

T w o

Breaching the darkness of the UnderDome, Remy enjoyed the bright Solaray day on Level One. The escalator was close to the Liquid Illusions Beverage House; Remy crossed the grass-covered University quad to it. She felt nostalgic pride that the Dome she called home had the premier eugenics, bioengineering, and genetic departments in the Dome world. Its gardens were filled with NuTrees, NuPlants, and NuAnimals. Generations before, the breedable animal and plant populations dwindled and started showing recessive mutations due to lack of genetic diversity. Botanical and zoological bioengineers designed a theoretical process which improved successive generations until the pinnacle of evolution had been achieved. With chemical enhancement, the ideal was replicated consistently. It was implemented with excellent results; NuLife had been created, and scientists chased down every genome of each desirable species in embryonic storage or in-Dome and perfected them one by one. Imperfection belonged to humanity alone; that was for the eugenicists to fix.

Remy strode through the front doors of the Liquid Illusions Beverage House, pausing talk. It had been redecorated since she had last visited but still had the monochromatic decor that was standard for interior decoration in the Dome world. Color was fiercely guarded by citizen castes; in public places, use of color claimed the space for one caste or another; it often kept more desirable spectrums from frequenting businesses; therefore, grayscale furnishings and decor became the paradigm.

The house's music harmonized automatically with the ebbing and swelling of the stopped then renewed conversation. A man (dressed in violet-blue) with straight, coal-black hair and dark eyes looked in Remy's direction casually then startled. Remy smiled at him before turning her attention to the VizArt screens on the wall to observe the works the new crop of fine art students was putting out this year. She looked over again at Damian; his thin lips curled up in a tense smile, and he stood slowly. She walked to the next VizArt screen and watched it cycle from one picture to the next slowly. She turned to look at Damian again and grinned; he was one of the few men who looked very attractive in deep indigo. Familiar, intimate desire drew Remy to him, and he relaxed as she approached his two-person table. Before she touched him, Remy stopped and sat. "It is a pleasure to see you, Eugenicist Damian. Sir. It has been a long time."

“Forgot about the entrance, again, hmm?”

Resting her elbows on the table, Remy propped her chin and gave Damian a love-lorn smile. “Mm-hmm.”

“I find it strange how you always seem to appear when I’m thinking about you.” He leaned forward. “Why don’t you go up to the Havens and wait for me there?”

“We can talk here.” She looked around, pointing to a denizen and Indigo scientist signing a NuPaper contract in the corner. “It seems like a particularly popular place for people like us to meet.”

“You know we’re not like them, Remy. I know you still feel like the Uni is your home, but you have to be careful on the grounds.”

“I will, next time.” She leaned forward confidentially. “Remember when we first started dating, and we pretended we wanted to join the College of Fine Arts just to make our parents mad? We sat here for hours; you wrote awful poetry, and I wrote worse music.”

Damian laughed a rich tenor warble. It charmed Remy and she felt seventeen again. “Did you get that from a video retrospective?” he asked.

“The cameras didn’t catch the initial conversation, Damian,” Remy said, grinning. “I remembered it. Myself.”

“Your memory is back?” Damian eyed her, dubious.

“More seems to be. I keep thinking I remember things and then wonder if it was me or the memory therapy. I do, however, sometimes get memories that weren’t VizCaptured.”

“That is definitely the right direction.”

“Oh! I had the strangest night at work. I was in DamCare and this Human Sanitation Services worker came in, only I didn’t –”

“Remy, I know you reserved a seat at the next exam; I want you to cancel it.” He arched an eyebrow and flexed his fingers as he clasped and unclasped his hands.

Her voice lowered to a distressed whisper. “Wait, what? Cancel? No, no, I am not canceling. I’m going to pass this time. I know I’m going to pass this time.”

“Rem, you said that the last six times. This is number ten. No one, not even Central Computer, can get you another chance.”

“If I don’t try, I can’t succeed.” Her frustrated whisper caused an unpleasant harmonic in the music around them.

“I am not asking you not to try, Remy, I am asking you to wait. I was recently approached by some peers who had reviewed my work in University; they are very interested in your condition. They can implant neural wiring which should bring everything back. Imagine! Curing people like you who are damaged by accident, not

providence!” Several Blue and Indigo scientists looked over at Damian. He waved and smiled; they returned polite nods and pleasant smiles, then returned their attention to their previous conversations.

“They can do that now?” Remy’s voice was hoarse; her eyes glistened with relieved tears. “I can be me again?”

Damian winced. “Well . . . not exactly. You, uh, you’d be the first test case.”

Her hopeful expression hardened. “You want me to be a Labbie.”

“Well, it is experimental surgery and they do need volunteers.” Damian offered Remy a reassuring smile, but she maintained her dour look. “Rem, Dome 831 has a superior eugenics surgical site. When I explained I still knew where you were, they were exhilarated! They are willing to do anything to get you there and have reassured me you will be especially well-cared for. They do the surgery; you spend a couple years under careful monitoring there; then, you come back here, where the sociotherapists and I administer your citizenship examination in a laboratory setting. You could test up to a respectable professional status in Dome society.”

“A professional.” Remy eyed a brown-haired, red-uniformed waitress talking to the Orange manager, then added, “Not just an Orange or Red?”

“They think – with the implants – you can get to Yellow or Green, depending on your aptitude and interests. Keith, the head scientist I’ve been conferring with, and I believe you can come back to Blue, as a politician. We’ve even discussed the possibility you could achieve Indigo status, if your educational foundation returns.”

“Violet,” corrected Remy.

He laughed. “Come on, Rem. We both know you didn’t have the right sense of seriousness. Sure you studied hard and even found a few great connections, but you never had the leadership qualities Violets possess. In Academy, you displayed the qualities of a politician, not a Violet.”

“I see.” Remy stood, ready to slap Damian with a stinging comment before walking out the front door. The room’s attention was turned to the main doors by a grand entrance that dwarfed her own startling one.

Two men – Blue University students – held the sliding glass doors open with their bodies. They eyed the entrance expectantly until the Yellow woman entered. She was the definition of Pretaport style. Gold-tone iridescent lace covered her peachy skin and fit body. Oblique shapes kept the dress to a minimum of modesty; the styling of the knee-length skirt and capped-sleeved lace bodice was jarringly conservative in contrast. A matching wide-brimmed hat in ivory with the same golden lace (used as an accent) covered the Yellow’s face. Remy cocked her head, amused. “Some man is about to have a very interesting afternoon.”

“That would be me.” Damian stood and approached the seductively dressed woman. Remy watched as the woman removed her hat, her honey-blond hair was pulled back into a bun at the nape of her neck; her face was turned from Remy as she flirted her thanks to the two enamored Blue students. Damian set his hand easily on the Yellow’s shoulder, and she turned, resting a kiss on his cheek. Remy steadied herself on the table. The Yellow looked eerily similar to her mother, Maria – twenty years younger. As the woman approached the table on Damian’s arm, she slid her dark glasses from her face and met Remy’s gaze.

Familiar cold blue eyes appraised Remy’s inadequacy with amused pleasure. In stunned shock, a name tripped from Remy’s lips. “P-Patrisa?”

Patrisa pulled Damian around the table, careful not to accidentally brush Remy. Remy saw the signs of aesthetic surgery as she passed. Patrisa’s once-powerful cheekbones had been broken and reshaped. Her strong chin had been softened to make her face heart-shaped. Her angular eyelids had been sculpted to a wide almond. Full, broad lips adolescent boys fantasized kissing were molded into a smaller, more cherubic mouth. Her long, aristocratic nose had been narrowed at the bridge and broadened at the cheek. The face that had inspired a decade of lust in Remy’s peers was gone. In its place was a poor copy of Maria’s face. Of Remy’s face.

Patrisa pressed Damian’s hand to her heart. “Oh, Dami, still not chi-chi as usual, I see. I made you such wonderful things, and you just refuse to wear them!”

“Not my style, Patrisa. What’s ‘chi-chi?’”

“Chi-chi? Twice as chic as the next spectrum, Dami,” she explained matter-of-factly. “Dress how I tell you, and you will be the master of trend. You need geometric shapes, edgy patterns, and – definitely – color shifts.” Patrisa eyed Remy. “Good news I hope?”

Remy sighed; Patrisa’s eyes were still their piercing ice-blue. The disingenuous smirk looked comical on the new face. Reverential, Remy said, “Hello, ma’am.”

“How long has she been working on the Uni?”

“She doesn’t.”

“So,” Patrisa forced herself to breathe evenly to hide her excitement. “Is she yours, Dami?”

“No. She works at the Medical Plaza.”

“Close to that dark place, then.” Patrisa’s nose wrinkled in disgust, as if she had smelled raw sewage. “What’s she doing here?”

“It’s called Darkside, Triss; you really should come visit. Why, I’m sure we morons would love to have someone like you show us how to be chi-chi. You could design new coveralls with geometric shapes, edgy patterns, and – definitely – color shifts.” Remy’s

confrontational stare had no effect.

Patrissa's eyes sparkled, malice in her voice. "I . . . will . . . try . . . that."

Remy snarled. "How's our mom?" Damian looked up at Remy, mouth agape in shock; Patrissa looked away, caught. "I cannot believe you actually paid to have the same face as a professional ass wiper."

"That is enough, Brown!" Damian's chair toppled backward as he stood, yanking Remy off her feet and from the table. He dragged her to the service entrance and shoved her out, his index finger millimeters from her nose. "Wait here." He retreated into the café; the door closed behind him.

Remy wiped at her eyes roughly then turned toward the wall to hide her tears. "Why does she make me so mad?"

"Because she can have him and you can't."

Alarmed, Remy looked up and over to see a middle-aged waitress with auburn hair. The waitress wore a cherry-red blouse and pants; her fuchsia apron was embroidered with carnation pink script which read: Liquid Illusions Beverage House. She sucked on a half-finished cigarette, the filter of which was stained with blood-red lipstick. She offered the pack to Remy, who smiled politely. "No, thanks. Those'll kill you."

"So will being a Brown on Uni grounds. What I don't understand is why you're standing waiting for him." The woman pointed the cigarette at Remy, squinting. "He offered you a future, didn't he? What color did he promise this time?"

"It's not like that. We're in love. Well, we were . . . before my accident." Remy paused as cold shivers ran down her spine. "What do you mean, 'This time'?"

"In love; oh, that is a new one," the Red mused, before sucking at the cigarette again. "Some come to the Uni because they've always been nothing. Some come because they once were something." The woman pointed her cigarette at Remy again. "And some? They come to die just to finally get it over with."

"I'm not going to die." Remy chuckled nervously. "He won't let me."

"What department is he?"

"Eugenics."

The woman shook her head slowly, dropped the butt, and exhaled. She squinted at Remy. "My advice? Hop an IDT baggage car and hide. Be a fun-girl somewhere good, like First Dome."

"I'm not selling my body!"

"Wait on this step any longer, and you already have." The waitress rambled back into the café.

Remy stood staring at the closed door, then looked out across the carpet of Nu-Grass toward the winding trails beneath the groves of NuTrees. Two hundred meters

away was the small campus lake. A spray of water shot up from the fountain at the center and startled the NuDucks and NuGeese coasting on its surface. As the fountain sprayed steadily, they returned to their lazy swim around the edge under the warm Solaray day. Beyond the grove was Maria's condominium, just off-campus. Remy stepped off of the small concrete square onto the NuGrass and strode toward the grove and her childhood home beyond, toward Maria.

The door opened behind her, and she quickened her gait. "Stop!"

"Have me arrested, sir!" Remy shouted over her shoulder as she maintained her fast pace. She needed to know why Patrissa had her mother's face; she needed to know why Damian was preparing to ask her to sign the Release of Consent if he loved her. She needed her mother: Maria.

"Drek! Remy! I order you to stop!" Damian caught up to her as she stood respecting Dome law but loathing him for it. "Where are you going?"

"So now it's 'Remy', sir? You saved calling me Brown for her benefit, didn't you, sir?" When he didn't answer, Remy added, "I am going home, sir."

"The escalator is the other way." Damian put a hand on her shoulder. "Rem, please stop calling me sir."

"I comprehend, sir. May I please go now, sir?"

He leaned close to her as he dropped his hand from her arm. "I really missed you; I didn't realize how much until I saw you here, and we have to talk. I know you missed me, too – you're even wearing the ring I gave you. Listen, just come back with me to the Havens. We'll have something to eat; I'll help you study for your citizenship exam, if you want. We'll take a step backward, okay?"

"No Patrissa?"

"No Patrissa." He smiled at her sweetly. "I want to be with you, Rem. Alone." Remy nodded, eyes lowered; Damian guided her from the lawn.

Arriving at his Havens residence, he waited until she had entered his redecorated apartment. She stepped in and spun around, taking in the space and inhaling a deep gulp of deodorized air. He laughed as she took her shoes and socks off and walked on the soft carpet barefoot, sighing in pleasure as she wiggled her toes. She frowned as she took in the changes. Instead of the soft muted grays she remembered, the apartment was all chrome-and-matte-charcoal.

The new carpet was almost black, and the conversation pit had throw pillows in garish black, white, and gray patterns. The floor-to-ceiling blinds were chromed; when Damian ordered them open, they glinted as they slid aside. Remy walked to the picture window and looked out across the expanse of the Dome below. Far off in the distance was Darkside, its towers cloaked in shadow. She turned to watch Damian as

he entered the redecorated kitchen. Glass shelves were held up by chrome pillars; his new resin plates were purposefully mismatched in marbled charcoal and high-shine silver. The counter surfaces matched the marbled plates. Remy's eyes darted around the room and she saw it: a tiny yellow glass bird on a high shelf. "Patrissa?"

"She and I are still good friends, like you and I are." Damian stopped in front of Remy.

"I hope not like you and I are." Remy stroked Damian's cheek, smiling.

They hesitated a moment to look into one another's eyes, then he grabbed her to him, his mouth at hers as soon as his arms circled her. She returned his consuming kiss and yanked his shirt up as he fumbled with the zip on her coverall. An hour later, they lay naked, entangled in his bed, and she explained what memories had returned since their last meeting. Damian pulled Remy close, kissing her forehead. "I really wish you would consider the surgery. Sure, you've gotten so much back (especially in the last year) but it's not all back and it would take years for it to happen this way. The exam would be like the practice tests here, and it would be entered into Central Computer by hand – you couldn't miss. I'll be there most of the time, too, as your owner-sponsor."

After a silence, Remy sighed. "So, why did you let her redecorate?"

"You know Patrissa just . . . happens." Damian laughed nervously then groaned pathetically. "You should see my closet. The drek she makes me is not normal."

"She's an actual designer now? I thought she was a DomeTrends buyer out of Dome 801. Why the drek would she be here at all?"

Damian sighed and lolled his head to the side, not looking at Remy. "Patrissa is a junior designer out of NuRoma, now, and she's leaving for the EuroDomes, soon."

"Yes, but why would she come here?"

"She owns a condo here, a gift from Dean for getting the designer job."

Remy slid from bed and walked to the bathroom. "See either much?"

"No." Damian patted next to him. "I miss you again. Come back to bed?"

"I will after I have a bath." Remy averted her eyes. Damian was lying: Patrissa and he were still lovers.

When Remy emerged from the bathroom, Damian had set a light lunch for them on his new glass-and-chrome table. Remy sat and pulled the NuPaper document toward her with dread and awe. Few documents were important enough to record on NuPaper. The Release of Consent contract was the one every denizen craved to both see and not see. She brushed her fingertips over it as she read it. Damian looked up, smiling. "Hungry, Rem?"

Remy turned the next page and read, looking over at Damian between reading each page; he was grinning, barely able to contain brimming excitement as she pored

over the contract. She returned her attention to the contract and read the final page, then exhaled. “You really want me to sign these.”

“If you understood them? Yes, I do.”

“I do.” Remy bowed her head. “I’ll sign after lunch. We’ll do it.”

Damian hurried the lunch plates to the table, set them down, and knelt next to her. “You mean it? You’ll sign yourself over to me?”

“I know we love each other; I trust it’s for life.” Remy shivered, afraid.

Damian took her hands and kissed them. “It’s going to be perfect, Rem. Once you’re a suitable spectrum class, we’ll get married.” He touched her stomach. “We’ll start a family.”

“Married?” Her voice cracked as her heart sank. “Why? I like you too much.”

Damian looked up at Remy in stunned realization. “I *know* the cameras weren’t there for the accident, Rem. You . . . you actually remember it?”

Remy nodded, eyes closed. “Last night. I was late to work, and the migraine came. That was the memory I got back. Damian, I can’t keep collecting my life piecemeal any more. I’m just this side of the UnderDome or, worse, DamCare. I am getting too old and am so tired of being a denizen. Being ‘The Remy’ doesn’t get the awe it once did. I want it back.” She put her arms around his shoulders, and he kissed her tenderly. “You were right all along; I should have listened earlier. I’ll cancel my place at the exam. I’ll get the surgery. We’ll get married and put these last awful ten years behind us.”

Damian squeezed her tightly, then moved to the chair next to hers. He happily chatted as Remy smiled patiently and poked at her lunch with her fork. As he started to eat her untouched meal, Damian’s plans for their life took shape. Remy would test up to Blue citizenship then attend and graduate University. Remy could either teach at the Academy or become a Junior Politician out of Dome 827, if there were representative seats available. They would have children as soon as possible. “If you’re already pregnant, we’ll put off the surgery.” Damian kissed Remy’s hand. “But just until the baby arrives.”

“I thought you didn’t want children, Damian.”

He explained his change of heart: the genome scans that the eugenics department had taken on citizens hadn’t gone well. In a moment of frustration, Damian had put his and Remy’s information in; the system had returned an astronomical chance for success for Damian and Remy to produce the first generation of genetically superior humans. “Think of it. You and I are destined to be the parents of NuHumanity.” He finished with a future of them growing old together and being buried side-by-side on University grounds as Dome 827’s greatest Eugenicist and their most famous student. “Together through eternity, and all you have to do is sign.” He pushed the contract

toward her and handed her a pen. As she turned the contract over to sign it, his VizArt screen trilled and a banner appeared: INCOMING CALL. "Wait here. I'll be back, you can sign, and we'll have champagne."

Damian walked to his bedroom to take the call. Remy stared at the contract then at the closed bedroom door. When he reappeared, Damian was wearing a jacket Remy didn't recognize. As he crossed under the light, the material showed a muted pattern; she dropped the pen, pushed the contract away, and watched him. "Emergency?"

"I have to go down to the lab; there's a problem with an experiment. I also forgot the department banquet I am required to attend tonight, so I won't be home until late." Damian kissed the top of Remy's head as he passed by her. "Will I see you after?"

"I have to work tonight, but I'll come back tomorrow morning."

"Domey. You can sign it, now, then come back at the end of your shift. By the time you get back, I'll be done filing it, and you'll belong to me. After that, you sleep here with me. No lab housing for my Remy." He waved and left the apartment. Remy counted to twenty slowly then walked to the door. Peeking out, Remy saw no one. Predictably, Damian had forgotten nothing and would not return until both the crisis and party had ended, well after Remy had begun her work shift. "Temporary override of residence system settings to pre-programmed setting A-13," Remy commanded. "Authorization: Administrator Thirteen."

The apartment replied in Patrissa's voice. "Authorization accepted."

"Secure entry; verbal notification if Damian 311-970807-002 exits elevator on this floor."

The unisex voice returned. "Accepted."

"Unlock terminal room." A wall panel slid aside into its pocket to reveal a small room untouched by Patrissa's hand. The carpet was the same as before, and the matte-gray blinds were closed. Remy strode into the room and checked his desk.

Damian's portable, old yet pristine, sat next to his terminal keyboard. Organized by date and research type, his cartridges were stored in a locked cartridge cabinet next to the terminal screen. Remy checked the connections at the back of the terminal. Eight color-coded lines connected to a hub: the seven colors of the spectrum and one grey connector. Thinking of Jack B. Nimble, Remy stepped back and sat carefully on Damian's ergonomic knee chair. Damian's system was already connected to Central Computer. Remy entered her semi-conscious meditative state, and logged in.

Her covert access to Central Computer was something Remy had uncovered with the help of her friend, Tem. He had found her only two years before, contacting her through Damian's VizComm connection while Damian was out teaching a class. Tem explained Remy had been a hacker on Central Computer who had disappeared around

the time of her accident. Years later, Tem had finally found her. Once Tem realized Remy was unable to use the system, he taught her how to commandeer local computer systems. Whenever she asked about his safety, he told her not to worry. With his help, she was able to traverse Central Computer and find Tem whenever she needed real help. Damian had finally brought out a copy of a Release of Consent contract. She needed real help.

Iram had made it clear she was never to sign any Release of Consent contract, no matter what. She kept her relationships with Iram and Tem separate; both served a purpose, but she felt if the one knew about the other, all three would be in serious danger. Once the ladder had been built, she shook off the grogginess and waited. Bored, she checked the traffic around her chain of temporary addresses. Data packets bounced to other addresses and sped to their destinations. Once she was out, any unlucky data passing through right then would spin off into to the infinite void of Central Computer. She had little fear of being caught; Enforcement didn't know what to look for and computer scientists preferred to argue whether Central Computer was built sentient or gained sentience through years of self-repair.

Remy believed it had been sentient as soon as it was brought online. None after Central Computer's creators possessed the prowess to replicate its sentience because Central Computer wouldn't allow it. Remy's only worry was whether or not its robotic minions were self-aware, as well. If it believed she caused it or its progeny harm, she would be punished. It allowed her and Tem through, and she was thankful. Central Computer knew she was special even after the Dome world had forgotten her. From the terminal box window on the GUI desktop, Remy saw words she longed to read:

Hello World.

Hello Tem. I have so much to tell you. I need your help.

Proceed.

Damian has given me a Release of Consent contract. He wants me to get neural implant surgery. Should I sign it?

It is an option. The surgery will allow you to fulfill your interrupted destiny.

I'm not sure that Damian intends on me getting there. Damian believes he and I are the progenitors of NuHumanity. He wants me pregnant, even now. He has said we will put off the surgery if I am. I am not and do not plan to be. I use the Dome-provided birth control. I am worried he is trying to put off the surgery for his own gains.

Tem did not reply for several minutes; Remy waited patiently.

This is not good news. Damian is trustworthy no longer. Nothing must bind you to him. The surgery center must hold possession of your consent.

He is with Patrissa, then.

He is in a laboratory to see a colleague's experiment be set in resin composite. When I monitored a call for sanitation service, I sent a message for him to attend. His later schedule involves her, however.

You sent him? Why?

I knew you would desire contact with me when you reached terminal access. I did not know you were close to releasing your consent. I did not know Damian was not trustworthy. It is good you contacted me. I can not help you if you sign with him.

Why is signing the Release of Consent with surgery center different?

Their sole goal is to complete the implant surgery. Have you other options?

I met a woman who said I should hop an IDT to Dome 101 to be a fun-girl.

Another good choice: freedom.

What do you mean, "Another good choice?" I would be selling my body!

Either choice is better than being possessed by Damian.

Remy paused, then wrote:

Tem, I met a man at work last night. He had eight black cables coming from his head, each with a connector end like the computer-to-wall connection. The connectors were the seven colors of the spectrum – red to violet and one grey, also. He looks like he was once a lab experiment. Do you know of any eugenics experiments involving cybernetics?

Do you know where the man with the cables is?

He works in the Human Sanitation Services department in 827's UnderDome.

This changes all.

Changes all? How?

Read carefully. The man you met is modified like me. I am connected to and running a secret system, one I have run for a decade. I do not know where my body is held. I am sorry I have hidden this from you for so long. I did not want you in such great danger, but I did not realize a man like me could walk the Dome world freely.

I understand why you would want to know more about him, then.

Your options are many and none are simple any longer. You may sign with

Damian and hope he will take you to get the surgery. You may contact the surgical center directly and have them take possession of you and hope the surgery will succeed. You may even go to Dome 101 and hope Damian will not send Enforcement to find you. Or you may choose to help me. Find the man with the cables. Learn if he knows of others like him and me. Tell me where they are, so I may contact them. With their help, I can surely be liberated like that man you met. Without his and your help, I risk becoming obsolete soon and disconnected permanently.

Obsolete? Disconnected? They're going to kill you?

I am a man on a machine, Remy. I am a peripheral to a system. When it is time to upgrade, I will be discarded like the being who came before me.

Tears dribbled down Remy's cheeks. She covered her face and thought of her future, of Tem's future. She loved Damian and wished to share her life with him, but he couldn't decide between Patrissa and her. Remy felt responsible to Tem, and Tem had helped her many times. She thought of what Iram said about signing the Release of Consent and sighed.

I'll help you. Will I ever get my life back, Tem?

Find me and I will make certain you will be counted among the greatest minds in the Dome world. End Transmission.

Remy removed herself from the system and sat staring at the dark terminal screen, emotionally emptied. She stood, carefully rolled the chair under the desk, and left the room. "Resume previous settings. Authorization: Administrator Thirteen."

"Accepted. Settings returned to normal." Remy swept up her shoes from the entry where she had left them a few short hours earlier. She put them on and looked sadly at the apartment before leaving to return to Darkside for a fitful afternoon nap and back before returning to work at the MediPlaza.

After an uneventful night on 200-North, Remy returned to Damian's apartment just after Solaray dawn with her bag of dirty uniforms. She wanted her day off (and her last day of luxury) to be with him. Remy hoped to surprise him and convince him to take the day off, too.

She had to use her administrator access to unlock the door and fully expected to catch Patrissa and Damian in his bed together. Instead, Remy found Damian's bed had not been slept in. She showered, dressed in a pair of satiny indigo pajamas, and rolled up the cuffs. Exhausted, Remy collapsed atop the soft comforter and fell asleep.

Remy woke to voices. "All I am asking, Dami, is that you see me off. I know you're

coming the next week, but you still need to give me a proper goodbye.”

Remy padded to the doorway; Damian (still in the same clothing he was wearing when he left the day before) and Patrissa were standing in the middle of the living room, talking. “Triss, I have a lot to do this week getting ready for my own trip. I’m expecting a visitor, so, if you would please go?”

“I’ll make it worth your time, Dami,” Patrissa cooed seductively. Remy cleared her throat, and Damian and Patrissa looked over to see Remy in Damian’s indigo pajamas. “What is she doing here?”

“Remy and I are negotiating a Release of Consent contract, and your presence is putting it in jeopardy. You need to leave now.”

Patrissa smiled gleefully. “You’re going to finally own her?”

“No, I am going to sponsor her for an experiment she and I discussed.” Damian tensed. “Patrissa, you need to go, now.”

“And does this experiment give her permission to wear indigo?”

“It was these or naked,” baited Remy. Patrissa’s gloating expression soured, just as Remy had hoped. “I could just remove them right now, ma’am.”

“I’m sure you could, Brown.” Patrissa kissed Damian on the cheek. “I’ll be back later so you can take me to dinner tonight. Some friends are stopping through and my father’s in town. I want to take them all to that great little restaurant near the Dome-Trends. You know, the one on the plaza you took me to on our anniversary?”

“Fine.”

“Wear something I designed, and throw those –” she pointed accusingly at Remy and the pajamas – “out.” Patrissa left a kiss on his mouth and departed, leaving Damian to Remy. As soon as the door closed, Remy walked into the bedroom.

Damian chased her. “How did you get in?”

“Janitorial access,” she lied, gathering her shoes from the bathroom.

“You look awfully good in those pajamas, Rem,” he said suggestively. She scoffed and dropped the bottoms then pulled the top over her head, leaving both pieces on the floor. “Awfully good out of them, too.” He reached for her as she snatched her coverall from under the bed.

She shook his hand off her shoulder and dressed hastily. “We both know where you were last night, Damian. I am dressing, and I am returning to Darkside – where I belong. I am not, I repeat, not, going through this again with you. Have a good life with your girlfriend.” Remy stuffed her bare feet into her shoes and yanked the zipper of her coverall up to her chin. Checking her backpack to make sure it was secured, she grabbed her bag of laundry from Damian’s closet and walked to the entry.

In despair and confusion, Damian whined, “But yesterday you wanted to sign!”

“Yesterday, I didn’t know you were still sleeping with Triss. One would think an Indigo could organize his women better. She is acceptable; I have potential. I’m not resting any hope of a future on a man who cannot commit to either of us. Drek, Damian! It would be more respectful to both of us if Triss were your wife and I were your fun-girl on the side!” Remy stopped in front of the door then turned to face him. “You need to ask her to marry you. Do it tonight, in front of her friends and her father. Goodbye, Damian. Have a good life.” Remy disappeared from the Havens through the service access and entered the UnderDome, weaving through tunnels to get to the University’s Inter-Dome Tram station. She took it across-Dome and arrived at her UnderDome destination: the Uniform Reclamation Center. The line at the Uniform Reclamation Center was mercifully short; they had her size ready to go when she reached the counter. Remy was out with clean, pressed uniforms in just over an hour.

Arriving at her Darkside studio, Remy stood at its doorway feeling stifled and trapped. Disheartened, she stepped in. The apartment door closed behind her. After hanging up her clean uniforms, Remy entered the kitchenette. Remy prepared a her vitamin shake; she heated her nutritional porridge tray as she choked the chalky mix down. “Travel channel.” Panning shots of Level Ones from around the Dome world were interspersed with pictures of happy citizen tourists visiting historic sites and exciting venues. She ignored the introduction’s narrator and kicked her shoes off, putting them back on when she felt the unpleasant floor under her feet. “Bed,” she grumbled. The single bed thrust out of the wall, nearly knocking her over. “Domey. Just Domey!” She sat on the edge of the bed, head in hands until the Qwik-Hot oven sounded that her meal tray was done. She took the tray from the oven and ate over the sink, frustrated at herself for not eating the lunch Damian had offered the day before.

Alone, Remy had to face her prospects. Damian’s betrayal wasn’t unexpected, but it hurt nonetheless. The thought of Jack B. and Tem endured for their surgeries made Remy wonder what would happen when she woke up. “Then again,” Remy mused to herself, “I might not wake up again at all.”

If she stowed away on an IDT to First Dome, she was afraid what would happen to her as a fun-girl. Tem wanted Remy to go to the one place that gave her nightmares – Human Sanitation Services – to find a Brown sub-denizen who wanted to use her like a fun-girl. Her prospects were bad. Even the examination worried Remy. The thought of Damian’s NuHumanity experiment looked less and less unpalatable. He wanted their children. They wouldn’t go to the Child Care Center like other denizen children – the unwanted pregnancies of the unwanted masses.

Remy rinsed the tray and thought of her mother, Maria. She walked to the bed and thought about asking her mother to take her Release of Consent, then rejected the

idea. Maria didn't need a reminder of failure to look after.

Remy sat on the bed, leaned back, then curled up on the bed, falling asleep quickly. Not long after she dozed off, Remy startled awake. On the VizTainment unit was a travel show highlighting Dome 101. "First Dome," the soothing female alto coaxed, "first in luxury, first in style. Whether you are interested in period architecture or a romantic getaway, First Dome holds a mystique all its own." A broad camera overview slowly spiraled down toward the gaudy architecture around the plaza. "The First Dome Plaza. Unlike the other perfectly round plazas found only in pre-elliptical Domes, it boasts a hexagonal metropolitan center. Each of its six sides blooms like a NuRose." Remy sat up and stretched, her attention fixed on the VizTainment unit. "Dome-Trends took over the old Central Government building three seasons ago and has turned First Dome into the new fashion and textile design mega-center. This season, say goodbye to NuParee and NuRoma; Pretaport style has descended on this source of fabric and inspiration. Original Dome, original fashion. Bold Red to shy Violet, citizens will find themselves dressed for success." Remy snorted in amusement as a mannequin in a plum velvet men's suit drowning in neon purple lace was rolled down a runway by a stern model in a mustard-yellow unitard. The new generation of Yellow designers might have been innovative, but they certainly wouldn't be rich. Violets, Indigos, and Blues had respectable images to maintain; the less innovative, the better.

"Next, the Museum of the Dome. The museum's historical wing chronicles the humble beginnings of First Dome to Central Computer's architectural plans for the anticipated 900-Series Domes. In the museum's fine arts wing, the best art collection begins and ends here. Only premier temporary exhibits show at this museum.

"Across from the museum is First Dome's fabulous Grand Dome Hotel. It can only be described as the Havens on Level One; its three spectacular buildings border three of the six sides of the Plaza. Luxuriously appointed suites comfort the Dome world's most prominent and powerful dignitaries. It even boasts the offices and residential suites of First Dome's Violet." Video of a man in dark purple robes walking down the steps to a waiting limousine changed to him officiating a marriage ceremony. "Not only overseeing Conferences and judicial proceedings, the Dome Violet also performs weddings for the ultra chi-chi."

"Weddings," Remy scorned. "What a waste of a Violet's mind and time."

"Lastly, no visit would be complete without dancing the StarLites away at the Sun Aura Della Kupla nightclub." A large building with beautiful bullet-shaped windows of colored glass was shown at a three-quarters view. As it panned to a night-lit scene, a large round rosette window glowed and pulsed as spinning lights streaked across it from the inside. The grey-carpeted stone steps outside were thick with people trying

to get in through one of the two arched doorways.

The interior camera shot revealed vaulted ceilings with ornate sculpture next to mounted spinning lights. A sea of people near the entrance danced while colored lights spun wild circles over the crowd. The dance music featured a booming heart-beat bass with a melody and harmony created by a blend of techno-synthesized and orchestral music. Deep inside, an interior set of doors was guarded even more carefully. The walkway to the doors was roped off, a two-meter by four-meter area surrounded by people on the outside of the ropes. The door opened, and a VizStar with entourage stepped out to camera flashes and reaching arms. “The Synapse Room boasts the world’s premier celebrity client list. Autograph seekers, bring your mini-portables and a spare memory card! Even popular celebs have been seen held at the Synapse Room’s doors. “The Sun Aura Della Kupla is the oldest and most famous nightclub in the world. Before it became a nightclub, historians believe it was the Dome world’s first version of a DomeTrends. Chi-chi place to shop in becomes chi-chi place to pop in!”

Remy leaned back and closed her eyes. “Mute.”

“Incoming call.”

She sat up, ready to hear what Damian wanted to negotiate. “Answer.”

A terminal window popped up over the video with the text:

Command the room to release the keyboard.

“Room, release keyboard,” Remy said, wary. Tem had not contacted her at her Darkside residence for over a year because it was too dangerous. She typed: *Tem?*

Tell me about the man with the cables, Remy.

I was on 200-North. No one died last night.

You know how to contact him. You must contact him today.

He’s at the Human Sanitation Services office. I don’t have business there.

Does he know where you are? Is he able to find you?

Of course not. If I had told him, he would have taken it as an invitation for sex.

You must find him, Remy. Offer whatever he wants. Find him today.

No. Human Sanitation scares me.

Please.

Remy froze; Tem never used the word; it wasn’t him. She shoved the keyboard

back into its niche. “Disconnect. Refuse connection with sender. Authorization: Administrator Thirteen.”

“Accepted. Connection blocked. Sender blocked.” The wall panel closed slowly, obfuscating the keyboard. Remy sat on the edge of her bed, tapping her clasped hands against her chin in worry.

A pounding on the door made Remy turn. She scrambled up; the door opened to reveal one of her neighbors, ready to bolt to the next apartment. “Spectrum in the halls,” he panted before racing to the next room down, banging on the door to repeat the message. The narrow hallways echoed the message with many voices then fell silent. Doors snicked shut; Remy tensed. Someone was being hunted. The last warning had been two months before; Enforcement had come for a resident fifteen floors up on a Release of Consent warrant. They had never had a citizen on the fifth floor during the ten years Remy lived there.

Her next-door neighbor looked over at her, mouthing, “Is it us?”

Remy listened. Slow, deliberate footsteps were approaching; it was the hard-heeled formal shoe of a high-level citizen. Grim, Remy nodded. Her neighbor cringed and stepped back into his own room. Remy retreated into her own room to wait. Tem must have been discovered, and she had fallen into Enforcement Intel’s trap. “Bed away.” The bed slipped back into the wall. “Table.” A small shelf slid out of the wall and she removed her stools from the closet, setting one up on the side closest to the door; she sat at the other. If it was for her, she would at least meet the spectrum on her own terms. Her door slid open; Remy tried to swallow but her throat was dry and swollen tight. Shaking, Remy sat up proudly upright on her stool, ready for whatever her visitor would say or do.

“This is your apartment?” Damian entered; Remy fell from her chair.

“W-what are you doing here?” As Damian reached a hand down, Remy reached hers up to him.

“When you said you didn’t need my help moving ten years ago, you meant it, didn’t you?”

“Damian,” she said, standing with his help, “what are you doing here?”

“I told Patrissa I didn’t want to see her any more. She yelled. For an hour.” He turned toward the kitchenette and looked through Remy’s cabinets. “At least I don’t have to go to dinner any more.” He picked up a shake pack. “Do you drink these?”

“I need the extra vitamins for my job,” Remy lied. “It still doesn’t explain why you are in Darkside!”

“Well, you won’t need them any more. I’ve come to get you to bring you home with me.”

Remy laughed. "You came to Darkside to get me."

He leaned against the counter, facing her. "I chose you, Remy."

"Oh, drek," whispered Remy, serious. "You didn't."

"I thought about what you said to me. I would rather have your potential than her acceptability. So, Patrissa is gone."

"What about the Release of Consent?"

"It's at the apartment." Damian handed her two resin cards printed with their names and surnames: Remy was identified as his baggage. "Two IDT tickets to Dome 831 for next week; Keith's waiting for us and has reassured me the surgery will succeed. You should be able to pass initial citizenship immediately after the surgery."

"A citizen that fast?"

"I explained a few things, and he understands my urgency." Damian grinned, reaching his hand for hers. "On the trip there, we'll have a luxury cabin to ourselves. I'll admit we can't go out among the regular passengers, but I hoped you wouldn't want to. On the trip back, it won't be so nice a cabin, but I was hoping you wouldn't want to leave it, either, because we'd be celebrating our honeymoon." Damian kissed Remy's hands, then her cheek. "Will you come with me? Please?"

"Yes!" Remy threw her arms around his neck, laughing and weeping, her doubt dissipated. They kissed, and Damian escorted her downstairs to an auto-piloted taxi.

The first thing Remy noticed when she arrived at his apartment was the familiar, homey smell of her mother's cooking. Remy looked over her shoulder at Damian as he followed her into his Havens residence. He smiled. "Just after you left, I realized I'd made the worst mistake of my life letting you go. So, I called Maria and begged her to deliver a catered dinner for two – whatever she had available. She refused at first, thinking it was for Patrissa, but when I explained it was a dinner celebrating your upcoming citizenship, she was exceptionally helpful." He walked Remy to a chair and pulled it out so she could sit. "Maria asked me to tell you to call her later."

Remy inhaled, tasting the flavor in the aroma. Years of nutritional porridge made the scent of citizen food sate her desire for flavor. Remy began to eat, enjoying bite after bite with sighs of delight. Damian grinned as he watched her. Midway through the meal, Remy stopped and looked up at him, worried. He startled at her change in demeanor. "Damian, why are you doing this for me? Really?"

Damian nodded, exhaling. "Despite her need to force it to happen, Patrissa has no part in NuHumanity's future. She refuses to listen to anyone, she can't understand my work, and she's genetically inferior to you. There's no debate; you're who I need."

"And all I have to do to have everything I want is to sign the contract."

"And the other one, when you're a Red citizen."

“Other one?”

“Legislation just passed that make marriage licenses only valid as NuPaper documents. It seems my bid for NuHumanity got a little more notice than I thought it had; we’ll have NuPaper pedigree documentation to leave our progeny. I don’t want to wait until you’re an ‘acceptable’ caste. We’ll test you up after we’re married; I just want to be with you.”

“Genetic recombinant scanning is really going to happen, then,” Remy whispered. “People matched not out of love but their potential to create NuHumanity.” She exhaled. “I bet Politician Dean was behind that; he’ll probably demand arranged marriages for the ‘Protection of the Dome.’” She shook her head. “There has been nothing like being on the wrong end of his legislation for the last ten years.”

Damian licked his lips then laughed nervously. “Who cares what Politician Dean thinks or does? You and I are the perfect couple, Rem. Our genes will produce the first super-children. Ours! It’s as though Central Computer knew all along and put us together because of it.”

“Super-children,” Remy whispered. She watched him carefully. “Are you sure the results were correct? I can’t imagine with you coming from a Blue and a Yellow and me from a Green and a Yellow that we could be the parents of a whole family of Violets!”

“Rem, I personally tested our recombinations at least ten times that night. You and I have a nearly sixty percent chance of conceiving a genetically superior child in any given pregnancy. Sixty percent!”

Remy dropped her fork. “You said the chance was astronomical!”

“It is! All of the other test subjects recombined at less than one percent. We just need to have two, maybe three successes, to get Conference to legislate the Dome-wide sample and begin arranged breeding.”

Remy sat quiet for a long time. Finally, in a soft voice, she asked, “What about the not-so-super children?”

“Sure, we’ll have to terminate some pregnancies, but after we succeed – with a boy and a girl – the legislation will follow right after. With medical supplementation, our grandchildren will be able to choose anyone they want to mate with. We could see NuHumanity in two generations. In our lifetime, Rem.”

“Terminate some pregnancies? Medical supplementation? Arranged breeding?” Remy trembled, suddenly queasy. “You’re talking as if NuHumanity is the only logical conclusion, Damian.”

Damian smiled, his eyes glazed with true belief. “It is, Rem. NuHumanity is.”

“I don’t feel so well.” Remy retreated to the bathroom. After splashing cold water onto her face, Remy returned to the main room of his apartment. “Patrissa!”

Patrissa was standing in the foyer, dressed for a night out. She offered Remy bored disdain before turning back to Damian. "I forgive your temporary lack of judgment. Go dress, Dami. You're coming with me to the Mirage Café right now."

"I explained my position clearly, Patrissa. Our relationship is over."

Patrissa screamed, "It is not over! Dean and I will destroy your career if you dare choose that Brown snag over me!"

"Snag?" Remy looked at Patrissa and Damian, confused.

"A derisive term for prostitute, Remy. Think of the cheapest fun-girl one could find," explained Damian, "and get cheaper than that." He turned to Patrissa. "That was uncalled for. You need to leave."

"You would destroy Damian because he chose me over you, Patrissa?"

"Yes! Yes!" Patrissa laughed, throwing her hands in the air. "Thank the Dome one of you two understands!" She turned to Remy and pointed at Damian. "Explain to Dami that his only alternative is to allow me my dignity." Patrissa eyed Damian. "He has to wait until you are a superior spectrum to me to leave me."

"What? No!" Damian aggressively stepped forward toward Patrissa.

Remy put her hand up to stop his approach; she tried to sound calm. "Damian, why does Patrissa know the purpose of the surgical experiment?"

"I had to tell her." Damian cringed as both women looked at him; neither was smiling. "Patrissa was devastated. I couldn't get her to understand why I would want to stop seeing her." He smiled to Patrissa, hopeful. "So, when Remy's a spectrum, you will step aside?"

"Superior spectrum," Patrissa repeated.

"That's unrealistic, Triss."

"That my offer, Dami."

Damian looked to Remy, unable to come up with a response the three could live with. "Go to dinner with Patrissa; there is no reason to ruin your career just as it's starting to reach to the high Havens. I mean, I might not survive the surgery, and Patrissa is acceptable."

Surprised, Damian asked, "You actually understand the risks, Remy?"

Irate, Remy snapped, "I'm still me no matter what color cloth hangs on my body, Damian! I didn't wake up stupid, just without my memories!"

"Technically you did wake up stupid," corrected Patrissa, checking her fingernails casually.

Remy pointed at Patrissa. "If you insist on a war for Damian's affections, you will find yourself battling nightmare specters and shadows until the end of your miserably pathetic life. Just walk away from Damian for your self and sanity, Patrissa. Central

Computer brought him and me together for a reason.” Remy looked over to Damian; smiled weakly, walked to her, and put his arm around her tightly. “Damian has a vital role to play in the future of humanity, and, apparently, so do I.”

Damian spoke with authority. “I order you to leave, Patrissa.”

“Force me to leave, Dami, and she’s dead by tomorrow night.”

“What are you talking about?” Damian looked from Remy to Patrissa, worried.

“Dead, Damian. Remy will be un-living, chars, in her way to an abandoned canister then the wasteland. No experiment for you. The Dome can survive without one more denizen soaking up resources. Not a citizen? Not a crime.”

“We can come to an agreement of some kind –”

“Agreement? Patrissa just threatened my life, Damian!”

Remy tried to pull from his grasp; Damian tightened his arm around her and laughed nervously. “Triss didn’t mean it, Rem.”

“Yes, I did mean it, Damian.”

Remy sighed. “This is damaged; I’m leaving.”

“Why?” Damian grabbed Remy’s arm anew just as she twisted away from him.

Remy pried Damian’s fingers from her arm. “She will not stop coming, Damian. I could be an Indigo Politician and always fear that she will come for me. No. I’m going to live out whatever life I have left in Darkside and keep my head down. I love you more than anything, but I am not willing to die for this. Not even for you.”

Patrissa applauded slowly. “Ten years of the same performance has gotten a little dull, Remy. You will not chase her again, Dami; I will not tolerate it.”

Damian shook in outrage. “Neither of you has the right to control an Indigo! You are both well below my caste! I am sick of you both fighting like caged, uh . . .”

Patrissa bit her lip, holding back a laugh. “Oh, Dami.”

“Caged Browns,” Remy finished. “Fighting like caged Browns.”

“I never said that,” he insisted.

“You meant to,” countered Patrissa.

“I’m neither a servant nor a Labbie, Damian,” rejoined Remy.

“You could be either quite easily. A whisper in the right ear, and I could own you within the year, Brown.”

Damian stepped in front of Remy, arms out slightly. “You wouldn’t.”

Remy squeezed his hand. “You can’t reason with her, no matter how you try. Just go with her, already!”

“Fine, I’ll go to your drekking dinner, Patrissa.”

“Wear something I made. I want my father to see what I’ve been designing.”

“Domey,” he grumbled. Remy followed Damian into his bedroom. He stripped

in front of her and grabbed clothing roughly from their hangers then yanked everything from the closet and threw it across the floor and bed. He sat on the end of the bed, naked, and cried. "I didn't want it to be like this. We were going to have a wonderful night – a wonderful life."

"Life never goes how any of us plans it," she said softly. Remy sat next to Damian and pet his hair as he sobbed on her. She leaned forward to see his face, and smiled at him. His mouth sought hers, and she returned his kiss when his lips connected. They fell back on the bed together, and he tugged at her coverall's zipper. "Hey, no," Remy panted between deep kisses. "You have to go."

Damian buried his face at her neck. "She'll leave when she figures it out. I'll protect you from her. I'll protect our children from her. Don't go. Please. I can't live without you. Don't make me live without you."

Remy sat up; Damian stayed down on the bed, covering his eyes with his palms. Looking around the piles, Remy pulled out a matte pair of pants and a shirt with a barely visible pattern. "She made these. See? They still have the tag: Patrissa Designs. They're not as hideous, so you won't be embarrassed in front of Politician Dean."

"Will you be here when I get back?" he asked as he dressed slowly.

Remy wiggled the fingers of her right hand at Damian; the star in the sapphire sparked in the light. "As long as I wear this, I will always come back to you. Always." She snipped the resin tags from the shirt and slacks with a nail clipper from his bedside table. He turned Remy's face up to his and touched his lips to hers before clinging to her. They held one another in star-crossed pathos. He slid a finger down Remy's cheek, gave her a final kiss, and commanded the door unlock.

Damian stepped out; Remy waited, then walked meekly to the kitchen, head bowed. As Remy cleaned after the interrupted dinner, Patrissa wrapped her arm around Damian's and led him from the Havens. As soon as the door closed, Remy slid down the nearest cabinet front and crouched on the floor, holding her arms over her head as she wept. "Incoming call," the apartment chirruped.

"Take a message," Remy shouted through sobs. "Damian's out."

"Video message is for Remy 827-970315-001. Accept?"

"No! Authorization: Administrator Thirteen."

After a ten second pause, the computer said, "Authorization override. Video message for Remy 827-970315-001 incoming." Remy walked to the VizTainment unit, trepidatious. The abstract painting flickered out. In its place was bright white text on a black screen:

Do not forgive. Do not forget.

After a jarring explosion of color, video clips of Patrissa and Damian beat into Remy's brain at furious speed; she watched the screen, mesmerized. From the time Remy was thirteen, coinciding pictures of Patrissa and Damian's more intimate moments were juxtaposed to each were video captures of Remy; in horror, she realized the recordings' time stamps were identical. The time she caught Damian being callous wasn't the first time Damian had laughed with his friends about Remy's awkwardness. On the day Damian and Remy shared a first kiss together, he had already checked the class standings and celebrated all afternoon with Patrissa by having sex with her in his bedroom. Young Patrissa's violent outburst wasn't jealousy; it was betrayal. Remy's heart sank. This was a year before she and Damian confessed they were one another's first lovers, a memory she had retrieved early and cherished for years. That memory had kept Remy returning to Damian year after year.

Taken the day after Remy's fall from the NuPine, VizCapture of Remy lying unconscious in post-operative care played side-by-side with an intimate video of Damian and Patrissa. Patrissa was in-Dome at the time for citizenship examinations, and Damian confessed his still-strong love for Patrissa as he lay with her post-coitus in a bed at the Grand Dome Hotel.

After a short pause, a blur of afternoons a not-quite-twenty lovestruck Remy was being arrested for crossing over Level One, Damian and Patrissa were in his University dormitory room having gymnastic sex. Again and again, Remy's worst moments were juxtaposed with Damian's and Patrissa's happy or loving moments.

The screen went dark for nearly ten seconds then showed Remy on her way back from to Darkside from the Uniform Reclamation Center just the day before. Video of Damian and Patrissa in her bedroom at her apartment started side-by-side with it. "But what will you do if she doesn't make it through the surgery, Dami?"

"I don't know." Damian exhaled, pensive. "I suppose she'll be sedate. It's based on the same surgery as mental neutering. The chance it will work is slim, but I know the old Remy would do it for the chance to change the Dome world."

Patrissa kissed his shoulder. "If it doesn't work, come back to me. I don't care what you have to do to create your perfect children in her body, Dami. As long as you give her to me when you've finished." The screen went dark. Bright white text appeared.

Know where your loyalty lies. End Transmission.

A rapid fire color burst disoriented Remy; she lost her balance and fell over. Whatever Tem had done implanted the video directly into her memory, and it all culminated into one terrifying truth: Damian was going to use Remy's uterus as a laboratory then

give her to Patrisa to abuse until Remy died early and mindless. Remy looked up at the shelf where the yellow glass bird sat, dragged a chair over, and snatched the yellow bird from the high shelf. Bird in hand, Remy climbed down from the chair and paced the living room slowly. Heartbroken, she looked at the tiny glass creation, fingered its coldness, then flung it with a scream of rage at the VizTainment unit screen. The resin display cracked; its displayed painting shuddered into digital static then went black; the bird shattered. Remy swept past the table and grabbed the Release of Consent contract and tore it apart, throwing small pieces around like confetti. Picking up the larger pieces, Remy rended them even smaller and scattered those around the floor. Stalking into his room she kicked what was on the floor to the bathroom. Grabbing an armload, Remy stuffed it into the toilet bowl and yanked the towel-warming bar from the wall. It sparked, then the apartment turned off power to the bathroom. Patrisa's computerized voice purred, "Maintenance call –"

"Override! Authorization: Administrator Thirteen!"

Remy used the metal and resin rod to stuff the clothing into the toilet then flushed. It overflowed onto the floor as she kicked the remainder of the dripping pile into the kitchen. She pressed the button to open the compacting pre-disposal unit and stuffed a mound of violet-blue clothing in. Remy shoved it a few times until it latched. It shrieked and groaned, offering satisfying snaps and pops as resin tags, closures, and buttons were ground and shredded. It beeped, and Remy pulled open the drawer, tossing mangled fabric covered with food all around Damian's kitchen. She added another load and destroyed that pile, as well. Impatient, Remy grabbed a shirt and stuffed it into the in-sink disposal unit and flicked it on. It spun the shirt several times, squealed, whined, then surrendered with a *ka-thunk!* and foul, burnt-resin odor. She tried to yank the shirt from the throat of the sink; it ripped loudly but wouldn't be removed. The compactor beeped; she pulled that set out and dropped in the final load. It was then she saw, on the counter, a white pastry box. In it was a small cake decorated with Maria's careful hand. *Congratulations Remy*, it read. Next to it were two heavy, marbled resin plates.

Remy grabbed both plates and walked in front of the glass-topped table, raising them over her head to smash them down onto the glass surface when a migraine split her mind apart. Remy dropped to the floor and screamed in agony; the plates rolled from her hands and landed on the carpet as she fell. Her eyes squinted shut, Remy ground her open palms against either side of her head, panting. The disorientation wrenched her stomach, and Remy vomited under Damian's table. Jumbled images, sounds, and feelings assaulted her. She crawled away toward the entry and pulled herself up. Using the wall to hold herself up, Remy stumbled from the apartment and

Havens through the service exit. Once in the UnderDome, Remy wandered as the waves brought new agony. Several times she was left on her hands and knees to empty her stomach on the walkways. Denizens avoided her, especially when the small robotics approached to clean. Incapacitated, Remy could only watch the robotics clean the floor centimeters from her nose.

The storm raged in her brain, and Remy could only focus on one thing: home. In a lucid moment, Remy found herself on her mother's doorstep. Another jab of pain sent Remy lurching forward, hitting Maria's entry door with her face before she curled up into a tight crouch on the front mat. Maria opened the door, irritated. "You could have used the bell," she snapped before looking down in maternal alarm and shock. "Baby, what did they do to you?"

"My memories, Mama," Remy wept, her nose and mouth bleeding onto her blood-smeared lower face. "Help me."

"Your memories?" Maria hurried Remy into the house and to a couch as another round of nausea sent Remy onto her hands and knees on the floor. Maria darted into the kitchen and returned; she smoothly slid a metal bowl onto the floor under Remy's face then jogged to the private rooms at the back of the condominium. Remy panted over the bowl then vomited into it. She wept silently, dreading the next wave of agony. Maria returned with a cup of water and three seedlike pills. "Take them. Now."

The pills dissolved in Remy's mouth, and immediately the pain in her head evaporated. As Remy began to fall unconscious, Maria helped her daughter onto the couch. Anaesthetic coolness spread over Remy's body, and Remy fell into a dreamless sleep on her mother's sofa.