him before she reached citizen status. They loved one another, an aberrance in Dome society. Citizen

could own or have sexual relations with a denizen but never marry one; it was a perversion to consider it.

Remy dropped her clothing to the floor and stepped into the bathroom stall, showering for an unscheduled midmorning meeting with Damian. She had hacked into his schedule earlier that week and found that he was going to be at the Liquid Illusions Beverage House. Assuming he would be signing a Release of Consent with a denizen, he wouldn't mind if she joined him. Cornered in public, he would be easy to manipulate into helping her for her tenth, and final, chance. As the water poured over her body, she assessed her life.

Only a decade before, Remy was ready to graduate from Dome 827's Academy. Raised to be a leader in the computer-controlled sapientarchy, she was groomed to enter a University Political Science program and intern with an Indigo politician as a Junior Politician. Once she had learned the machinations of the representative government, she was to have been recommended for Violet candidacy if she had shown the qualities of leadership needed to adjudicate on the disputes of a Dome's citizens. As a Violet, her word would have been law, and she would have been adored and respected.

The accident had taken it away. All that remained for her were memories she gained from a cameraman's view of her life and a few restored memories (which were always devoid of emotional content) from her own point of view. Using those visual aids and articles and interviews she had done, Remy pieced together her life before the accident.

Born at Solaray dawn on the fifteenth of March, Remy arrival was celebrated by sociotherapists and eugenicists around the Dome world. Her mother was a successful Green caterer and private chef and her father was a Yellow sculptor. From birth, she was educated by the top minds of Dome 827 and observed on-camera. At seven, she was already a spoiled prodigy. Professors marveled at her intense violet gaze; the sociotherapists announced it as a harbinger for her illustrious future. Her mother, Maria, had lighter violet eyes which complemented her honey-blond hair and peachy tone. Her father, David, was Maria's counterpart in appearance – being blond with blue eyes. At eight, Remy question why she was dark-haired and so pale, Maria explained it came from Remy's father's side of the family. David smiled tensely when Maria announced it while staring at him coldly. Not long after, David brought Remy VizCaptures of relatives from all over his side of the family. She grinned at seeing a picture of his great-grandmother – a dark-haired woman with ivory skin, bright blue eyes, and a genial smile.

They took little time for themselves, always focused on Remy's future. Any ques-

tion Remy had was answered, and her unquenchable curiosity was fostered and guided. She chased after knowledge vigorously, shunning her age peers for the adults whom she considered more interesting. When she was ten, a prodigy in biology from the AsiaDomes transferred to Dome 827: Damian. The two families worked to put the two together without success; they had to settle for the children sitting silently across from one another in the University library as each studied alone.

At twelve, her interest veered toward genetics, and she began to sit with Damian, asking questions and receiving complete answers. He explained his complex ideas and she sat cross-legged in the chair next to him, nodding. Her six-month foray into genetics ended, and she turned back to political science. The sociotherapists built a study group around the two – half of the table was focused on the biological sciences and the other half were children who were expected to maintain the political dynasties of one of their parents. Remy and Damian, however, began to spend time outside of the study group, exploring the Dome together.

Just before her thirteenth birthday, a girl was brought in from First Dome with her parents to encourage Remy's femininity. Patrissa's father was an Indigo politician and her mother was a Yellow socialite and celebration coordinator. Remy assumed Patrissa was like other daughters of politicians and brought her into the study group. Instead of being a driven future politician, Patrissa spent her time drawing and talking about clothes and shopping. Not long after, Patrissa left the group and rarely saw Remy except at the University mixers. Then, their friendship changed.

Patrissa began to bump into Remy and Damian everywhere; she convinced them to start spending time with her, and the three became inseparable as they traversed the Dome together. Without Damian to buffer their relationship, Remy and Patrissa had difficulty with one another. At Patrissa's thirteenth birthday party and sleepover, while the other girls giggled over the cute boys at Academy, Remy was in the main room with Indigo Politician Dean (and a camera operator) discussing recently enacted legislation. She sat across from him in her regular cross-legged pose, silently engrossed, as peals of adolescent laughter came from the closed bedroom door. When their discussion ended, Remy approached the bedroom door. "Why did you come to Dome 827, sir? Everyone knows First Dome is the hub of the political world."

"I was offered the opportunity to mentor a future Violet; I couldn't let it pass," replied Politician Dean. "Good night."

Remy began to spend more time with Politician Dean and his peers, leaving Patrissa and Damian to themselves on many outings. She began to adopt his views on the vast inferiority of denizens. It was at a study group when, impatient, Remy criticized Damian's aspiration to improve the lives of denizens through eugenics. He

nodded quietly, stood, and left. She rolled her eyes and returned to her books.

She tried to VizComm him when he stopped showing up for study group. He refused her calls, he refused her invitations to do the things they once did. She waited for him after class and asked him to go to the library, watch a surgery, or even visit the Liquid Illusions Beverage House to laugh at the deeply pained verse the university students composed and recited. He walked away from her, shaking his head.

With no one else to turn to, she fled to Patrissa for comfort and friendship. She stopped talking to Dean regularly, so he started to live out-of-Dome again to maintain his political ties in First Dome. She missed study sessions and spent her time with the girls and boys Patrissa wanted her to know. Patrissa paraded Remy around as the attractive friend of the homely prodigy. Damian reappeared in Remy's life because of Patrissa, and for an idyllic year, Remy followed Patrissa around. The sociotherapists worried about her grades, but she was able to maintain her stellar scholastic standing. Worried the teachers were passing her without requiring performance, Maria sat with Remy at the dining table covering the textbook concepts on weekday nights then allowed Remy freedom to spend her weekends with Patrissa and her friends.

Patrissa developed from a snobbish, but still playful, girl into an aloof, suave adolescent modeled after her socialite mother. Remy turned toward her own mother for similar guidance and only found Maria's evenhanded earthiness. When Remy tried to convince Maria of her need to enter the world of Pretaport style ("The highest fashion," Patrissa's mother assured), Maria smiled patiently. "You and I do just fine the way we are, Rem," she had explained before trying to give Remy a hug. Remy ducked the embrace and, in tears, locked herself in her room and sobbed for hours at Patrissa about her hopeless mother. She followed Patrissa everywhere and mimicked Patrissa's practiced mannerisms as best she could instead of adopting Maria's easy grace. Boys laughed at the ingenue's efforts to be worldly; her heart broke when she walked in on Damian telling the others about a trip to DomeTrends when Patrissa and Remy had tried on the same dress. "I would have looked more girly in it," Damian recounted. "And the sales clerk was standing there, trying to think of anything nice to say." The laughter stopped as everyone saw Remy; instantly they went from amusement to guilty shame. Damian turned to see her. He tried to explain himself. She turned her back on him and left.

Politician Dean returned at Maria's request, and Remy went up to the his Havens apartment the first day he was back. He explained to Remy that the sociotherapists were considering sending his family back to First Dome. "I need Triss," Remy admitted. "She's my only friend, sir. She's all I have." Dean nodded, his face grim. Remy sat in the living room as he went to his office to contact her educators to get her scholastic

information. The camera operator caught Damian and Patrissa returning home from a night out. At the door, Damian and Patrissa kissed. Remy watched, stunned. Politician Dean walked in from his office, looked over at his daughter in an embrace with Damian and cleared his throat. Patrissa looked up, gasped, then jogged to her room. Damian saw the blond man glaring at him and disappeared down the hallway. Politician Dean sat next to Remy and sighed, then they began to review her schoolwork as she sat, clearly distracted. He reassured the sociotherapists it was adolescent stress, but they put his family's return to Dome 101 in motion.

Within a week, the nearly fifteen-year-old had yanked herself around. She returned to the study group, reasserting herself and taking control of the political science side of the table. She demanded the sociotherapists keep Politician Dean in-Dome for her, or she would appeal to Conference to have the experiment ended; they complied and watched her carefully. She shunned everyone not involved with politics. She and her study peers sat and discussed active legislation with Dean's political peers whenever they weren't at her home studying while Maria prepared dinner for a dozen ravenous teenagers.

Politician Dean was held in-Dome by Violet order several times as Remy demanded his tutoring; Politician Dean offered to take her to Conference with him and teach her from there. Maria refused outright and told Remy to stop holding Politician Dean from his work. When the sociotherapists pressured Maria, she conceded and chaperoned Remy, herself. They spent six months going with Politician Dean around to nearby Conferences. On their final trip with him, Dean invited Maria to dine with him and discuss the direction of Remy's education. Maria returned angry, and she took Remy home. She insisted Remy send him home and choose a new mentor. Remy wanted an explanation; Maria offered none. Remy was unwilling to concede and had the whole sociotherapy department to support her, so Politician Dean stayed.

Their mother-daughter relationship stalled then eroded. Remy spent her time with Politician Dean, cameraman over their shoulders as they studied in his Havens home. She sat near him, cross-legged, as he took control of her education. She shunned David when he tried to step between them at Maria's request. At fifteen, Remy learned to be an Indigo woman under his guidance; she shed her awkward nature. Patrissa couldn't dodge Remy's caustic wit whenever they were in large groups. Remy took sharp, quick jabs at Patrissa's flighty nature and intellect. Maria tried to intercede but was blocked when Dean considered taking his first Junior Politician ever; the sociotherapists were desperate to link Remy to one of the most powerful politicians of the time.

Maria took her helpless frustration out on David; he shrugged off her nonsensical curses. Remy was regularly invited to Politician Dean's parties. At one of his parties

in the Havens, Maria made the mistake of telling Remy to spend time with Patrissa – like an ordinary girl. It was an inopportune moment, for Damian and Patrissa were in a corner locked in the self-absorbed kisses of adolescent passion. Remy explained that Patrissa was occupied, but if her goal was for Remy to be a normal girl like Patrissa, she would oblige. Remy crossed the room and took Politician Dean's hand; he casually tucked her under his arm and walked her around the room. Remy looked over at Patrissa and Damian smiling and talking quietly to one another. She slipped her arm around Dean's waist and leaned her head against him. Still talking, he looked down at Remy, who looked up at him in girlish adoration. Returning his attention to his conversation, Dean didn't notice Remy's triumphant smirk as Patrissa paled then flushed in anger.

The attending videographer, Patrissa's mother, and Maria noticed. The camera followed Dean and Remy around the room; Maria was off-camera just behind talking quietly to Patrissa's mother. She offered her services gratis if she could take Remy home immediately; Patrissa's mother replied that she would pay Maria double her normal rates if Remy never returned. The two grown women cornered Remy when she left Dean's side for a moment; Maria took Remy's arm and pulled her toward the door. Remy pushed Maria away and returned to Politician Dean's side, taking him aside to explain what her mother and his wife had just tried to do. He turned on them and – in a clear, booming voice – used Indigo privilege on them both. He ordered Maria to complete the requirements of her contract and demanded his wife act like the wife of a politician. Grim, Maria completed the night's work. Patrissa's mother retreated to her room as Dean escorted Remy around the party, talking and laughing with his peers.

In the morning, Maria was already in the Havens having a closed-door meeting with the Dome Violet. By evening, the order had been signed: Dean was to leave for First Dome immediately because he was interfering with Remy's education. Patrissa begged not to leave, and the Violet allowed Patrissa and her mother to stay so Patrissa could finish Academy at Dome 827. On the InterDome Tram station platform, Remy (escorted by her cameraman) watched his entourage prepare him to move his secondary office back to First Dome. He shook Remy's hand as the camera recorded the moment. "I meant what I said."

"I know, sir," she replied coldly. He boarded the IDT and she walked from the station before it left. Maria was shut from her life, and Remy's focused on her father David for the remainder of her time at Academy.

David expanded Remy's education by introducing her to the arts. From fine arts to performing arts, he showed her the passion of humanity. The callous girl softened under his gentle tutelage, and her underdeveloped artistic talent bloomed in the per-

forming arts. One afternoon, she and David arrived at drama practice to find the University's debate team using the stage to prepare for an upcoming debate at another University. She watched then turned to her father. "I wish to do that."

She observed the University debate team, joining in their planning sessions and practicing the art of compelling speech. Several were political science majors and knew who she was already; she was accepted readily as the team's mascot and honorary little sister. Despite Maria's misgivings, David and Remy followed the debate team to win after win. Maria put her foot down about Remy traveling so far for the championship debate. The whole team appeared on her doorstep that night promising to take care of Remy while she was there and begging her not to keep their lucky mascot from the most important debate of the year. Overwhelmed by begging college students, Maria surrendered, laughing. The weekend was one of the few times she was not filmed – the camera team had just missed the tram.

Remy sat in the front row of the broadcasted debates, was treated as a minor celebrity, and was asked for autographs and VizCaptures with attendees from all around the Dome world. When Dome 827's University won, Remy was brought up on stage as the group jumped and hugged one another, the large chromed trophy hoisted above their heads.

She returned to Academy serene; her relationship with her mother started again, and she became a model daughter and student, effortlessly surpassing even Damian in their shared subjects. She took strong control of the study group filled with future Blues and Indigos and divided tasks and tutoring so all would benefit. It was then Damian returned to the study group; spending time among future Yellows and Greens had taken a toll on his own education, and his parents were livid. Patrissa flitted around the study group as Remy worked with her peers on the Political Science entrance examinations while the future eugenicists and sociotherapists studied across the table. Week after week, Patrissa would wander the study room, sigh loudly, hang on Damian, and complain. Remy said nothing, ignoring Patrissa completely.

It was when Patrissa accused Remy of trying to flirt with Damian that the study session stopped abruptly; the others looked from Patrissa to Remy. Remy set her portable down carefully, and in a calm, pedantic voice, said, "Patrissa, I am working with my peers; Damian, with his peers. I strongly suggest you consider spending time with your peers. Damian, handle this. We're breaking for dinner." Remy walked from the table, the whole of her political science group following. They were soon joined by the others, save for Damian. When the group returned to the study room, Damian was alone, tight-lipped and taking notes. Patrissa never returned, and the group's tension reduced. Remy and Damian started talking across the table and often went to dinner

by themselves before returning to study.

Throughout their time in school, Remy and Damian ranked as the first and second students in Academy, even through their hardships. Remy had beaten Damian year after year, and, after his performance the semester before he returned to the study group, he was determined to regain his standing. On the day grades were to be recorded into the system, Remy and Damian were in the library at a terminal. She sat in a chair as he leaned over her shoulder and checked the class standings from her account. She looked up at him. “Congratulations.”

“I wanted to do this forever,” he had replied, and he kissed her. The camera operator cleared his throat, and the two smiled up at him bashfully.

The sociotherapists were thrilled; Patrissa was horrified. Her outburst was magnificent when she (and everyone else) learned Damian had kissed Remy. Patrissa stormed into the next study session and screamed at him. As the others tried to ignore her outrage, Damian took Patrissa aside. He calmly explained that their relationship had ended, adding sheepishly that he always liked Remy more. Damian apologized, and Patrissa left.

Patrissa was inconsolable; her mother took her on a tour of the EuroDomes for Pretaport Fashion Month, calling the sabbatical from Damian an educational opportunity. One month became three. Patrissa changed as she traveled and honed her social and design skills. She sent artificially sweet messages to Remy about her new worldly life. Remy returned kind and encouraging messages to her. Patrissa began to date Blue University students and visit Universities which were known for their textile design programs; it was clear the direction her mother planned for her. With Patrissa gone, Damian and Remy cocooned and discussed their future when they weren't studying.

After Remy's accident, Damian explained much of what hadn't been on-camera. Remy and Damian had fallen in love and started an intimate relationship the last year of Academy, one they maintained to that day.

The accident, itself, was not recorded. The videographer had gone to lunch, leaving the two at the grove of NuTrees, explaining he had enough footage of her in the NuPine from five years old until then that the sociotherapists wouldn't mind missing this trip up. Remy had just grabbed the bottom branch when Damian said, “When we get out of University, I want to get married, Rem.”

“Married?” she scoffed. “Why? I love you too much.” Then she had jumped up onto the branch, scaled most of the tree, and, on the way back down, fell into a future she had no idea could exist for her.

Remy woke with a shaved and bandaged head in a large, private room in the

MediPlaza's main hospital. All around her were bouquets of NuFlowers and cards from well-wishers and Universities wooing her if she happened to awaken with all of her mental faculties. She looked around, confused; the life this denizen Remy remembered began in that moment.

Her first actual memory of Damian was of him looking up at her from a bedside hospital chair. He was exhausted and had been crying. "You're back," he whispered, hopeful. He stood, kissed her, and shoved a ring onto her middle right finger. She looked down at the ovoid dark blue star sapphire, then back up at him. "As long as you wear it, it's your promise to me that you'll always come back to me."

"Uh, okay?" Remy replied slowly. Four weeks later, Remy failed her final examinations and was tested for citizen status. The results shocked everyone when Central Computer returned a failed examination. The doctors determined she had received irreparable brain damage and very possibly needed admittance to DamCare. For one weekend, the world mourned with the educational community, then all moved on.

David left, divorcing Maria. Maria searched for any help she could find; Damian decided to commit himself to teaching Remy for the purpose of returning her citizenship. Within two months, she was a functional Level One denizen, a success Maria was deeply thankful to him over. Through four years of University at Dome 827, Damian taught Remy to read and use a terminal and portable. Her recovery was amazing, and Damian wanted to take control of her recovery in a laboratory setting. Maria stopped Damian when he wanted Remy to sign a Release of Consent contract, asking he wait until Remy was capable of understanding what it meant. If Remy accepted once she knew what her signature on the NuPaper contract meant, Maria would not stop them.

Ten years had ground by since the fall; she was twenty-seven and on her last attempt at the citizenship examination. No one was given more than ten tries; after that, she had to consider the Release of Consent contract as a serious option. Remy turned off the shower and stood in the warm air of the dryer, filled with hope and dread.

She tossed a meal tray into the Qwik-Hot oven and dressed as it heated the nutritional porridge. She touched around the inner lining of her zip-on pack and found the ring in the lining then pulled it out. Pinching it between her fingers, she watched it glint in the light as she ate her meal. It was shaped like Dome 827 because that was where they met and fell in love, Damian once explained. The star in the indigo stone made her think of a single Solaray shining bright through the darkness. She finished the porridge and set the ring on the counter to rinse the tray and return it to the cabinet then walked out the door. As she left her apartment, she walked down the hall then jogged back. The lights illuminated when she arrived. She walked to the counter

and swept up the ring, sliding it onto her finger.

Remy counted herself fortunate that she was only five floors up and a short three hallways to the closest elevator to Level One. When she emerged from her building, she only had to cross the street to get to the escalator UnderDome. As she descended, she thought of the unfortunate souls in the heart of Darkside, having to walk ten blocks to get to one escalator or the other.

Descending from Level One, she entered the orange-lit, hazy world UnderDome. Shadows punctuated everything and everyone, giving the tunnels a sinister feeling. The constant melody of machine hum had regular squeaks, squeals, and grinds as accompaniment. In the UnderDome, it was either cold or hot as the needs of Level One fluctuated. She took a people-mover belt to her closest Intra-Dome Tram station and waited for the University-bound tram. She waited on a small platform with a tight group of quiet, anxious people. When it arrived, she sat in the open-sided car, enjoying the silence of the trip. Browns desperate enough to better their lives risked releasing their last right, the right to refuse a citizen's order. Denizens who gave up that right could only hope the citizen who owned their right to deny consent valued their lives enough.

Browns more desperate than that signed their lives over to the University. Each hoped to be the one chosen for the good experiment, the one which allowed the denizen to succeed at a second chance at the citizenship test. Few returned to Darkside after they signed, so few signed the Release of Consent contract. Rarer still were those who did earn the chance and succeeded. No one ever knew the person, directly, but everyone knew of someone who had become a citizen; in contrast, the stories of what happened in the labs were told in hushed, macabre tones. The tram ride to the University inspired revulsion and fear, desideration and hope. It was the dream of a new life; it was the nightmare of a violent death.

Remy sat quietly next to two Browns her age; she fidgeted with the ring. As much as she hated to admit it, she preferred the ride to the University the most. She could enjoy a peaceful trip to her childhood home without the annoying gossiping or prattling about VizShows. The denizen on the other side of the blond man next to her nudged him. The blond snorted in disgust. Remy looked up at him, and his gaze bounced deliberately from her face to the expensive ring on her finger. She sat up, indignant. "Fun-girl," he muttered under his breath.

"Drek yourself, you filthy Labbie," Remy snarled, standing as the tram reached the University station.