Tilyou’s Daughters

-- We are only what we appear to others --

Part 1

1.

Morgan listened to the sounds of the restaurant and counted them; the creaking of its axles as it looked towards the primordial sea and the glossed metropolis, the crying of nighttime gulls, the rhythm of the pianists tap-dancing fingers, the clinking of glasses, the rattling of jewelry like some secret code of wealth, the shuffling of feet, the velvet acquiescence of the servers who had been trained to withhold their equilibrium in a shaky ballet, the somewhat labored breathing of Arno, who had appeared behind her, holding a glass of whiskey that clinked its ice as he swirled the ichor in a counter rotation to the restaurant itself.

Arno looked like a frog who had walked out of the Hudson River and, like the ancestral transition of apes to humans, become what some could artistically speculate as the genetic manifestation of this in-between genome. Morgan suspected that he had never been handsome, even when he was younger. Although this description of Arno was common among the other Daughters, Morgan fancied an extra step, describing to herself in case of insensitivity that her Auditor was not the end of this hypothetical amphibian evolution, but the rendition of one step before it, like a caveman to the modern man. His wide set eyes, his bulging cheeks, the warts that dotted his neck like barnacles on docks…the rotund man even liked to take mud baths in the Uppers. A waiter floated by and offered a complimentary custard. Arno slurped and burped and Morgan kept to her rotating gaze. Arno washed down his indigestion with whiskey, which seems to come from anything these days, and was now sipping on his own espresso that had floated his way.

Eventually he said, “Are your enjoying your cross-pollination, my little bee?”

*Little bee*. This was Arno’s universal and universally unwelcomed term of endearment for Tilyou’s Daughters. This invoked several psycho-linguistic gymnastics, since bees are typically male, referring to both his lack of natural education and adolescent primers on sexual intercourse. Additionally, Arno’s wielding of such an innocent name implied that the frog was higher in the stratospheric ladder of the Globe from the very top of the opulent hotel rooftop cocktail bars in the Uppers to the grimy, inhumane sewers at the bottom of the Dredges. This was not entirely untrue, Morgan realized, since Arno’s actual position in the Tilyou ecosystem was more akin to an accountant, a mission giver, and an employer, a horizontal branching path in the inner machinations of the Globe’s metaphorical white blood cells of which Morgan and her ilk were proud and faithful members.

One thing was for certain, however. The Globe was indeed a hive, ever since being vaulted on the eight colossal socles like an octuplet of diligent Atlases, ever since annexing the lands of Steeple Chase and the surrounding Luna Park and Dreamland like some parasitic root, ever since detaching by ways of advanced hydraulics wrought from Ezekial Otis’s mechanical mind, the grandson of the very same Otis who had invented the elevator and first presented it not far from where Morgan and Arno sat…in fact, as the giant lazy-suzie that was the restaurant spun clockwise, Morgan could see where the first elevator, shown eons ago, at this rate, was showcased just down the way, haunting that spot of land that had since turned into a warehouse like some historical birthmark. And within this hive of hedonism, invention, escapism, there was indeed a Queen Bee, and as much as Morgan had attempted to keep this affection out of her own mouth, Arno had succeeded in proliferating the naive and somewhat playful moniker within Tilyou’s Daughters, who now referred to the descendent of the original Steeplechase Empire’s granddaughter, Ophelia Tilyou, as the Queen Bee.

Morgan watched a waiter drift by and collect their plates. The bill, of course, was paid for. She smoothed out the hems of her dress and plucked lint from her blazer as she and Arno sat in silence, watching the world drift by as if on a train car.

“I’m surprised you didn’t go to the Circus, or the sauna, or the gardens. The restaurant is better there,” Arno said, reigniting the conversation. “You could have gone anywhere on your ticket, and yet you choose here.”

“Just because something is in the Uppers doesn’t mean it’s better,” Morgan said, “and likewise just because something is in the Middles doesn’t mean there is a certainty of lower quality. Besides, I like this turntable of a place.”

Arno giggled and it sounded like the happenings of a child. “The Globe is founded on several principles. One of which is social stratification. How do you expect to live with the elites in the Uppers if you don’t have a taste for it?”

Morgan grimaced. “One rung at a time, Arno. Take your predilections elsewhere. I’m sure you will find ears to bend in Oslo’s or the Oyster Lounge.”

“Bah,” Arno said, “that is all people who think they have power. It’s all ‘who do you know’ and ‘who can you know’. It’s a ladder I’ve already climbed.”

Morgan knew that Arno only said this because he was uncomfortable with the Manhattan Elite who vacationed at the Globe or the Uppers residents that have socially seceded from the concrete jungle to live a life of metropolitan hedonism that they perceive as a utopia, which was what the Uppers sold as if on a silver platter, and quite well, actually.

Morgan’s patience had thinned with her employer / accountant / keeper. She said, “Why did you come here, Arno?”

Arno croaked, “I was hoping for was one of your Sisters, but alas I was sent for you.”

“Sorry to disappoint.”

Arno leaned in, smelling like brine, even though the restaurant was perfumed, and espresso floated on his breath. The low murmur of the server’s ballet accompanied the pianist at the edge of the room, the shake of a cocktail being mixed. He said, “There is cancer in the hive.”

“There always is,” Morgan reminded, “someone is always trying to kill Queen Bee. In case you haven’t realized, that’s what the Daughters are for.”

“What if one of the Daughters had gone missing?” Arno said, raising a greasy eyebrow.

A cold hand gripped Morgan’s spine. She had never conceptualized these concepts in tandem. Tilyou’s Daughters, the sublime secret service of the Globe, the feminine watchful eyes of the System, the extension of the enigmatic and mythical Queen Bee’s fist of her justice and the palm of her charity. There was a different revolution bubbling every day along the social hierarchy, and contrary to Morgan’s own beliefs when she was first inducted into the sociological bloodstream of the Globe’s ecology as a child, wealth did not determine the likelihood of coups, only the mediums. The poor rave about worker’s rights, the sweats on their brows traveling from the bottom of the Dredges to the vaulted ceilings of the Uppers. The Middles, of which the rotating restaurant in which Morgan and Arno currently sat, argued that the middle class, the *working* class, was bloated and by capital mathematics of sheer numbers carry the Globe’s people in their shoulders. The wealthy wage war on paper and in cocktail parties, with double meanings among the rattling of expensive, seafloor scooped pearls. It was ultimately all the same. But the Daughters were paladins of the Queen Bee, her regency earned through birthright and maintained through savvy.

Arno’s knew made Morgan feel like she was standing above one of the crystalline pools in the Uppers, looking down into the depths from a great height. It was always like this before an assignment, sometimes given so suddenly as to make abandoning your old identify easier, to keep you from getting attached. Mentally, she closed her eyes and jumped.

“Missing,” Morgan repeated.

“There is information that suggests a coup, and several Daughters have already gone missing.”

“They could be in the field, or spending their Tickets like I am.”

Arno jiggled with a phlegmy chuckle. “I’m afraid not, little bee. This was a job for Samantha, but she was the one found missing.” He pulled a pipe, a can of tobacco, and a folded polaroid from the inside of his jacket. He slid the picture across the table and began to tamp the tobacco. Preemptively, he said, “Sorry, little bee.”

Morgan turned to Arno, red hair twirling like the feathers of a phoenix. She unfolded the picture and immediately recognized the semblance of who Samantha was, feeling a heavy pang of sadness in the image before her. She knew Samantha very well. They were of similar age and became Daughters together. They had a similar build: lithe, extraordinarily tall in heels. Her buoyant golden locks curled to her shoulders like candy cane spirals, and Morgan always thought that she worked best within the Uppers, her delicate fingers perfect for stroking many things on powerful, wealthy men, her voice a siren song that beckoned secrets. Now in the photograph Morgan could not help but feel in danger herself; her leopard-esque body was stuck in 2D, crumpled on her bed with bloodied tendrils damping the sheets, her eyes looking like asphyxiated fish.

“What happened?” Morgan asked.

“The little bee got murdered is what happened.”

“Listen you frog,” Morgan said, “I implore you to be a little more sensitive unless you want that pipe down your throat.”

Arno stared at Morgan, and she started back. Eventually his clayed expression seceded. He said, “We don’t know who did it. At first, we thought it was a classic broad getting got. Sorry. But something about this seems amiss.”

“And the Queen? How is she?” Morgan had never met the Queen Bee, no one has, but she was always the first on her mind. For Morgan and her Sisters, the status of the Queen Bee had become synonymous with the state of the Globe, and by extension, themselves.

“There is always a coup. Everyone knows that. But none of them have targeted Tilyou’s Daughters, which means no one has really targeted the Queen.”

“Because this would imply that they know who the Daughters are,” Morgan said, feeling suddenly uneased.

She called a waiter and ordered a glass of gin. It tasted particularly good because the Globe refused to recognize prohibition, and as their quasi-nation state the United States could do nothing about it. This brought some of the more guiled folks into the threshes of the Globe, which was an interesting year. Now all of them, even the wealthiest of peddlers have sunken in their drink, down into the dank and oyster shelled Lowers, frothing like crabs in the street as they sip at their bottles of grain alcohol like a teat. The waiter arrived and she offered for Arno to sip it, and, in his special effort to please at every opportunity, took a sip, offered unearned wisdom on the tasting notes of birch and pine, and handed it back to Morgan. After he seemed fine for thirty seconds, Morgan took a sip and determined his pallet must have been fake.

“Could it be someone from the inside?” Morgan asked.

“Might be,” Arno said, clasping his hands around his vested stomach. He puffed sagely on his pipe, looking like a chimney. Through the corner of his eye he said, “Could be you.”

“Arno, I-”

“I’m kidding,” Arno interrupted, “Couldn’t be you.”

“Why not?”

Arno harumphed and shakily stood. A waiter passed by with flutes of champagne and he took one off the tray. With a satisfied grin, Arno said, “Queen Bee asked for you personally.”

Morgan shivered. “Why?”

But he was already gone, disappeared behind the columns and the humdrum of automatons.

Morgan sank back in her chair, the picture of Samantha’s twisted corpse burning in her blazer pocket. She sipped her gin and watched the sunset from the rotary. Her heart skipped a beat when she realized that Arno had not replenished her supply of Steeples, the only cigarettes that she enjoyed. The restaurant was facing the green sea beyond Coney Island when she stood up and left to return to the Lowers, the taste of birch and pine a phantom dancing on her tongue.

*a*.

*The philosophical scaffolding embedded within the Globe’s history is evident within its sociological stratification. Created amidst the injunction by George Tilyou against the supposed cronies that had planted the socles in the middle of his carney empire of Steeplechase, the Globe was designed, and invested by the community, to be the world’s first resort, skyscraper, media tower, and otherwise utopian escape from the threshes of the morally fallen Manhattan across the pond, which was ironic considering that the investors who had shepherded this entire architectural experiment were nothing short of snake oil salesmen. Now finding himself with a reputation at stake from getting got, George Tilyou, bold entrepreneur, decided to make the Globe as it was intended, as a fashion towards those who would defy his abilities to entertain, to deliver on manifesting theatre, to erect the spectacle just as he had done with Steeplechase itself way back in 1897.*

*The Globe was architectural hedonism manifest, with the poor being in the Lowers, holding up the great width of the Middles, and finally rising to a spherical point of the cusp of the Globe and its accompanying lighthouse nothing short of the corona from the sun, the elite class forever offered to the gods but latched onto the steel socles like an anchor, with Tilyou rising with his hands upon his hips, the wind blowing from the Atlantic Sea, as if taunting the gods which have held dominion over the sky. The Globe contained numerous attractions spread along the social strata: 15 restaurants (one of them revolving), a hotel, four saunas, a hippodrome, an opera hall, a roof top garden, two Olympic gymnasiums (located at the Uppers and the Middles). It had several self-sustaining gardens, two plazas, a helicopter pad, a machine workshop. It contained a robust school system. There was a police force. It contained hotels originally meant to hold upwards of 50,000 visitors but now housed, at last census, 70,000 permanent residents and rotating 5,000 guests, which approximately 35,000 of the population residing in the slushy dredges of the Lowers. The mechanical organs of the Globe resided entirely in the Lowers, and the steam from its automating powers increased the temperature of the bottom floors into a nigh-tropical ecosystem.*

*And then there were Tilyou’s Daughters, the secret force of Ophelia Tilyou’s feudal reach, the white blood cells of the hive, the barometers for the Globe’s equilibrium. To know of the Daughters is to be a Daughter yourself or an Auditor. They exist in many forms; escort, housekeeper, nanny, prostitute. The Daughters know who they are, exchanging winks and other signs of acknowledgment as they float from the upper strata to the lower strata and back again, the circuits of Ophelia Tilyou’s legion a stream of social espionage, of tapping into the social engineering in which the Globe stood upon his cradling pillars. Hence the Tickets, a quarterly ritual for the Daughters currently working in a particular strata to experience a night in the other socio-economic classes. Since the Daughters go where they need to, it is easy to become to adopted to the life of an aristocrat’s date, to become attached to the lifestyle. The whore, the mother. The escort, the maiden. And like all men, the endeavors of Tickets provided new feminine bodies and energy to the strata, to keep the illusion that the Globe was a world of serendipity and not the controlled spectacle from the Steeplechase soil in which it was anchored.*

*Does the Globe take the shape of the world?*

*Not quite.*

2.

Morgan descended into the threshes of the Lowers. The world outside of the elevator drifted to her like a fisherman casting a line. For a stationary edifice, the Globe was perpetually in a state of motion on a horizontal or longitudinal axis. The lift here had no elevator music, as the lifts going downward are essentially giant dumbwaiters, meant to feed the rest of the Globe’s infrastructure with tokens of sacrifice in the shape of muscled, stupid men with hands calloused from manual labor.

The lift opened its rusted fence and Morgan stepped into Thunderbolt Square, the nexus for most of the Lowers. She walked through the steam haunting the alleys, the alcohol from the night’s dinner sweating upon her brows. The Square was bustling, as it always was. There were no windows looking out of the Globe here, but the poor artists who had originally come with the hope of creating a perch in the Globe and unwittingly entered into a contest of luck had primarily ended here, starving and doing odd jobs, hanging out in their hovels of tin and oddly shaped studios, thinking they could drown the bourgeoisie with art. They had created the simulacrum of clouds that hung from the rafters above, obscuring the exposed and sweating goliath pipes.

One of Morgan’s sisters was currently in the artist’s crowd, her art being displayed in one of the ethnic cafes a couple of neighborhoods over. The poor artists exist in the struggle of hating the elite and their wealth, but no talk yet of toppling the Queen Bee. It was a struggle that required little strings to pluck, but once there was an inclination…still, Morgan thought, centering herself, the clouds were a nice touch if you’ve never really seen clouds before. A lot of children in the Lowers never had. She passed open taverns that were always occupied, the smell of malt and hops from the Squid Inn permeating their bitter aroma into the street where a couple of old men played dominos, dirty street children vaulted between the shadowed protection of alleys, the prostitutes with cheap makeup, smudging from the humidity, and clothes that had long lost their glimmer underneath the many layers of exhaust. Morgan passed a homeless woman bundled in itchy blankets scabbed with grime. There was a glimmer of recognition between the two of them. That was Rhea, a fellow Daughter, a fellow Sister. The Queen Bee’s reach knows no bounds. Last year she was a dancer in the Dressler Lounge. In a couple of months, someone else shall take her place amongst the rabid and noxious underbelly. In a couple of months, it could be Morgan.

She entered her apartment on Ninth Street. It was a small studio, a dresser, a bronze kettle, a small cot. It was not royalty, but it worked fine for Morgan. In fact, the temporary abode was one of her favorites. She liked the confines of the walls, the peeling wallpaper, the consistent saltwater leaks, the perspiration of humidity plastering on the windows like some long hanging fog, the odorous battle between brine and citrus waging a forever war in the halls. She found comfort in the lifestyle of the Lowers, the simplicity and the predictability of it. The apartment was an ephemeral station, much like Rhea’s wilted cardboard hovel a couple streets down, or Samantha’s high-rise apartment in the Uppers where her body had been found butchered and warped, or even the paint scabbed studios that the artist Daughter was currently stationed. Morgan had lived in a variety of places, from the top of the Globe to the brothels with the other escorts, to the undercurrent of the Dredges, the very bottom of the Globe, which accumulated all the filth and runoff from every stratosphere of this utopia like the weight of a loaded diaper. Poor little Rhea might be itching the bedbug bites from her arms and neck now, but her next station could have her wearing authentic baby seal fur and eating caviar as a hotelier from Manhattan.

Still, Morgan found comfort in this small apartment; she liked feeling at least some sense of her Sisters occupancy marked by the steadily declining bag of teas, of old left over porridge, of where the previous girl kept her ashtray to think pensively and reflect on the day. The domiciles in the Uppers were too well kept to be personable, and existing in the Lowers or the Dredges…well, that is when you keep your head down and do your job and find comfort in the small things.

Morgan ignited one of her Steeples and pinned the snapshot of Samantha’s obliterated body on the wall. She opened a window once the miasma of smoke became unbearable and she found herself in the cross breeze of the humidity outside and the acrid fog inside. She ran a list of the Daughters that could be in peril—they numbered an indiscernible amount, known only to Queen Bee and Auditors. Morgan callously considered that perhaps Samantha’s murder was just that – a murder. She was positioned in the Uppers as an escort, and the cases of domestic assault via narcotics like cocaine and ketamine were higher in there. Maybe she pissed off some visiting CEO or resident? It seemed plausible. Still, now it was on Morgan’s hands to investigate the murder, even though she was currently abiding in the space between the Dredges and the Middles, which complicated things, geographically speaking.

Morgan finished her Steeple and tamped it into the ashtray by the windowsill, the same location as the previous Daughter who resided there, the color of her purple lip stick at the crumpled end of a Steeple cigarette. That was a commonality among the Sisters. They all smoked, and they only smoked Steeple cigarettes. Morgan herself did not care for any other brand. They tasted like acid, much like how Steeples are described to those who do not care for it. Then she fished into her pocket for a box of matches, the insignia of a little demon-imp juggling fire, *Ifrit’s Kiss*, and placed it a drawer as a sign of respect for the next Daughter, as one of her sisters had done before. It was primarily full, sans the one match she used.

She put a hand on her hip and leaned into the picture, looking for signs of struggle, of any modus that might link to the central database of everyone that came into the Globe, gathered from years upon years of espionage and reconnaissance. The Queen Bee believed that not all wars needed violence. Some problems could be stopped with a whisper and well-aimed cannon fires of shame.

Morgan accessed the terminal near her bed, located where Samantha was murdered via her files. She had died in the Barnacle, a ritzy hotel in the Uppers that had its own terraced garden and stood high enough to get a glimpse of actual sky. She was last seen entering the elevator to her room. No video evidence suggested she was followed into the golden lift or even the hallway. Morgan opened up the check-ins. No one was seen lurking the hallway hours, days, even weeks before hand. No evidence of stalking in the terraces, nor being followed in the arcade amidst the bustling of shops and eateries. A part of Morgan liked this game. It was a puzzle. Most of the time the Daughters were invisible sentries in the urban fabric of the Globe, simulations of humans, an actor with a new role every couple of months. But occasionally Arno liked to throw Morgan a scrap of adventure, an excuse to exercise her muscles. She was told that this was because she was good at it, and Morgan, being just one of many, took personal pride in a being good at *something.*

She returned to the picture and scrutinized it with a new look. She ignored the brutality of her sister’s body and instead focused for imprints of shoes, bottles that would suggest an echelon of wealth, a particular proclivity towards a certain alcohol or brand. Her eyes drifted to the pools of blood seeping onto the sheets and once again to her arm, where the lacerations looked a little like…yes…a little like script. Embedded on her arm as with as much deftness as carving a pumpkin were incisions that bled like a fresh tattoo: *RUN*.

Morgan recoiled and instinctively lit another Steeple, feeling the pulse of pressure on her arm, mentally imprinting the feeling of the blade slicing through her flesh like butter. After massaging, she rummaged through the drawers in the kitchen, past the utensils dull with use, and grabbed yarn, tape, tacks, scissors. The colors of the yarn were blue and yellow and red, colors picked by the previous Daughter, no doubt. If Morgan needed more yarn, she’ll leave purple for next person. And green. The Lowers do not have much green.

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She set out the following morning, stepping into the rush of Thunderbolt Square, careening into the smells of cheap coffee, lingering whiskey, the saccharine aura of funnel cakes and sewage. The morning commute was a dual ballet; people in the Lowers typically did not keep predictable hours and as such the people coming home from a long night looking for a beer in the twenty-four hour dives bumped into the elbows of the people still clawing crust from their eyes, both groups caught in the space between waking and dreaming, an orbiting river of vacant lily pads.

Morgan passed Rhea in the streets, where someone had given her a cup of coffee. Morgan deposited some coins into her metal cup. The never-ending stream of street children vaulted in between alleys, too attuned to the rhythm of the streets, their young minds bent on surviving. Morgan remembered being one of them. Most of the Daughters spent time as child urchins when they were young, and it was in these duties that holding one’s tongue was the most difficult. It was a rite of passage, Morgan understood, as she herself caught and ate live rats in the Dredges, fished out of dumpsters in this very own Thunderbolt Alley with makeshift hooks and hidden away to eat in peace like a gremlin. She caught a glimpse of a girl with wide doe eyes and a button nose, not too much different than how Morgan figured she looked when she was younger. She looked innocent enough, but Morgan knew better. Daughters develop a sixth sense for one another.

She scrambled into the elevator with the others; the burly men and the homely women as they left their own children to the underfunded school systems a couple of neighborhoods over. They drank sour coffee in bent tin cups, they attempted to read the news in the crowded lift, primarily the *Global Voice* or the *Coney Tribune*, but sometimes, if you were a real kook, the *Sonic*.

She got off the elevator and walked across Scalar Avenue, passing by the hardware shops, the cafes, the middle-class restaurants serving sea foods and various forms of hotdogs. She passed Nathan’s Famous Foods, a satellite location that had entrenched itself into the Middles but ended up becoming a tourist attraction for those visiting from as far away as Europe to as close as Manhattan, which might as well be Europe. She got a cup of coffee herself and passed a street peddler playing a guitar that she knew was named Beth and who was previously stationed into the Dredges and before that as an aristocrat’s secret girlfriend. She gave her a coin. The Sisters took care of each other.

Across the cobblestoned streets Morgan entered another elevator and ascended to the Uppers, where the air was infused with rose, where freshly shucked oysters were in the palm of every hand, where alcohol flowed from fountains, quite literally, and people glistened with the expensive skin pigmentation oils that turned your skin a gold or silver sheen. Men in business suits eyed Morgan as she walked down the manicured path, passing the Corinthian columns and the hanging gardens. Their adjoining companions, woman who may or may not be their wives or girlfriends, wore glittering dresses, some adorned with rainbow fish. The men were discreet, which was another surefire way for Morgan to know she was in the Uppers. The men in the Middles would leer and wait to get you drunk. The Lowers would be bold enough to approach. The Dredges…

The Neptune loomed before her, an Art Deco masterpiece in a bottle that was the Globe. Long balustrades guarded by leering octopi stood like sentries above the gold and black entrance. Fountains burst ultra-filtered fresh water to her right and left. Chrome plating winked at her as she neared the threshold. This was not a place for a Middles girl, and Morgan knew this. Before stepping into the hotel, she scanned the open square, looking over a popcorn vendor, a barker for a riverside booze cruise, two bartenders in an open veranda, their open bottles resting on the ice like totems of worship. She locked eyes with the brunette, passed her over, and found the eyes with the blonde. Between pouring a glass of wine for what Morgan could assume was a tourist, the bartender kept her gaze and made a show of deliberately resetting the bottles in a different order. Morgan knew the order. Without another word Morgan picked up her bag and approached the restroom, which was not open to the public and was already unlocked by the time that Morgan arrived.

She was adorned with the shells of silverfish, a necklace of salty pearls. She wore heels made of processed seaweed that illuminated a deep green underneath a certain light. Her hair was done in a beehive, which was intentional, even though she admitted it was a little on the nose. She applied a quick oil to her skin to give it a golden sheen, and although it was the “fake” stuff that Middles girls wear for a night, it was aesthetically effective enough to get by, and would wash off in one day or poison your skin if you leave it on too long. Without looking at the barkeeping Sister, she walked back towards the Neptune, her pistol a deft weight in her bag, a new person entirely.

By way to another fortunate Daughter, Morgan found herself in the same hotel suite that Samantha had been found brutalized. The apartment was wiped clean, which is what Morgan expected. She walked into the hall, past the bed, past the bathroom with crystalline tap that might as well been gold compared to the murk in the faucets running in the Lowers. The room glinted. Morgan scanned the walls, the inside of the sheets, looking for anything that the housekeepers might have missed. Absently, she lit a Steeple and pondered, wondering how to investigate this without any alibis or timeline. Someone had done something to Samantha, had made an example of her. Morgan allowed her a moment of selfish relief before she realized that had she been in the Uppers it could very well be her. Tilyou’s Daughters were not safe from danger. Prostitutes were beaten and left in ditches on the daily. Trolley accidents happen because of a misread direction. But the Daughters knew. They knew not to squeal. It was engineered into them. Morgan herself could not even incriminate the existence of Queen Bee if she tried. This was the way of things.

Morgan found herself in the elevator. The straps on her dress pinched her shoulders and she waddled uncomfortably on her heels; each ankle only able to take a couple of seconds of weight before screaming for release. A man entered the lift, his arms folded behind him, smelling a little bit like sea salt and vermouth. He eyed Morgan through the corner of his eyes, and Morgan knew this, sizing him up as well. The Neptune was half residential, so it was difficult to determine if this man was a patron or of the Globe’s upper crust. The only people that visited the Globe nowadays were the elite, and it was always a little difficult to tell their stance in these places.

The man said, “Great evening.”

“Indeed,” Morgan answered.

The elevator went down one, two, three floors. Then the man pressed a button which jammed the doors and he turned to look at Morgan with a tight-lipped grin atop a baby face and Morgan reached for her pistol in her purse and pulled it like a fisherman’s lure.

“Your eyes remind me of how fish look when they die,” Morgan said.

“I’m not dead yet,” said the man.

“Yet,” said Morgan, “identify yourself.”

The man raised his arms, palms up as if to say *aw shucks*. “My name is Robert Forrest, and I didn’t kill the girl, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

The elevator began to stir, and Morgan jammed the button on her own accord, causing the lift to rattle to a stop.

“Talk.”

“The Globe was run on cronies, you know. Built from false promises. That same sickness runs in the Globe to this day, over a hundred years later. Party bosses, gangsters, crooks…” his voice was soft, like a water over a river bed, a voice that could be identified over a gramophone.

“I will use the pistol,” she said, although she hoped she didn’t need to. Daughters were not meant to cause scenes, and she would have to shoot herself in the arm to make it appear that she had somehow wrestled the pistol from this man after being shot.

Robert chuckled. “I know you will. You know, Samantha told me about you. You’re one of them, aren’t you? One of the…girls.”

“What happened to her, Mr. Forrest? Did you break her, carve her up? Who do you work for?”

Robert stepped back, made a show of slowly reaching into his inside pocket and pulling out a manilla folder. He dropped it to their feet and kicked it with his suede shoes, maintaining eye contact. “I think you’ll find some jarring letters in there. If you think that your little sorority has its best intentions for you, I’m afraid you’re wrong.”

The lift started again, and Morgan jammed the doors again. Sooner or later the maintenance men would be arriving, wielding their golden hammers and wrenches. “Samantha’s death was targeted. You know more than whatever is contained in that folder.”

Robert shrugged, “I know whoever did her in didn’t cut those words into her arms. The girl did it herself.”

“Lies. No one carves words into themselves.”

“Not unless they want to be seen, ma’am,” Robert said, “unless they know someone would see it.”

“And the brutalization of her body? You think she did that to herself?” Morgan began to sweat, her mascara starting to drift.

“That…I’m sorry.”

The elevator shook and began to descend. Neither she nor Robert made a move to jam it a fourth time.

“Listen,” he said, “I will be at the docks underneath the Globes at midnight with my skivvy to seek asylum in Manhattan in three days.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“In case you want to leave the Globe.”

“How do you know that I won’t come for you, that you signed your own death sentence? How do you know that you aren’t flirting with a force that is as dastardly as the forces that killed Samantha ?”

The doors opened to the opulent foyer of the Neptune. Bell hops carried golden dumbwaiters. Caste iron seashells adorned the walls. A simulacrum of the submerged god surveyed the electric atmosphere, trident in hand, horses ready to bolt.

Robert kept his gaze and made a show of bending down as if to tie his shoes. “One can only hope,” he said, picking up the folder and handing it to Morgan who was busy hiding the pistol. “You forgot something.” They brushed hands and before Morgan could respond Robert was already out of the door, adding over his shoulder: “Didn’t realize we were flirting.”

*b.*

The snap of whips, the phantom of funnel cakes and popcorn, the honking of elephants and seals as they balance on rotating pedestals, lobbing multi-colored balls. Sunspots flash in the darkness as somnambulists twirl weightlessly in perilous heights, suspended in space, each atom of their body occupying a specific part of the Globe that was otherwise unreachable. Children of the elite laugh with their working-class counter parts, men share beers with the wealthy who would otherwise be found dead with the cheap beer served through those rusted taps, woman gather and eye one another up, too conscious of their life decisions against what they could only see as a parallel universe version of themselves, envying those who live above, content with knowing that they do not live any lower. Such is the nature of the Hippodrome, the great canvas of merriment and spectacle, located in the upper echelons of the Globe but seemingly accessible to all, a neutral ground. Everyone loves giraffes.

The Hippodrome is a universe in and of itself, a contradiction to its host nation-state. Because within the Globe the Hippodrome contains the simulacrum of nations, each circus ring pointing to the cardinal directions as if to say that the Globe was the center of the Earth, that the Globe was architecturally akin to how god created man in His image, that each circus ring is a different country with imported animals and attendants (who were paid better than the Lowers but not enough to exist in the heavy comfort of the Middles) giving elephant rides and allow toddlers to sit on the humps of camels and feed carrots to bison. There is a freakshow in the Hippodrome, although they are only available for a particular price, and they are not called a freakshow. Communal remnants of the midget-city Lilliputian emerges like nuptial otters on the bay with seaweed hanging from their ears and oysters clamped on their cheeks, combining with the carneys that are lingering in near poverty in Coney Island proper, lurking underneath the boardwalk, eating sand dusted hot dog buns from the trash. The Owl Man perches when he sleeps. The bearded lady is the last of her kind. A pair of Siamese twins can attach and detach themselves at will, their biology ever changed from munching on the oysters that glow in the Hudson River, and this is a lie. Watch the freaks as they collect over a fire lit by the Fire-eating woman. Don’t forget to gaze at the Crocodile Man, rumored to have been found in the very sewers of Manhattan and travelled via drainage pipe, erupting like a mudman and covered in city excrement, the product of the Dredges. If this is true, the Crocodile Man would be the first illegal immigrant to come to the Globe. People say that he eats the Lilliputian midget children when he goes into rages, but it’s all smiles on the stage, unblinking visages of glee and showmanship as the cameras flash and push the freaks closer over the precipice of sanity / insanity with each *click snap click snap click SNAP*.

All this and more, for a measly dollar per head. Children under 4 get in with a discount.

3.

It turned out that Robert Forrest was nothing short of imaginary. He was not in the Auditor’s databases and Morgan could not form a patchwork narrative of him walking outside of the Neptune and disappearing into the glitzy arcade of the Uppers. She had passed a high-end courtesan, Charlotte, on her way back to her abode in Thunderbolt Alley and asked through a series of codes if she had seen anything suspicious. Charlotte shook her head and returned to her martini before getting the attention of the suited man at the end of the bar. Morgan asked a passing nanny as they were orbited by her wards and obtained a similar response.

And now she sat at the dingy table that was moved a couple inches to the left to accommodate what Morgan could only assume was a left-handed Sister, the manilla folder before her like a relic. A Steeple rested on the ashtray, the pyres leaning up, a small wisp of smoke trailing like the wagging fingers of a phantom. A tin of ground coffee from a shop in the Uppers, one of the small gifts that the Daughters leave for one another, bubbled in its beaker. The man was certainly real, the folder was certain of it, and Morgan found herself confronted with an unexpected apprehension between its pages, looking at its neutral façade as if it were a precipice to dark and deep waters. For good or bad, the contents would bother her, even if it ended with that strange Mr. Forrest lying and the sad truth that Samantha had been horrifically carved and murdered all along for nothing short of human cruelty.

She took the plunge, unearthing a blossom of crumpled, water damaged papers, half of them stuck together with some strange and black ichor that could only have come from the Dredges. She saw letters written by Samantha addressed to a Y, and she herself signed her name as X. Morgan scanned more documents, watching a narrative unfold in the briny, starchy pages. Samantha had met someone, not Mr. Forrest, but someone else from Manhattan that now resided in the Globe. The little bee was planning on leaving with him, she was the one which even suggested it. Morgan took a puff from her Steeple, her eyes steady on Samantha’s uniform script as she told the mysterious Y that the Globe was corrupt, that the Globe was no longer the life that Samantha wanted.

But why? Morgan set the Steeple on the ashtray and started to pace the studio, her heels adding onto the creaking of the dilapidated walk up, a chain of tapping from the top floor to the one below and the one below that, an ascension of pensive tap dancers. Being a daughter of Tilyou was a dangerous, risky job, but it is one of which the pros far outweigh the cons. It allowed you to be tangential, ephemeral, a wraith between all economic stratospheres in the Globe. The Daughters were important to the wellbeing of the Globe ecology. Without the Daughters the Queen Bee would lose her grasp on her kingdom, and the Globe would actually turn into the cesspool of villainy and corruption that people were constantly accusing the Queen Bee of creating. The Queen Bee needed her Daughters more than the people need the Queen Bee.

Morgan drew her eyes back to the remaining papers. Perhaps was this was no more than a lover’s tryst, a romantic escape. Had something gone awry, had Samantha turned her back on Y after revealing the powerful secrets of the Daughters existence? Had Y, distraught and rejected in the way men could be, murdered the poor girl in retaliation before escaping into the Dredges to meet Mr. Forrest and escape into Manhattan? But why would someone gut the poor girl like a fish? Why would someone carve *RUN* into her forearm?

She inspected the notes written by Y and found imprints on the side of some of the letters, as if something had weighed on the pages as he hastily wrote his correspondence to Samantha. She slanted her eyes, leaned in close, found the rough edges of an insignia: *Tectonic Biotechnics – Gene Division.* This mysterious Y was connected to here. A scientist, no doubt. Or a janitor. It was all too confusing at this point, and Morgan felt as if in a wayward river of facts and logic, being pulled in strange directions speeding past rocks and fallen logs and poisonous barbs.

The automated lights above Thunderbolt Alley had turned a shade of purple to reflect the sunset, and a slight shadow began to crest over the windowsill, slicing Morgan’s face in half, forcing her to perceive as Janus. She could not help but feel that a larger shadow was about to crest over the Globe, one which threatened to materialize and strangle the Queen Bee and her iron-wrought grip. Morgan stared out of the threshes underneath her windowsill, keeping a watchful eye on Rhea even though the Daughters were not supposed to collide with each other’s lives. Still, it warmed Morgan’s heart a little to see her beggar’s pail full of coins today, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. Morgan stamped out the cigarette and headed into bed, her feet sore from the heels, her body aching because, well, she didn’t quite know why.

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Tectonic Biotechnics was a looming pearl of a building cased in copper and black iron. It stood on top of a landfilled hill in the Middles, constructed when the upper crust of the Middles was viewed as the Uppers. It was an interesting phenomenon, Morgan thought, the propensity for the entire wealth classes to move upwards into unforeseen territory, able to plunge with full confidence because they know in the darkness of where they land they won’t hit cement. It was still a building that catered to Upper sentimentality, perched like a guardian at the highest spot before the wrought iron ceiling of the Middles becomes the foundation of the Uppers. Bioluminescent sabers of light shot lazy auras of seafoam and seaweed, giving the impression that the building was in an aquarium, or outside of it.

Morgan walked into the foyer and asked the attendant, a fellow Daughter by their series of nonverbal correspondence, to speak with the head of the Gene Division. The daughter shook her head, her auburn curls like the hems of a flapper dress and explained that there was no Gene Division in Tectonic Biotechnics.

“Only our typical departments, you know,” she said against the tinkle of fountain, “pharmaceuticals, vitamins, the like.”

Morgan leaned in, “Come on now, Jeannette.”

“Honest,” she whispered back, and then saw a cluster of businessmen pass by, swinging their briefcase and walking like automatons. They looked at the two men flirtatiously and with a practiced coquettish flutter until they passed. Jeannette resumed her erected stance behind the desk and spoke in so many words that their conversation was over. “Anything else I can help you with, ma’am?”

“No miss,” Morgan said, looking up the tall walls, the indoor rivers circulating around the well-kept ferns that stretched to the ceiling. She knew that somewhere behind these walls, hiding deep within the recesses of this guarded building, there was a secret, black boxed department. She thought of Mr. Forrest, of Samantha. Y was a piece of this puzzle, too.

She turned to make her way out of the lobby, passing underneath the sentinel gaze of Zeus and his lightning bolts. She ignored the passing gaze of men who fancy powerful women and Morgan fancied her thoughts on them confronting the Queen Bee herself and watching their expressions melt away like the icecaps. She craved a Steeple, but only had enough to last until the next assignment. Arno should have given her more. Maybe Arno could…

“Arno,” Morgan said, recognizing the fleshy amphibian from anywhere.

He was standing outside of the vestibule smoking his pipe. It was odd to see him standing in the wild, staring at the Middles from the Tectonic Biotechnic’s unique vantage over the entire sector, which was, as the Globe’s physical horizontal zenith, the widest of the districts. It was like being in a plane and seeing the patchwork quilt of farmland down below, as if Morgan herself had ever seen that much fresh sky in her life. He had a messenger’s bag on him bustling with folders. She turned him around by the shoulder with such excited force that he almost lost his balance.

“Little Bee,” Arno said, his oily face glistening underneath the aquatic aura, “how goes your assignment?”

“It has brought me here, to find you apparently,” Morgan said.

“Mhm,” Arno tapped on his pipe. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a box of Steeple cigarettes.

“A gift?”

“Mhm,” Arno said as they exchanged hands. He pullout of his pipe, exhaled. “Why are you here, Morgan?”

“Chasing ghosts,” she said, “looking for a division that I know must exist but am being stonewalled into believing it isn’t. You?”

“I don’t believe in ghosts,” Arno said. He raised a pipe to his wide lips and the messenger bag raised and fell like a levy. Morgan noticed splotches of blood on his wrists, his cupped palm. Morgan saw splatters of blood on the messenger bag too. He continued, “What does this place have to do with solving the murder of one of your sisters?”

They started to walk down the path, past the men in lab coats and business suits, boys with clipboards. Never women. Morgan noticed that Arno made a particular effort to hide his bloodied wrist because of how tactful his movements were, especially for a man with a body more seen as poured rather than built.

Morgan said, “Who were you visiting?”

“A friend,” Arno said.

“Mhm,” Morgan followed Arno down the steps. It would be a long descent. “Tell me about the Gene Division.”

“Gene what?” he piped, looking like a smoking train down an alley.

“Don’t be coy, Mr. Arno,” Morgan said, “the secret department in Tectonic Biotechnics.”

“Little bee, little bee,” Arno said.

They rounded a corner, came upon stone steps which split into a bottlenecked alley leading into the Middles and another elevator which was private access from the Tectonic Biotechnics to the Uppers, glistening like a neon aura and lighting the outside of the windows of the multi-family homes and faux-suburban homes. Morgan stepped down the cobblestones and rolled her ankle, pulling on Arno for leverage, bringing them both down in a flurry of swears and gasps. The contents Arno’s collections blossomed like pistons, moving around them in a snow globe of confetti. Morgan’s limber arms caught herself on a step after scraping her knee. Arno slid onto the next landing, the falling around him like feathers. Morgan discarded her heels and ran to Arno, propping him up.

“Jeezus, little bee, you been drinking? Too many Tickets in the Uppers? Fucking Christ…”

“Apologies Mr. Arno,” she said, helping him get his belongings. She gathered them together, looking now like a bouquet of discarded newspaper. Arno snatched them from her hand and stuffed them back into the bag. “Really, apologies.”

“Come on, Little Bee, almost broke my neck,” Arno said, and he made his way down to the lower platform, turning to head into the elevators to take him straight to the Uppers.

Morgan waited until she saw his rotund body shoot through the pneumatic tube like a poison dart. She opened her palm, let the bloodied lanyard drop from her fingers like a yo-yo. Y was a scientist here, working in the Gene Division. Morgan excavated scabs of blood that had obscured the name: *Yves Moratz*. French. Not that it mattered anymore. The Globe was the world.

*c.*

The Globe is not a place for children, but it is a place for teenagers. Much like the Globe itself, teenagers are battered like the bumper cars that used to zoom around Steeplechase Park, navigating fast and blindly in a torrent of sexual alchemy and ego reformation. A frenzy of activity, an illuminated neon world of of love, of loss, of fast friendships. The Globe has three world renowned malls, two in the Uppers (The Steeple, the Luna) and one in the Middles (The Nathan’s), but aside from this clear stratospheric cleft, teenagers are invited, as if by design of Ophelia Tilyou herself to invoke her ancestor’s brilliant dedication to the spectacle, to enjoy the various avenues of manufactured serendipity within the Globe, renowned by the world over.

Watch the discotheque lights flash their candy rays over the waxed floorboards, illuminating the circular force of teenage angst and frustration as they hold hands in their sherbet colored pants, their broad shoulder jackets, their headbands. A disco ball hangs over the court like the uvula of the great Globe itself. The aroma of feet and soda and fried foods wafts into the vents and exhausts upwards towards the artificial clouds, rising high enough to where only the elevator leading from the Tectonic Biotechnics to the Uppers can see (but everyone knows this is an Uppers establishment, really), before dissipating into the bay.

Down the street is the only bowling alley in the Globe, complete with lanes that stretch as if gazing upon a horizon. Pins rise and fall like the obstructions of Manhattan that attempted to prevent the Globe from birthing in the first place. Bowling balls in the shapes of perfect spheres, bowling shoes which tell everyone that clown shoes are exempt from no one. There are leagues, and surprisingly they are divided by class, although this is not a spoken doctrine. The Uppers arrive in their glinted bags and gloves with their own bowling shoes, flapping like monocle wearing ducks. They walk together, protected by the clouds of their Cuban cigarettes, imported, no doubt, by pulling political favors or owning land, as much as anyone could under the jurisdiction of the ephemeral and nigh-mythological Queen Bee.

The Middles smell like cheap bear and their numbers are many. Often, they must be divided into several teams and they are all hate each other, which is by some divine design that no one in the Globe is even aware of. This is their one night a week to forget they have wallets, their one night a week to supplement a glass of expensive whiskey that is only for the Upper’s pallets with more cheap ale. The Lowers come already drunk, sipping on a beer that is sometimes shared between them, ordering pops to put confiscated flasks of grain alcohol in, which is a practice that only bothers the Uppers. Their bowling balls are sometimes misshapen and shared between them, too. The Dredges are of course invited to the bowling alley. It's open for everyone, obviously. But they never come. The Lowers hate them too much. Bowling is a working man’s game.

The highest level available to the public is an aerial palm garden, designed to carve a piece of history like a child cups a handful of sand. Corinthian columns are linked by verdant vines dotted with pink and white roses. Palm trees create natural shade over picnic tables, covering those who wish to relax away from their shoebox apartments and claim to one another that this, right here, is in their backyard. Indoor rivers and shrubs and bushes and knolls and hills and some black rock waterfalls give the impression of nature contained. Sometimes helicopters enter through this way, and out comes people dressed for the safari, wielding machetes and binoculars. The Middles, watching the black bird enter through a slot in the glass partition, don’t realize that the safari goers are the Uppers who already live there, spending money to replicate a Lewis and Clark expedition to see a difficult to reach corner of the gardens: a place where the toxic run off gathers in the corner, hidden away by thick, unapproachable foliage with as much design as hiding a litterbox, and it is here in the swamp of the contained bathysphere that the Dredges feel comfortable enjoying their little stretch of nature afforded to them. Some Uppers have never even seen the folks living the Dredges, especially if they don’t come to bowling, which most of them never do. The Uppers like seeing the Dredge folk in their natural habitat. Even in the Globe, it’s possible to encounter culture shock.

It's all fun and games here.

4.

Morgan awoke that morning to the feeling of a jackhammer on her head. Her body felt as if they were a buoy threatening to pull her away, stressing her bones and muscles as she swung out of bed. She lit one of the Steeples that Arno had given her and allowed herself to stew in its narcotic pillow as her muscles to reset to normal. She did not remember when she had started smoking Steeples, or why it’s only this brand that her body craves. It’s certainly the best out there, far more effective in soothing muscles and giving you a waking buzz than the contraband peddled elsewhere.

She put on an outfit fit for an office in the Uppers; high wasted pinstripe pants and a buttoned blouse. Woman were given secretarial jobs in the Globe, even though it is run by the Queen Bee. In her bag she packed Yves’s lanyard, a lab coat, and her pistol, just in case. She entered the fray of Thunderbolt Alley, absorbing into the crowd of workers too tired to notice an Uppers girl in their midst. She passed Rhea, holding out a cup of change. Naturally, Morgan plucked a coin from her purse and plopped it in her jangling tin can.

“You got a Steeple?” Rhea said, her unkempt hair shading her eyes, her button nose, her freckles. The fact that she asked for a *Steeple* and not a cigarette was sign enough of their commonality.

“Uh,” Morgan said. She was not sure when she would see Arno again, especially if he figured out that her fall was a farce.

“Please,” Rhea dropped her guise. She whispered, “I need a Steeple. I need one. My head feels like it’s going to explode.”

Morgan suddenly felt possessive of the cigarettes. “Just wait. I’m sure more will come.”

“I have dreams that I am dying, sister,” Rhea’s face opened to a toothless smile, one which is too extreme a dedication to the role, even for Morgan herself. “Then I wake, and I can’t wait to die. I feel like I’m drowning.”

“Like a force strong enough to pull a buoy underwater,” Morgan said, more to herself. When Rhea did not answer she noticed that the homeless girl was beginning to cry, perhaps in a form of mutual understanding. Morgan pulled out her packet and dropped the cylinder in the bucket. She would hopefully get more from Arno soon enough.

Morgan returned to the rushes and entered the lift. She passed through Sealion Plaza and walked up to Tectonic Biotechnics, blending in with the crowd that had not come from the alley leading to the Middles but the glistening pneumatic shoot to the Uppers. She waded in between the suits and ties, the receptionists to these powerful men, the scientists who work in the other departments. She moved with them like a school of fish and as they walked past reception Morgan caught eyes with the receptionist from yesterday and both of the Daughters said nothing. Morgan flashed Yves’s ID card and withdrew it before security could get a glimpse at the name; it was the shape they were used to seeing, and a too-keen developed eye for bullshit that really manifests as apathetic incompetence. Morgan broke apart from the crowd and found an empty plastic crate near the janitor’s closet. Holding this in hand, she walked along the pristine tiled steps and the cloud of bleach and antiseptic which seemed to cake on the walls. She passed totems of men in lab coats, woman watering plants. The aural pressures of a slight headache pushed at her temples. In the middle of the foyer was another receptionist, one who was not a Daughter, and Morgan sauntered up, smiling.

“I am here to see Yves Moratz,” she said.

The reception looked up from her files but kept her attention elsewhere. “Mr. Moratz is no longer with us.”

A thump in Morgan’s temples made the lightbulb in her brain difficult to look at. Still, this was proof that Yves worked here, and that the Gene Division existed.

“I’m here to collect his things,” she said.

A raised eyebrow. “You don’t look like his wife, ma’am.”

“I’m not,” Morgan said. There was a silence. Morgan leaned slightly closer, “My job is to collect his things.”

The poor girl straightened as if someone had gripped her spine. “Of course. Come on in.”

She unlocked the door behind her and swung it wide as if presenting the maw to Morgan. It looked like a Tunnel of Fun, or a Tunnel of Love. The neon abyss gave Morgan a sense of vertigo and she felt the urge to smoke a Steeple right here and now. Although it would be unprofessional she already found the cigarette in her hand. Without asking for permission, she cupped her hands around her face, put flame to the acrid cylinder and walked into the gaping, neon corridor to the Gene Division as if donning armor, her movements steady and relaxed like a country-side locomotive.

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“Little bee, we’ve been waiting for you,” a saltwater croak gurgled in the blinding light. Morgan knew the voice.

The lights of the Gene Division faded and Morgan lowered her raised forearm, the smoke trailing from her other hand. The room came into view. It was not so much as a laboratory but a giant room full of bubbling vats containing black ichor. Men in lab coats zipped across the rafters carrying clipboards and marking on chalkboards. They paid Morgan no mind. She stood in the center of this great room, bigger than the giant ballroom in the Uppers, the botanical garden along the outskirts. A slight antiseptic odor haunted the space.

Arno stood in front of her, smoking his pipe, multiple chins jiggling, his jowls ballooning and recessing. “You followed the path.”

Morgan gritted her teeth. She stamped the cigarette into an ash tray near a computer terminal. “What is this?”

Arno attempted his best as gesturing behind him with this neck. “I have someone that has been waiting to see you.”

He stepped aside and opened his arms, revealing in the center of the great antechamber a woman with a quilt over her spindly legs and attached via series of tubes and dials to a wheelchair. Wisps of hair looked like cotton in the wind from a liver spotted scalp and she looked up with great physical strain to look at Morgan with striking emerald eyes.

Morgan said, “Queen Bee.”

“Little Bee,” said Ophelia Tilyou.

Seeing Ophelia Tilyou in the flesh was akin to seeing a celebrity, or a god. There were some Daughters who saw the Queen Bee as more of a concept than a person who had once lived, or someone who had come from a line of succession, so strong was the religion that she had dispersed throughout the Globe. Seeing her validated Morgan’s existence, and she hated to admit it. She fought against tears.

“You’ve done well, Morgan,” said Ophelia, her bony hands clasped over the armrests of her wheelchair, “you’ve followed all of the directions to a tee.”

“I…I don’t know what is going on,” Morgan said, “here I am in the Gene Division and I see you and Arno. Did I do something wrong, ma’am?”

“Bah,” Arno said, “the opposite.”

“Enough, frog,” said Ophelia, and for once in Morgan’s life she had seen Arno become silenced like a kicked dog. “But he is right. You’ve done splendid. I’m very proud, Little Bee.”

Morgan watched the lab coats move like automatons on the scaffolds, inspecting the contents of the large vats, listening to the hum of each individual machine, and taking notes. She remained silent. She noticed a vat next to her, saw something move.

Ophelia wheeled herself to Morgan and together they watched the vat, their reflections cast in onyx. “How long has The Globe been around, my dear?”

“A long time,” said Morgan. She felt that was a stupid answer.

“Yes, and to do this, one needs to make sacrifices. Sometimes they are moral sacrifices, like withholding marriage and a comfy life in Manhattan to become a ruler of a great city such as this. Others are pragmatic sacrifices, such as maintaining the balance of the social stratification in the Globe. I care not for the opinions that those in the Dredges tell themselves…I feel bad for them, but society needs stratification, it needs balance. Upholding this balance is where my Daughters are the nexus, the gate keepers of this invisible social order. And then there are the spiritual sacrifices,” Ophelia stopped to wheeze, pulling a bloodied hanky from her pocket and then returning it, “these sacrifices are the ones that defy the laws of god and natural law, ones that demand man to rise above the cosmic prison and say, ‘I shall not comply to the biological constraints put upon me’. That is, in a way, what my father aimed to accomplish with Steeplechase Park. It was the first skyscraper, you know, the first amusement park, the first resort. Steeplechase, the world of the new, the respite from the dredges of Manhattan.”

“Your father was George Tilyou?” Morgan said, “But that would mean you are…The Globe has existed for generations. I was born in the Globe.”

Ophelia laughed, although it sounded more like a wheeze. “You don’t need to continue my dear. I know I’m old.”

They stared at the vat for a while, watching a silhouette twist in its ichor. She continued. “I had six siblings and we all hated one another. We all vied for the amusement park and the Globe. I was the only one who had the drive to continue, to sit upon the throne and make something of the metal city dropped on our lawn. I used to be called Marie.”

“Tilyou’s Daughter,” Morgan said, then feeling dumb for pointing that out. Of course, the Queen Bee knew this.

“Nothing in the Globe is coincidental, little one,” she said, “but you know this already.”

The silhouette turned and Morgan thought there was a caught mermaid. Then, as the smog cleared, the creature revealed itself to be a woman in stasis, floating in the black gelatin before them. Morgan looked around and saw other women in the vats being prodded, assessed, analyzed. Large vats contained women folded into one another like pretzels, hardly enough to float freely, jammed like sardines. Morgan bounced backwards, catching herself on the railing, fighting back a sudden need for a Steeple to anchor her.

Ophelia said, “My siblings always said, ‘if we had more time, we could live forever’. Well, I found out how to live forever. Look at your siblings, Morgan.”

It took a significant emergence of willpower for Morgan to keep her eyes peeled. “Are these…Daughters? Was this…me?”

“Some of the Daughter’s are needed for their organs. Others are needed to maintain power in The Globe. All my daughters are necessary, and it brings me no joy to harvest their organs when mine fail.”

Morgan looked to Arno, realized that he knew this operation all along. Do all Auditors know about this, or just the frog? He shrugged, as answering her thoughts.

Morgan pulled out another Steeple with shaking fingers. Usually, she could go several hours before needing to relight, but something about this place, the fumes, the Queen Bee, the hammering of abacuses and chittering of pens on clipboards, made her skin crawl. She watched a burly man pick up a keg of swishing brown liquid and place it into one of the vats, cinch with a fireman’s hose into an opening, and flood smog into the cylinders. The legion of nubile woman collectively gasps as if pleasured, their heads pulling back, their scalps in various stages of hair growth tangling into one another, a great orgy in a pit of gelatin.

“That’s Steeple,” Morgan said, “that’s what’s in the cigarettes the frog gives me.”

“Contrary to the other contraband that comes around here, Steeple *does* provide the nutrients for my Daughter’s natural cell growth and keeps them compatible with me. Go ahead, light one.”

She offered a light and Morgan found herself within the captured flame of Prometheus and her own free will. The want for the Steeple tapped on her brains like rain on a windowsill, like dancing fingers on a piano, like plucked harp strings, like the down of a goose feathered pillow, like the sweet and total cosmic bliss that only a Steeple offered. Suddenly she found herself vulnerable, at the whims of Queen Bee, at the whims of her own carefully articulated self. Morgan kept her distance, unable to put the Steeple away, unable to bend to Queen Bee’s level in service of her.

Morgan mustered, “Samantha found out, didn’t she? That’s why you killed her?”

Opehlia’s face scrunched, looking like a twisted spiderweb. “That little bee was a victim of circumstance. We had a…defector in the lab. Although I’m sure you already knew that.”

Morgan reached into her pocket and fished out Yves Moratz’s ID card. It was still flecked with blood. She turned to Arno. “You killed him.”

Arno shrugged again, “Falling in love has consequences.”

“I know where all my Daughters are,” Ophelia said, “but I didn’t see Samantha and Mr. Moratz coupling. That was not in the grand design. When he told her they made plans to flee, and then…well…”

Morgan turned to Arno, “You killed Yves and Samantha. Was it necessary to destroy her body, carve her like a ham?”

The Frog grimaced, “The destruction of her body was a message. Do you know how many other Daughters I brought the picture too? You were the only one to rise to the occasion.”

“And the carving, Arno?”

“Don’t know nothing about a carving.”

Morgan understood now. It was a notice. *Run.* It was Samantha’s last will. A warning, only shown to those who would dare investigate. How had she managed to cut the message into her arm as Arno was brutalizing her? Was it with the same knife that she no doubt held in her hands to ward him off? Regardless, Samantha understood how deep the Queen Bee’s influence was. She knew that Yves had consigned them both to a fate, that her death would be investigated. She knew she was going to die.

“Rejoice, Morgan,” Ophelia Tilyou wheeled her chair around as a vat of Steeple disbursed into the tank before them. The body strained and flexed, a strange floating dance between pain and pleasure. Morgan hated that she envied how they felt. Her own muscles were starting to feel heavier, as if her body was rejecting its own architecture. Ophelia smiled, “You’ve past the test. Like I said, I’m very grateful.”

“I won’t tell, please don’t harvest my organs. I’ll go back to work and I won’t tell, I promise.” Morgan said, stammering, her voice now a low burr against the buzz of Steeple withdrawal, the synapses gasping for the black ichor that was blossoming like ink in clear water. Tears of panic began to sting at the corners of her emerald eyes, the very same that stared back at her from the hollows of Ophelia’s web-stricken visage.

“You won’t need to tell,” Ophelia croaked, “because you will be taking the throne of the Globe.”

“I don’t understand,” Morgan said, her fingers clenching into a fist, balling into her palms.

Arno said, “Are you just going to stand there, Morgan? You’re being handed the keys to the world.”

“The Frog is right. You were the first of my Daughters to pass the test. You saw how dangerous this mission was, how personal it was to you. You saw the threat that it presented for the Globe. The other Daughters have not proven worthy. You are the successful heir to the Globe, Morgan. You are my True Daughter.”

Morgan held onto the railing, the world suddenly twirling underneath her like a carousel. Her knuckles whitened, drops of blood fell from her tightened palms. Her fingers grasped for the last of the Steeples in her pocket, found the pistol instead.

“You have been selected as my heir,” Ophelia said, raising her arms like a strained crane so as it to present the Gene Division on a pedestal. “Please, relieve me of this duty. I cannot stand to let the Globe split apart and feed the many mouths that will come to the table to fill the vacuum. It’s not what my father, our father, would have wanted.”

All Morgan could see was the black ichor pumping into the vats, of how she yearned to feel what the numbed bodies felt, infantile in their gooey incubators. She wanted Arno to come to her with a lit Steeple, to ingest the chemical mixture that has been bred into her genes by men with lab coats and clipboards, but she did not want him any closer. “You are harvesting these women.”

“They don’t even know they are being harvested, little bee.”

“And Samantha was going to risk the whole operation.”

“Had to make an example, and still, you prospered,” Ophelia said.

Morgan pulled out the pistol, her aim shaking, her eyes rattling like rings tossed over a bottle. The lab coats kept their distance, moving as if this was normal, as if a loaded weapon around all this machinery and black vats posed no threat. Arno raised up his arms, shrugging, lips snapping onto a pipe. Ophelia appeared nonplussed, and this angered Morgan, for in the Queen Bee’s eyes she saw the many women, grown expressly to die, others grown to live for the Globe, all for some rite of worship to the Queen Bee, to maintain her mythology. Morgan realized now that if she were to run Arno would snap her body like he did Samantha’s, and she would be unable to carve a warning onto herself for the next of her sisters. It was a cycle that perpetuates the Globe, that maintains like the shoulders of Atlas, so powerful and intrepid was the Queen Bee’s force and dastardly longevity that only an immortal could be made so callous as to their own people created in Her image.

“You are no god,” Morgan said, stammering. She cocked the pistol and the *click* sounded like a shockwave into her temples.

“But I am a queen, and you can be too,” Ophelia said.

“Put the gun down, Morgan,” Arno said, and the mention of her name out of his mouth sounded like an insult. “Your organs are going to crash unless you have a Steeple.”

As if by a spell, the pistol began to feel heavier in her arms. “No. I refuse.”

Ophelia shook her head, the cartography on her face making her look like an old tree. “Daughters are not exempt from giving me their life. In fact, we use the harvesting as punishment sometimes.”

“Then I’ll shoot myself and you won’t be able to,” Morgan said.

“Do you think that you are the first of my Daughters to be given this opportunity? I am older than some nations. There will always be another Daughter with drive enough to continue my legacy. Each generation of you are bred to want this purpose.”

“I’m not your Daughter and I am not an incubator,” Morgan said, “but one thing is for certain, the Daughters you did raise are bred to be in peak physical shape and to have the willpower to succeed for the betterment of the Globe. Queen Bee, you are a cancer.”

“Insolent bitch,” Ophelia said.

With the last of her strength Morgan detached her gaze from Ophelia fired at Arno. She was a good shot, but her vision was sideways, moving as if on a spinning dais. The bullet misfired and caught Arno in the arm, dropping him. He croaked and held his seeping limb, his rotund figure rocking more like turtle than a frog. The scientists had begun to intervene, and Morgan ran at Arno, wielding the smoking nozzle like a whip, her equilibrium inverted, her eyes mad. She reached into Arno’s pocket and pulled out whatever Steeples she could, grasping at them with as much deftness as a boardwalk claw machine. Then she was off, running out of the Gene Division with the pistol in one hand and a cluster of Steeples in the other, feeling like a fugitive, slave to her base desires, and on the way out she had aimed the gun to fire at Ophelia Tilyou but could not find herself able, so close was the ego shared between the two of them that it felt like staring into a funhouse mirror, a familiarity that she had not expected was possible and had thought she had mastered by being one of Tilyou’s Daughters and…

…she was in the middle of the cobblestoned fork, to her left was the glinted elevator leading to the Uppers, the other towards the Middles, and with each step a tremor shot up from her ankles to her spine and then to her skull as it *knock knock knocked* upon her cranium like an angry knuckle looking for unpaid rent. She fell to her knees, afraid that the pistol was going to fire and strike her stomach, her engineered face, and then the smell of dirt and shoes and brine swept into her nostrils as her organs failed, one by one, and she remembered the silly packaging on Steeples, as it does for all cigarettes: *May cause organ failure, may cause cancer, may cause loss of feeling, may lead to loss of life*…

*d.*

There is nothing quite like eating dinner on top of the world. Imagine dishes that are more art than food. Tiny morsels of truffle and gold flakes. Fois Gras. Butter made from the pastures on the lower levels. Chickens bred to be consumed. Lambs taken and put into vats of marinade, still alive, to loosen their muscles. This food died for you, was created for you, and should very well be celebrated. It is the dream of the culinary gastroartisans around the world to have a restaurant in the Globe. Before it was Paris, then America. Now it is the Globe. Look! See the wine being poured? Ignore the price, see that it is genetically engineered grapes from the Globe’s Uppers, the *terrior* chemically perfected to create a flavor that is an echelon leagues above what you can find in Italy or Rome. Look at the crystal chalice it is being served in, created by the glassblowers on the Middle, the working class that is proud to rest the Globe upon their shoulders like Atlas, which *The Vox Sonic* says is now becoming their new god. See a religion in the making! Only in the Globe, only in the Globe.

We have the best culinary experiences. The Globe is where America defected, not because they disliked the motherland, but because they knew that that drive to create the spectacle like our all-father George Tilyou is instilled in all of us. We are only what we appear to others. Look down. Look at your food, you fool! Smell it, absorb the nasal vibrations of the rosemary, the thyme, the sage, whatever you want, all grown here, in the Globe. Where else would it come from? And the potatoes, the salad with anchovies, the oysters shucked by the *thousands*. Paris has baguettes. Germany has schnitzel. America has hotdogs. The Globe has…the world.

Get over it.

5.

Morgan woke with a start, feeling the sweat caked upon her like some sandy ice bath. She was in a gurney, her clothes stripped from her. Her head felt like an over blown tire, sort of like a hangover. Smells of vinegar and fish scales infiltrated her sinuses. She felt pin pricks, like cacti, upon her arms and found various tendrils latched onto her body, siphoning black ichor in and out of some nameless vat in the corner of the room that hummed with her heartbeats. There were stitches traced across her abdomen like railroad tracks, an attempt at replicating Frankenstein’s golem, or a quilt.

“Shh shh shh,” a voice said, appearing at Morgan’s bedside in the darkness. “Don’t rip your stitches.”

Someone else put a straw to Morgan’s mouth. Her base desires activated, and she began to suckle. Images of a meager river over a craggy abyss. A sun beaten dirt bath reviving.

“Hello?” Morgan asked.

*She’s up.*

*Get her more water.*

*Can she stand?*

*Okay. We have no more water.*

*Will she…fear us?*

*She can have mine.*

*Mine too.*

“This will disorient you,” said the voice.

With a *snap* the lights activated, and Morgan was blinded by an aura of ivory. Before her was a group of people standing over her as if she were in a fishbowl. Women of various shapes and sizes looked at her with equally shining emerald eyes.

“Hello,” said Ophelia Tilyou.

“No, no!” Morgan started to create distance from this monster, and after being unable to get off the gurney she started to peel at the tubes sticking out of her. Arms arrested her, overpowering her. In this silence Morgan knew this was not the Queen Bee.

The mimic was just as tiny, but not confined to a wheelchair. Someone offered a stool and she waddled from the edge of the hospital bed and climbed up by swinging one baby-fat ridden leg over the crusted cotton sheets. She waddled up to Morgan, small, pudgy feet navigating like some toddler on a a tightrope.

“You are safe,” she said.

“Where am I?”

“The Dredges,” said the woman, “we’ve been keeping you alive.”

Morgan leaned back onto her scratchy pillow and a woman that looked like Rhea but with mismatched eyes put another canteen of water to her lips. Another woman that looked like Samantha but with a deformed limb applied a cloth to wipe on Morgan’s brow.

“I need to go,” Morgan said.

“Shh,” said the faux-Ophelia.

“Hello?” Morgan said.

“Hello!” Said a little girl that looked just like Morgan herself did when she was a child in the alleys. She even had the same freckle on her left cheek.

Faux-Ophelia blinked mismatched eyes. She put a skeletal hand on Morgan’s knuckles. Liver spots looked like miniature plum-colored countries along her taut flesh. “You’ve been given a chance to fix these wrongs, but not in this state.”

“Who are you?” Morgan asked, looking at the mutants, seeing the funhouse versions of herself and her Sisters around her, various deformities present in their limbs, their brows, their statures. “Why do you look…?”

“Like you?” Said a woman that looked like the bartender near the Neptune.

“Because we are,” said Faux-Ophelia, “we were the ones in the vats. The ones which escaped.”

“Escaped? From the Gene Division?”

“It was Samantha,” said a teenager girl that looked a lot like Morgan as well, except one eye was milky and her lip looked cleaved and vacuumed to her gums. “Before leaving the Globe she convinced Mr. Moratz to free us.”

“Confinement is no life,” the one with the plastic straw said.

“We are more than organs,” said the Faux-Rhea.

“Tell me,” Faux-Ophelia leaned in, “did they make it? The two of them?”

Morgan looked at their mismatched faces staring at Morgan with collective apprehension. Morgan knew the look, all the Daughters had it; a slightly raised eyebrow, widened eyes in which to see every aspect of the world as they waited with bated breath. She wanted to lie to them, to tell them that their liberators had made it and not needed to warn Morgan of her doom and that they had broken the cycle, but instead Morgan started to cry even though it tore at her stitches. They were free, but now in the Dredges…no one should live in the Dredges. These poor women had traded unconscious captivity for a conscious one.

“I’m afraid not,” Morgan said, leaving out Yves’s murder by Arno, the brutalization of Samantha’s body as a cruel test of Morgan’s dedication to the Queen Bee, the message she herself had carved into her arm as warning. The silence was filled with low murmurs and sobs.

Finally, the Faux-Ophelia said, “Then you must make it out of here.”

“The Dredges?”

“The Globe,” she said, massaging her right forearm, the very same spot that Samantha had carved the warning into her own flesh.

“The Queen Bee will find me,” Morgan said, “and she’ll kill me.”

“She already tried that…and she failed, didn’t she?”

“You must have thought you were a goner when we found you outside,” Faux-Samantha added.

“Your organs had come close to near failure. We saved you,” Faux-Ophelia wiped a tear from with a toddler-sized knuckle, “there were more of us who bravely gave to your cause.”

Morgan knew what this meant. She rubbed her hand over the train tracks on her abdomen. Scabs of dried blood lined the outside of the fresh sutures. “No, please don’t tell me that you gave your organs for…how does that make me any different than the Queen Bee? You just said that you are more than organs!”

“We are more than organs,” Faux-Samantha said, sidling up to Morgan’s side, clutching her hand with two long fingers that made her look a little like a crab. She said, “We are an idea.”

“There are many forces that are out to take over the Queen Bee, and all of them are horrible,” Faux-Ophelia croaked, “We need her order, but we do not need her. The Globe needs a Queen Bee.”

“I’m sorry,” Morgan said. Someone lit her a Steeple, put it into her mouth. Smoke filled the small room like the Hookah-dens in the Uppers. She knew that there was a limited supply of Steeples in their possession, and it wasn’t like Arno could supply them anymore. The damn addictive cylinders had actually become contraband. She protested, “I can’t.”

“The cycle must be broken,” Faux-Ophelia said.

“There are others,” she said.

“Not like you.”

Morgan recoiled. Their silence settled like dust in an old room, broken occasionally by the misshapen clones gasping like suffocating fish to get the second-hand smoke from Morgan’s exhaust. The briny smell seeped through the rusted vents, which accompanied an ever-present *drip drip drip* and, in the corner, Morgan saw bundles of blankets and dirty mattresses, several dimly lit candles. Morgan made a way to stand, holding onto herself as various versions of her genetic past, present, and future hobbled together like elves, propping her up, the Steeple dangling out of her mouth. With a steady hand she took the cylinder out of her mouth and placed it in Faux-Rhea’s thin lips.

“I can’t fight the Queen Bee, and I can’t prevent her from trying to find another heir,” Morgan said. She frowned. “We don’t have enough momentum.”

Faux-Ophelia said, “There are others outside of the Globe. They live in Manhattan and New Jersey. You’ll find many friends there, many people who know of the Queen Bee’s Auditors and Daughters, know of the tyranny.”

Little Rhea looked like a broken doll and the Steeple hanging from her lips looked a little cartoonish. She said in a squeaky voice, “Head to the forest.”

“That makes no sense, there aren’t any forests here,” Faux-Samantha said.

Rhea shrugged. “That’s what Yves told me. Go to the forest.”

Morgan understood this. “I know where to go. Come with me, all of you. We can leave for Manhattan tonight.”

Faux-Ophelia jumped off the bed with elderly legs that were spritelier than they appeared. She walked to the dark corner of the room, past a puddle of slimy ichor and black mold, and opened a door into the subterranean and steamy sewers; the entire infrastructure of the Dredges was a series of labyrinthine right angles and pits of sewage, not fit for habitation.

She cracked, “Then who will let you back in?”

“I can’t risk that,” Morgan said.

“We can,” she answered, “look at what we’ve sacrificed to bring you back to life.” She pointed to the candles and Morgan counted three. “Duty has been thrust upon you. Will you take it?”

“Yes,” Morgan said, and she limped into the intestines of the Dredges, the aborted clones gathering in the doorway behind her.

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The air outside of The Globe tasted different. Morgan had felt the breeze against her cheeks when she attended the cocktail bars in the Uppers or swam in the infinity pools overlooking the rest of the Coney Island as a mistress to a CEO a couple Assignments ago. But down in The Dredges…the air felt tinged with salt and brine, with oysters and dead fish, with excrement and nuclear waste. The Atlantic Ocean glowed in the darkness, illuminated by the lighthouse on top of the Globe, colored by the electrical aura of Manhattan, and shining with the submerged shells of those illusive psycho-oysters. Barnacles clasped onto the dock and fell and collided with tangled nets of seaweed and oil-stained hotdog wrappers. The Globe was directly above them, held up by the socles, those grand architectural giants. It occupied all the sky and Morgan felt like she was underneath an entire planet, which in a way, she was. This was below the Dredges, the open space of Coney Island, the boardwalk underneath.

Morgan found Mr. Robert Forrest at the docks, smoking a cigarette with one hand, tipping the rim of his fedora in Morgan’s direction with the other. A broad chin and a long nose accented a confident smile. He looked to be his own lighthouse and carried himself much in the same way.

“You’ve made it,” he said, flicking the ash into the water. He pulled out a package of Steeples and handed it to Morgan. “For your troubles. It’ll get you to Manhattan. There are more Steeples there, so you don’t have to worry about your organs failing.”

Mr. Forrest got into the skivvy and offered his hand to help but Morgan ignored him, setting onto the rocking boat herself. The wood swayed left and right, and she felt waves of nausea sweeping like the ebbs and flows of the green water upon the pikes.

“Why are you helping me?” she asked as Mr. Forrest kicked off the boat from the docks and began to row around the spotlights dotting the water from the top of the Globe.

“Same reason Yves helped. For love.”

“Love of what? Did you love one of Tilyou’s Daughters as well?”

“Not quite,” he chuckled, “although I’m not incapable. No, ma’am, I’m in love with the Globe. It’s my birthright.”

Morgan froze and Mr. Forrest laughed.

“George Tilyou had several children. Not all of them had children. But some of them did. And some of those had children. And some of those had children.”

“Are we related? Are you my…brother?” Morgan asked.

“No. Technically, you’re my great-great-great-great aunt, and together we’ll stop the real one.”

Morgan shook her head. “I am the real Morgan.”

“I like that attitude, Morgan. You’ll do fine with your friends in Manhattan, who to be frank are still expecting Samantha and Yves, but they might enjoy the twist. I like the spectacle.”

Mr. Forrest rowed across the dark water, the oar spreading small rifts like wings of a bird. The giant Globe at Morgan’s back looked on like an angry eye, the golden spires of Manhattan inching ever closer. Morgan looked over her shoulder and envisioned the Globe as an egg. An entire city encased in this technological marvel with aims of being its own nation, but it was not immune to a coup. All great nations worth their salt encountered this fate, and Morgan promised to make sure that Ophelia Tilyou would understand that she, with all her might, is exempt from nothing.

PART 2

1.

“Ma’am,” Mr. Forrest was surprisingly gentle in his urging, the gentle tap on her shoulder.

The smells of brine and salt were thick upon the docks; the rocking boat gave her a bit of bothered her. Morgan’s eyes opened and she winced, holding the stitches lining her abdomen like a poorly laid zipper. Instinctively she opened the pack of Steeples and lit one with an open flame offered my Mr. Forrest. She took a drag and, feeling her organs calm from the biologically engineered tempest within her, felt her throat begin to tighten. She held back the threat of tears. These organs were not her own. It had cost so many of her Sisters to even get her to Manhattan. She cursed herself for needing the Steeple, but letting those organs fail would be an insult to those who had given them up.

“Those stitches will dissolve, you know,” Mr. Forrest said, “whomever restored had good stuff. Like from a medical bay.”

“Must have been Yves’s,” she said, thinking how in the world these rejected siblings had acquired the technology to transform their meagre quarters in the dredges into an operating room.

“Let’s go, ma’am,” Mr. Forrest stepped out of the boat, held out a hand. He looked left and right at the forts of barrels and crates, of shipping skivvies and empty warehouses.

“Stop calling me ‘ma’am,” Morgan said, heaving herself past Mr. Forrest’s extended hand and pulling herself on the docks, Steeple resting delicately in her hand, a practiced position during her time as a courtesan. “I’m Morgan,” she reminded.

“You can call me Robert, if you like,” he said, withdrawing his hand.

Morgan steadied herself, looked over her shoulder at the Globe across the river, it’s grandiose sphere like some chained sun. “Where are we?”

“South Piers,” he said, going back to the boat, unleashing a hatch, and pulling out a small candle. He lit it with another strike of the match. “To our North is the elevated train, the High Line.”

“I’ve always wanted to see the High Line,” Morgan said, soberingly aware that she sounded silly. A phantom of a memory crawling up from the depths of her psyche; she remembered being a rat child, huddling in the alleys in the Lowers, scurrying through the humid and dangerous vents that only the children knew. Visitors from somewhere or another that were not Manhattan, accidentally left a pamphlet of New York City attractions next to some perfectly scavenge-worthy sandwiches and pop. Morgan and her closest orphans, ones which she would only learn later were actually Sisters, by some design, spent an uncountable amount of hours looking at the pamphlet as if it were some totem, or a relic. Central Park, Broadway. Times Square!

“It’s different now,” Robert said, nodding. “It’s all different now. Come on, we must go.”

They walked in between alleys, old buildings, crumbling structures. Small boats bobbed in the green water, dwarfed by the mega yachts that, even in the darkness of the starless sky, the illumination of the city proper, appeared colossal, monolithic, great beasts of steam and naval arrogance, blue flags unrolled like hangnails. They passed patches of water that glowed faintly in the distance with the radioactive psycho-oysters.

The entrance was underneath a shipping container, which Robert explained with an irritating pizazz. He unlocked the flaking container with a special key, ushered Morgan in, and closed the hulking, unsteady door after making sure no one could see. Morgan knew better than to ask where she was, but she had enough experience with charming men in dark places to take her chances. She withdrew her pistol, the weight of it several bullets shy and embedded in the Frog’s sallow, melting skin.

Another hatch opened into musty stairs and Robert ignited a lantern that guided the two of them down what looked like a mine shaft. In the distance, far away and separated by bastions of ancient concrete and *nth* generation rats there was rumbling like long, rhythmic thunder that barreled back and forth, left and right, vibrating underneath her feet like a great, tunneling snake. The lantern was a captured pixie, swinging left and right, Robert positioned like Charon as he told Morgan of upcoming divots, pitfalls, unhinged rails. They made turns that Morgan could not track, and eventually her spirit broke. She had accepted, in the chill after a gust of one of the mighty trains, the growl of bending metal above her head, that she could not turn back. Where would she go? She needed to go back to the Globe, needed to free her Sisters in the vats, needed to save the Daughters that crawled hands and knees like mules with a carrot to those damned Steeples. How many Daughters had existed before Morgan? How many had fallen because Ophelia had not found a suitable heir?

*We are only what we appear to others*.

Morgan stopped, gathered herself on the damp, vibrating walls. She fought an urge for another Steeple, cursed herself for abusing her organs, and prospered forward, each step closer to breaking this forsaken cycle.

They walked until Morgan’s feet hurt, although she refused to complain. Eventually Robert put the lantern on a hook and went up a set of stairs and as Morgan turned the corner, she saw a square halo above them leaking whispers of stale hops and the low murmur of chatter. Robert knocked, opened the hatch and offered her a hand up the steep stairs that were almost vertical. Morgan refused and she popped from the ground like a meerkat into a world of orange and brown, passing a floor sticking blanket cloud of ale vespers and spilled liquor. The light was almost blinding, and instinctively she put up her pistol while her eyes adjusted.

“Goodness, Robert,” said a voice. Nordic, deep pitch as if dragged through gravel. “You didn’t say anything about the Daughter being jumpy.”

“Not Samantha,” he said.

“Where’s Yves?” French, subtle lilt of voice reminded Morgan for whatever reason of the smell of clean laundry. She walked over to Morgan as if she were not pointing a cannon in random directions. Morgan felt her peering into the black maw that they had come from. “Where is my brother?”

“I’m sorry, Frederique,” Robert said. Then he turned to Morgan. “You can put the gun down, Morgan.”

Her eyes adjusted and the world revealed itself, showing several people with their hands up, eyes locked on Morgan and her pistol. She lowered it, made a point to keep her finger on the trigger.

Robert said, “Don’t mind her, folks. She’s had quite a couple of days.”

“But Yves,” Frederique raised a slender hand to her neck. “*Ou est mon frere?*”

“It’s been a couple of days,” Robert said, putting his hand on slender woman’s shoulder, “I’m sorry, Frederique.”

The Nordic man stood and it looked like a bear rising on its haunches. He fished some whiskey from a side table and poured it in between glasses. He lumbered over to Frederique as Robert took her shaking body onto the chair, and placed the brown liquid in front of her buried face. He handed two to Robert, gestured to Morgan. Robert stretched across the room and offered it to her.

“It’s whiskey,” he said, taking a sip himself.

“She’s like a cornered badger,” said the man. Then he said, “We were expecting Samantha.”

“It’s been a rough couple of days,” Robert said again, terser. Then, shrugging and gesturing to Morgan. “We have someone else.”

Morgan determined this crew was in more dire straits without having a gun pointed at them. She withdrew her pistol. “I’m sorry for your loss, Frederique.”

“It speaks!” Said the large man. He downed his drink. “Call me Aldous. Are you a Daughter?”

“Was,” Morgan said.

She looked past the door and into the closed bar. Chairs were stacked on top of tables. The tall obelisks of Manhattan glowed from the floor to ceiling windows, swathes of neon and pastel. The colors of the city at night. On any assignments that allowed Morgan a balcony, a courtesan, a sitter, an escort, she had always caught glimpses of this city, felt that it was a foreign country in more ways than the governmental definition. It was just across the bay but it required a passport to get in and out, and Morgan always saw the multitude of colors blend into a collective orange glow. Now up close, even from the distance of the musty stock room, the colors of Manhattan at night were kaleidoscopic.

“At the risk of being insensitive, we need to keep going,” Robert said. “Morgan, you are probably dying for a bed.”

“I need to go back,” she said to the room. “Take me back. I can’t be here.”

“Patience, Tilyou’s Daughter,” said Aldous.

“Don’t call me that,” Morgan, hiking a thumb to herself. “My name is Morgan.”

Frederique lifted her head from hands, large doe eyes peaking from the branches of her fingers. “I was looking forward to meeting Samantha. And now…”

“Sorry,” Morgan said, unintentionally adding a touch of venom. Then she added: “Samantha was brave. You would have liked her.”

“Are you ready, Morgan?” Robert said, “I can take you back tomorrow.”

“Today, Mr. Forrest.”

“Tomorrow,” Robert said, more sternly. “I couldn’t take you back if I wanted. The boat is gone.”

“Excuse me.”

“Boat. Gone.” Aldous poured himself another glass of whiskey. “That difficult, Daughter?”

“If you call me that again,” Morgan said, “you better be sure to be satisfied with it because that is the last sound that will be on your tongue.”

“Enough,” Robert said. “The boat is gone. It was set to capsize. We didn’t really intend on making a return trip so fast.”

“But you did intend a return trip?” Morgan said. “Don’t I recall you telling me that the Globe was your birthright?”

“With Samantha and Yves in tow, yes. But revolutions take time.”

“A revolution?” Morgan scoffed. “I am not here to play your games, Mr. Forrest. Not with you or anyone else. I have a duty to my Sisters. I have a duty to The Globe. I have a duty to kill Ophelia Tilyou.”

Robert opened his mouth to retort but Frederique sniffled, “You want the Queen Bee dead and we want to return The Globe to its glory. Don’t you see, you idiot, that your goals align with ours? I’ve lost Yves. I’ve lost the other half of my soul.”

At first Morgan thought to confront Frederique about how she knew of Ophelia Tilyou’s adage, but then she remembered that Frederique was not widowed from Yves: it was her brother. She probably knew more of Samantha in some ways than Morgan did by proxy. Defensively, Morgan took out a Steeple and soothed her organs, seeking solace in the cloud of black tar as if it were a shield.

Morgan’s quarters were tucked away in an alley surrounded by buildings, connected by a defunct subway tunnel. There was a small window that was concealed by wild flowers, but in between the reeds Morgan could see the yellow rectangles of life from the tenements, silhouettes living their mortal circuits. The room was obviously designed to host two people. It was a modest get up; a small dresser, a writing desk, tiny bathroom. Its quality reminded her of her abode in Thunderbolt Alley, but there was something about this place that imprinted upon a sense of uneasy comfort, which she acknowledged was confusing. It took her several minutes of pacing to realize that this room was meant for Samantha and Yves, that this was not a room in an apartment building with beds that housed other Daughters and shifted to other Daughters, that this room was not a part of a collective, that Morgan knew for sure that the bed was not occupied by someone else like a pair of shared shoes. The décor was basic, but Morgan could not decipher any touches from the previous occupants which suggested even a semblance of personality. With this, Morgan found it beautiful, and as she laid upon the bed and closed her eyes, she could not help but feel that she was on a route that would bring ruin to someone, or somewhere, that these sheets were meant for lovers and her very presence was tarnishing.

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Robert entered her quarters via the same hatch in the door that brought her there. He had a calming presence, one which irritated Morgan because she did not wake at his approach. She once trained herself to be a deep sleeper during a tryst with an oil executive that rented an entire suite in the Halcyon Hotel in the Uppers to hide from his wife and replace her warmth with a socialite, of which Morgan had perhaps leaned a little too into since her previous assignment was as a sanitation worker who lived in the Lowers but operated in the Dredges. The executive had a particular sensitivity to waking Morgan while he got ready for her, as if any disturbance would shake the spell from his mistress that she liked him for him (she didn’t). Morgan got very good at feigning a deep sleep, but this was not the case. Her body had been through a lot, but still she found herself groping towards her loaded pistol on the bedstand and pointing it at Robert as he stood at the foot of her bed, his body blocking what minimal morning light had pierced through the grass curtain.

“If you are the type that needs coffee, you best be getting dressed,” he said. “You snore you know.”

“I’ve never heard it,” Morgan said.

She gestured for Robert to turn around as she got dressed. Her clothes still felt damp with sweat and grime from the river. She needed new underwear and thought, perhaps after her and Frederique’s spat with one another yesterday, that they might have come into an understanding, especially since Morgan had agreed that patience was the best route forward. The Queen Bee had centuries to scaffold her empire. The law of time was on her side.

She walked down the hatch and into the network of tunnels. Robert made no effort to be quiet.

“Where are we?”

“Underground shelters. Bunkers from the war.”

“What war?”

Robert turned over his shoulder, his face twisted into confusion in its orange glow. “World War 1?”

“Different parts of the world I guess.”

“The whole world, actually.”

“Not the Globe,” Morgan said. “We got news of it, but it felt like such a faraway problem for a country that was not ours. Ever since the Globe receded from America-”

“I know,” Robert said, cutting her off. “The Globe’s absence was noted.”

“We took refugees,” Morgan said, remembering her time volunteering in soup kitchens in the Uppers, becoming surrogate mothers for rich widowers, friends to wives whose husbands stayed behind.

“You took the rich,” Robert said.

The conversation would have continued but Morgan could not help but addressing her instinctively pinched nose, warped at the fistful of brine and sulfur that swept from some vacuum to their left. There was a glowing pool to their right, covered with algae along the black rocks like some stinking grotto. The pool glistened like the neon hued chlorine in the Uppers, shining its ephemeral rays of inner light as if a jewel was trapped within its depths. Shining oysters, their shells gnarled and prismatic like hardened bark, climbed upon the walls of the submerged subway route, clinging onto the ceiling as faux stalactites, dotting the rusted rails that go into the aquamarine depths. A kaleidoscopic phantom lurked, appealing to Morgan’s base desires and unearthing the childhood fascination buried deep within any adult’s psyche. She wondered what pearls looked like, the smell no longer assaulting her senses, now all that mattered was the slight hum, muted and angelic like a drowned angel…

Robert pushed a hand on her shoulder, stopping her as if she were about to fall off a cliff.

“Enough of that,” he said, “they have those oysters in the Globe. You know what they can do.”

Morgan found herself tugged back into reality. Her feet had stepped into an opalescent puddle with a tiny splash, her hands outstretched like a groping child. She blinked hard several times. Robert pulled her away and she allowed him to guide her, having difficulty peeling her attention away from the opalescent force.

“The oysters in The Globe don’t really look like *that*,” she said.

“The chefs shuck them appropriately,” Robert answered, “but if you eat them raw, you go mad. More than mad. I’d bet that shucker in the Globe is a little crazy by second-hand, even if they can resist the temptations of their calling.”

“What’s more than mad?”

Robert kept leading her away, “Let’s just get you out of here. I’m sorry, Morgan. I should you have warned you. The psycho-oysters are exactly the type of thing to provoke you. It’s what they do.”

“How do you resist them?” Morgan said, her senses sobering, feeling a little vulnerable, psychically prodded.

“By never having one, because everyone knows that if you have just one, you’ll never need anything else.”

They returned to the stockroom of the pub, which in the morning light had adopted a crisp, cozy glow. A gramophone was playing staticky jazz on an obelisk record. A table full of coffee and espresso and empty glasses from the night before invited Morgan to sit. She felt at ease here, although she was unsure of what lasting influence the psycho-oysters had impressed upon her. Through a ceiling window the Manhattan sky reflected into an aquamarine stain glassed quality; it made Morgan feel as if she was on the inside of a fish tank, looking out. Frederique sitting in the corner, reading a book on a dusty chair, stretched out like a feline. She raised an eyebrow of recognition to Morgan before escaping to her novel. Aldous blundered in from the bar, stinking of whiskey, inching his chest underneath what Morgan thought to be a small tent. She did not notice the large, baggy clothing last night, only enraptured by his abominable frame. Tendrils of oily green marked his long beard, and at first Morgan thought the hulk to be drunk and the shining scars as trails of snot, but upon inspection she saw that they were seaweed.

Aldous sniffed at the cup of coffee, growled, and poured whiskey into it. He noticed Morgan looking at him and, through unexpectedly child-like eyes, poured whiskey into a cup. Morgan took this as a sign that it was hers.

Aldous took a sip, let silence grow between them. Finally, he said, “It’s seaweed.”

“I can see that,” she said.

“You’re not going to ask.”

Morgan shook her head, “Not unless you wish to tell me.”

Underneath his beard there was a tired attempt at a smile, as if he had forgotten how to use the muscles. “Good girl.”

“Not our girl, though,” Frederique said, slamming her book shut with a stative *thunk* and sulking out of the room, her sandaled feet stepping into the closed bar. Morgan could hear footsteps ascending stairs.

“Don’t mind her,” Robert said, taking an espresso, sipping it with a certain suave. “Frederique is really quite lovely.”

“I’m sure,” Morgan said. She thought of Samantha, wondered how excited Frederique might have been to finally see the woman that Yves was literally sticking his life out for. The twins must have been close. “She’s not mad at me. She’s mad that I’m not Samantha. Nothing I can do about it.”

Aldous grumbled. “You’re actually better than Samantha.”

“Mr. Bell!” Robert snapped.

“Yves was planning on fleeing the city. You know that. After Samantha gave you information on the Daughters the two were planning on getting eloped. Now,” Aldous pointed a meaty finger at Morgan. It felt like a spear. “Now we’ve got someone angry. You’ve got someone who wants to *go back*.”

Morgan put her coffee in the middle of the table. “Speaking of. I think it’s high time you deliver on your promise, Mr. Forrest. Bring me back. I’ve unfinished business.”

“Not without preparations,” Robert said, “as discussed.”

“What preparations? We’re ready now, aren’t we, Mr. Bell?”

“I like this one,” Aldous said.

Robert leaned against a counter, put his free hand in his pocket, the glint of his watch poking like a turtle head. “Okay. Let’s get you a boat then, Morgan. Find a boat, cross the international waters. Easy. Then get back *into* the Globe.”

“I’m a Daughter,” Morgan said, tasting tar on her tongue. “They would let me in.”

Robert stared at her, eyes sliver.

“I’d go via the Dredges then, I have Sisters who are privy to our cause.”

“And then?”

“I’d kill Ophelia. And Arno.”

“Mr. Arno is an Auditor, correct?” Robert said, smiling in a way that reminded Morgan of a man holding a better hand and knew it. “If the Daughters are horses, the Auditors are the ones who build the race track. You won’t get within five feet of him unless he wants you too.”

Morgan considered this. She thought that this was more or less true, as every time he had come to *her* for a new assignment or to give her a convenient pack of Steeples as if he had known hers were running low. Even the serendipitous meeting outside of Tectonic Biotechnics had been orchestrated on his part, another cog in this great machination. He had intentionally been there, waiting to find a way for Morgan to get those confiscated documents, one flabby arm raised intentionally to show the blood on his wrist. The “test” component, Morgan realized now, was how she would retrieve the documents. Ophelia wanted a Daughter who was as cunning as she herself was, and perhaps this was the moment in which Morgan fit the bill. She played into it. She had been the horse with full agency of the engine of its muscles, but unaware that its direction was predetermined by outside forces.

She cursed herself, folded her arms in response to Robert’s posit.

Robert clapped his hands together, jolted to action, enough energy to rival the sudden spring of a jack-in-the-box. “Come on now, let’s take you to the city. Frederique had loaned Samantha some clothes to get her through the next couple of days in transit, but something tells me that you will be in a position longer than what constitutes as a ‘loan’.”

“I doubt Frederique would be fine with lending me clothes anyway,” Morgan said, thinking of how the clothes she was wearing now, down to her knickers, were borrowed from the previous occupants of her station. Someone else was occupying the Thunderbolt Alley quarters now, the room no doubt molested by the Auditor’s hands. It dawned on Morgan that she had only trusted the Auditors by relationship to the Daughters, and now that she had excavated herself from this bee hive, she had no idea of their reach or influence. The Auditors were instruments of the Queen Bee, except they were men. That made a lot of difference.

*a.*

There is not a lot going on outside of the Globe. Even a blind man could see that. Heck, even a blind man could see that there aren’t any blind men *in* the Globe! Come groping your way through the darkness, our ticket masters will shepherd you with their white fleeced gloves to our wonderful medical clinics. What’s this coming up? Oh, is this Biotechnic Tectonics? Oh, you mean *the* Biotechnic Tectonics? Can’t you tell by the intelligent murmuring of the greatest thinkers of the world, the low buzz of the massive engines pumping coolant into their newest initiative? Come, come quick, no need for the cane. Soon you’ll see really what the Globe has to offer. They say the spectacle is what we live for, but the Globe also has why we live! Did you know that the lifespan of citizens in the Globe is upwards to 120 years old? Did you know that the average Globe child is within the top ten percentile in both intelligence and physical fitness when compared to their simian relatives across the Hudson, across the Bible Belt, across the *OCEAN*? We at the Globe prioritize health. A healthy people are a healthy community.

Ah, that’s better. Look. Didn’t even feel anything? See that? See everything, you lucky duck? Your sight has been restored with these, yes, you see it, yes, these psycho-oysters! Do not go mad at the color. Come into its beauty. Our optometrists are not shuckers, but they might as well be. Now, with your natal eyes, come to outside, gaze upon the valley that is the Middles, where the proud backbone of Globe society rests upon its shoulders, where they sing and laugh as they pull up their bootstraps, where they become humble with the knowledge that the Uppers can relax and leave the heavy lifting to them. Their lucky, I’d say, they don’t need to be bothered with the mental strain of bio-engineering. Leave that to the nerds. Leave that to the nerds who gave you *sight*. Now you can understand how The Globe seceded from the Union. Who wouldn’t want to gaze the Globe with fresh eyes? There is no horizon that contests the arc of the Globe. There is no ocean that can combat the might of The Globe’s beauty.

Now, with your hands on your hips, stand over the ledge and look at the glory before you. The Globe had given you sight. All the Globe asks is that you share its vision.

2.

It took Morgan a significant amount of effort not to keep her pistol loaded and hidden within the confines of her jacket. At every horn, swear, and “pardon me, Ma’am” the scaffolds of her psyche felt a little shakier. The alleys were brighter than that of Thunderbolt Alley, more reminiscent to the spires which glittered in the Uppers, but still Morgan felt on edge in the threshes of Midtown, Manhattan. Awnings created long shadows in which any old man playing chess or young parent getting a beer could be a spy for the Queen Bee. Morgan could not resist staring back at them.

“Have you considered, perhaps, that you are just pretty?” Robert said.

“The Queen Bee has eyes everywhere,” Morgan said, eyes darting left and right, up and down, at the balconies and even under the sewer grates. The world was not unfamiliar, and in fact the congestion in this city was familiar enough to Morgan’s own experience in each echelon of the Globe. But the Globe was her city, her people. The only foreigners were tourists. In Manhattan you could tell a tourist from anywhere, and this bothered Morgan. She felt vulnerable, tiny, an ant in a grid work. She made to go. “This is stupid.”

More cars. A taxi blurred passed, a guitarist played in front of an open case of which Robert flipped a coin. He had started slowly ignoring Morgan, which, upon her recollection, had started the second they left the pub and walked into a taxi. This had grated upon her. She felt simultaneously like a rat child from her youth and an escort. Some of the Daughters had left the Globe as they trailed powerful men, guided upon the cynical steering of the Auditors, but they always came back after a couple of days. Usually it was the Daughters that were less prone to spectacle, more consigned to duty where the beauty of the world had fallen by the wayside out of misuse of appreciation, as if it were an unused muscle.

Morgan had never left the Globe, but she had been an escort, and she had lived in the sewers. This, she could do, plucking her old identities to create an amalgamation of a script, a narrative for herself. But this still did not quell her anxiety. Her hands unconsciously moved towards whatever object was sharpest in her reach, a lemon cutting paring knife from an outside bar, the ends of a rusted metal chair, before snapping back or being scolded by Mr. Forrest, which only served to reignite the engine of thought that Morgan, in all of her anxiety, really did not enjoy being in the threshes of Manhattan.

“This is what everyone was talking about?” She said, speed walking through masses. “No wonder the Globe annexed itself.”

Robert was silent. He bit his lip, found himself in the shade of his hat.

“Sorry,” Morgan said. She did not know what nerve she hit, but she knew she hit one.

“We’ve got to get you clothes,” he said, “the clothes that were meant for Samantha are meant for the countryside.”

“I’m fine with what I have on. I’ll make it up to Frederique to keep the clothes, even if she won’t accept it.”

Robert chuckled and shook his head. “Poor girl.”

“I don’t take it personally.”

“Not her I’m talking about it.”

The Macy’s was a world unto itself. Morgan had heard people talk about this place like a mythical beast, showing off their furs and leather belts with a certain panache, as if evoking the origin of Macy’s increased the value of their items. There were some people in the Middles that had left New York City and were struggling to replicate their quality of life they had been promised, and still they clung onto whatever scraps of material came from the deified building. Sometimes they even sold it to people in the Uppers who had never left the Globe. It was the one commodity brand that ever pierced the Globe’s authority, and Ophelia Tilyou seemed to have a vendetta against the brand vis-à-vis the side directives from the Auditors to investigate something, anything, about the department store’s success. The department stores in the Uppers were glorious in their own right, the Pearl and Fink’s being the most ordinate, but their flavors were different. Same echelon, but unalike, like a weed that Ophelia could not quite raze from her public’s psyche.

Morgan understood why from the second she walked through the gilded doors. Perfumers sprayed expensive essence, mannequins displayed expensive and mesmerizing furs. It contained a whole city block, and it reminded Morgan, strangely enough, of the Globe itself, so metropolitan and electric was its interior and the atoms within, the machinations of business and dollars and coins and chatting and socialization and the envious eyes of window shoppers, brought it by novelty from the displays outside, accepting that they cannot purchase anything because it is not meant for them. There are Middles everywhere. There are Lowers everywhere, too.

They walked over to the woman’s section and Robert swept his arms as if opening up a popup book. Cairns of clothes hung on racks, glistening dresses displayed as if in a museum, woman with pearls and long gloves to their elbows appearing as if dirt and grime repelled off of them like an anode magnet. Morgan had been those women a couple of times. It was a world that was easy to stay in but rotted you from the inside out. She inspected a silk dress, rubbing the softness between her hands.

“Anything you want,” Robert said.

Morgan slanted her eyes. “I’ll have no man purchase my attire. Unless it is an Assignment, which it is not.”

“But it is. If we are going to go back to The Globe we need to look like we come from Manhattan. As tourists.”

“There has to be a better way,” Morgan said. “I’ve mentioned the Dredges.”

“Then we’d be coming from the Dredges,” Robert said. “No, I reckon we go as tourists. The Globe doesn’t blink an eye at tourists, as long we have the cash and our passports.”

“I don’t have a passport.”

“Frederique has that handled,” Robert said, “but for now you need to decide on what you look like.”

“What I look like?” Morgan scoffed, then turned to a floor-to-ceiling mirror. Reflections of other women admiring their angles, testing perfume from the counters, chatting with their friends, were behind her. They seemed so sure of themselves. But Morgan herself had never considered this. She had looked like many things. A poor guitarist, a whench, a temp secretary. Sometimes her hair was a different color, the ink supplied by the Auditors and in the fashion of a tin can set upon the table like some housewarming present. Sometimes, if she was in the Uppers, her body would have a sheen of gold, of silver. “That’s a stupid question.” Morgan said, after a pause.

Robert examined a dress. “Do you like this?”

“Is that what a tourist looks like?” Morgan countered, feeling snappy. She was losing patience. “I’ll wear whatever a tourist looks like. It’s just a costume, anyway. I need a Steeple.”

Morgan held out her hand. She realized that the pack was in Robert’s breast pocket. She didn’t really need a Steeple, and both she and Robert knew this.

He said slowly, patiently: “What do you look like, Morgan? Not as a Daughter, but as yourself. This is your assignment, no one else’s. Dress for yourself.”

Morgan grumbled and waded through the racks of silks, chiffons, rows of boots. Her fingers touched upon their make as if to imprint upon them, aware of any prying eyes that might move to sweep her from the store and bring her to Ophelia’s wheelchair bent knees. She caught several girls looking at her, but she realized from behind a rack that they were snickering at her cluelessness, at her alien functions, as if her existence was to entertain them.

She found a periwinkle dress that glittered underneath the light. Robert noticed this. “Do you like this?”

“I…I don’t know,” Morgan said. Her face soured and she held in her breath, thinking of her Dredge siblings, of the Daughters in their roles, unaware that they were merely placeholders for extending someone else’s mortal coil. “I don’t like this joke, Robert. It makes me uncomfortable.”

“Only uncomfortable because you’ve never been asked this before,” Robert said. Then he handed her a Steeple but made a show of keeping the lighter with him. “To show you I’m not cruel and for when you return to me. Oh, and I’m glad I graduated to Robert. See you in thirty minutes, Mrs. Tilyou.”

“Morgan,” she corrected.

He shrugged. “Prove it.”

Aside from her fetching of him outside of the Macy’s, where he was found eating a hotdog with mustard and relish and reading the newspaper outside of Herald Square, the venture was entirely Morgan’s own. She had thought of abandoning the project several times, asking a nice gentleman for fire, and leaving Robert in the dust as she found her way back to the pub, but this was unwise and she felt in every fiber of her being that someone was waiting to capture her. She determined that allowing Robert to pay for her (logistically, she really did not have any money, hardly actually had any at all, ever, now that she thought of it) was the lesser of two evils, and her pragmatism licked the wounds of her scalded ego. She walked out with Robert carrying two large bags, which she took as a further insult. She had in her inventory: a sundress, dungarees, knickers and brassier, a broad rimmed hat with a feather, long gloves, silk scarves. It was the most that Morgan had ever actually owned, that were actually hers. Occasionally she would peak in the bags and look at her selected garments like they were foreign things, unsure if she liked them, unsure if she liked that she liked them.

They waited for a taxi and, now underneath the cloud-pregnant sky, Morgan felt someone spit a cold, crystalline pebble on her brow. She looked up, thinking that it was too cold to be the occasional beads of perspiration that drop from the vents above the Middles, and found nothing but silver trails like miniature comets, hitting the concrete and road into sunspots. Morgan blinked away an intrusive rain drop, kept her gaze now at the crystalline streets, the glistening headlamps throwing sabers of light if you squint hard enough, the slightly increased hustle from the street as they moved in one chaotic fashion underneath the awnings of the concrete spires.

“I don’t see an umbrella in here,” Robert said, gesturing to the bags. He raised one Macy’s red star into the air and hailed a taxi.

“It’s fine,” she said. “There is no rain in the Globe.”

“That’s silly.”

“Well, the outward facing apartments and hotels have windows, but it’s always a square of rain, and being up that high just gives you the impression of being in the clouds, which is nice, but it’s not…here.”

“Manhattan in the rain is beautiful, Morgan. I’m sorry that Ophelia had denied you this.”

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Aldous cooked them some stew, full of potatoes and onions. The Globe had a restaurant that served Nordic provisions, but Aldous’s cooking far surpassed even the best of the chefs there, even though it was simple. The food was warm and heavy, and the four of them sat around the table with mugs of beer or glasses of vodka and whiskey, the storm door sounding like fairies tapdancing against the metal, the glistening calculus of rain against the windows of the pub outside, through a crack in the door. Occasionally the patrons could be heard beyond their hovel, clinking beer, joking with one another, shivering against the rain as they ordered their porter or lager. There was someone playing the guitar in the corner, a yowling man with a thick Irish voice, and fingers that moved upon the strings like pale spiders.

They ate in relative silence, Morgan herself transitioning with a trifecta of eating, drinking, and smoking. Occasionally she would catch Frederique staring at her from the corners of her eyes, brows furrowed in what Morgan could only assess as judgement. Morgan did not expect the mourning of her twin brother to abate any time soon, if at all, and she was sure to be patient with her transgressions, but after the third time catching her eye Morgan took the Steeple out of her mouth and said: “Can I help you?”

“Rein,” she said.

Morgan volleyed between Robert and Aldous for support and found none, which frustrated her more. “You keep staring at me.”

Frederique said, “You eat like a man with his booze” -she pointed to Aldous- “and his cigarettes” – a delicate finger to Robert.

“You’ve offended everyone at the table, Frederique,” Robert said, blushing.

“Everyone? No, not everyone. Yves is gone. Samantha was supposed to be here. We should have been trading secrets, talked about childhood crushes. It should have been me taking her out shopping today. Instead, what came back from that failed utopia was a woman who doesn’t even know what she is, and here we are shopping at Macy’s to continue this long, treacherous endeavor.”

“Watch your tongue,” Morgan said, “my patience for your weeping only goes so far.”

“You don’t even know who you are,” Frederique said. “You act like your two days of individuality have freed you from the chains but you are still a Daughter of the Globe.”

“Samantha was a Daughter too. And my Sister to your brother. I have already wept for her.”

Frederique’s eyes started to redden. She blinked away the sting of tears. “Samantha knew who she was. She made to leave. You…you were kicked out. Freedom was thrust upon you and still you crave order designed by someone else.”

“We can’t change what happened,” Morgan said, “only what we do about it.”

“Aye,” Aldous grumbled and helped himself to more bread. Robert looked pleased with himself; a cigarette scaffolded by two fingers.

Frederique gulped down the rest of her wine. She stood and grabbed the rest of the bottle. “You’re right. But that doesn’t make me like you, Morgan.”

Morgan nodded, paralyzed. She was losing patience for Frederique, was slowly allowing herself the addictive feature of releasing pent up anger, yet she knew that if she would raise to Frederique’s antagonistic level then she would have no intelligent words to say. In arguments her reactions would be to go for the throat. Instead, she watched Frederique leave again to her quarters. With the weight of her absence settled, Morgan picked up her gin.

“Does that woman ever stay in a room for more than thirty minutes?”

Aldous chuckled, his seaweed laden beard moving up and down.

“Go easy on her,” Robert said, resuming himself. “She’s mourning. She has a lot of anger.”

“She takes it out on me when you’re not around,” Aldous said. “While you were out shopping, I asked for her to forge a signature to renew an apartment and she brought the darkness onto herself, claiming that she should have been forging a lease for Yves and Samantha.”

“Pain comes in many forms,” Robert said, and the obvious vacant meaning in this allowed the three of them to continue eating in silence, the weight of Frederique’s departure dispersed.

Later that evening, Morgan went through her new clothes on a bed that was not meant for her but had not belonged to anyone else. They were fine clothes, but they were divorced from any inherent value that could imprint Morgan’s personality on them. Did she have a style? Of course, Morgan preferred sequined cocktail dresses as opposed to moth eaten potato sacks, and it was obvious that an escort in the Uppers had an objectively better life than the starving miscreants in the Lowers, but Morgan was raised to prefer these because the opposite seemed so outlandish. On assignments when Morgan would have to struggle, like little Rhea as a begger, a girlfriend to an aggressive alcoholic, it was seen as a honorable duty to maintain spirits. She had seen Rhea dining with the Globe’s political rivals (although they did not know they were rivals of the Queen Bee) and knew that the dangerous, less extravagant parts of being a Daughter were cyclical. It was simply doing time. And the knowledge that eventually the Auditors will cycle stratospheric assignments between the Daughters, as well as the occasional Tickets, was enough to fuel the headstrong fire to survive on the colder, more dangerous nights. But, as Robert had so blankly said, pain does come in many forms. Perhaps it was not so empty an insight as she thought.

A knock on the trapdoor near the bed seemed to summon Robert from her thoughts. Morgan allowed him entry and together they looked over the bed spread, a menagerie of furs and silks, of bangles and dresses. He held out his lighter and Morgan, unsheathing a Steeple, grabbed the cylinder with her fingers instead of leaning down to the open flame. They stood adjacent, two smokestacks. There was a new piece of luggage that he wheeled onto the bed, and then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a passport, handed it to her.

“We leave tomorrow,” he said, “remember the details in this, but not too much. Don’t want to convince anyone you’ve committed it to memory.”

Morgan flipped open the little book. There was a picture of a woman that looked vaguely like Morgan but not quite, enough that her and this imaginary person would blend into a crowd together.

“Frederique forged it. Put you in a long, blonde hair instead of your auburn.”

“Surprised that she didn’t give me a witches nose.”

Robert shot Morgan a look and she knew to back off. “Now she has more need for you to succeed than before. She wouldn’t do that. Besides, no one in the Uppers has witches nose or warts. They are all beautiful up there because they can pay for it.”

Morgan knew of the surgeons in the Uppers because she had attended parties with them. They were some of the richest folks in The Globe and many revered them as artists, especially since they could practice without the ethics chained upon the shoulders of those outside the Globe. Morgan actually found the plastic surgeons to carry along with them the verve of spectacle as if they had come from the very DNA of the Globe itself.

She inspected the name, tasted it on her tongue. “Lea Arnoux.”

*“Arnoux*”, Robert emphasized the -noux, “like ‘know.’”

“Or ‘no’, as in, that’s a hard name and she can pick something better. I hardly even look like a Lea.”

“She’s French,” Robert said flatly.

“I’m not.”

“Do you even know? How can you be so sure?”

“The Queen Bee isn’t French,” then Morgan said, “I think.”

“My dear, you were born in a vat,” Robert said, and the words stung. “You’re Global. High time you understand this.”

He puffed on his cigarette as the words sunk in like needles. Morgan found herself staring at the passport, at this false person who she would have to don, and here she was, born in a vat like the others, incubated in the thick ichor that puffed through her martyred organs.

“Sorry,” Robert said, and he made to put a hand on her shoulder but drew back as if she were an anxious animal.

“Leave the Steeples,” Morgan said, “there is too much apologizing going on around here.”

“Yeah. It’s Ophelia who should be apologizing.”

“No. She’ll have earned what is coming to her.”

Robert made his way out. He put the carton of Steeples on the table and shut the trap door behind her, reminding her along the way that she doesn’t have to spend the rest of the night here, but she could if she wanted.

“You’re not a prisoner,” Robert said.

“And yet I’m going back to someone else’s bondage.”

“If only to break the chains,” Robert said, and the trap door slammed shut.

Morgan lit another Steeple because she deserved one, filling the room with an odorous tar and burnt rubber, that of which was one of the Auditor’s narrative that they were banned from the Globe because of their pungency but have since become a candle-esque comfort. And in this smoke, she found herself feeling adrift. She could not help but see the clothes before her in a bedroom that were entirely her own but not meant for her that this was nothing short of a costume, yet another role to play in the grand scheme of someone else’s machinations. At first Morgan thought of abandoning this venture, her taste of individuality too brief and immediately under threat. She clung to this as she clung to the Steeples, and as she took another drag and invigorated her organs she knew she could not live a life of her own. Not yet. Robert was right. She was Morgan, yes, but she was of the Globe, and she was indebted to her Sisters. She would be no more a moral failure to them as Ophelia if she saw the dangers and left. In this, she was different than Samantha, and Morgan felt another weaving pang of anger that she knew of horrors in the labs and still attempted to flee, although Morgan could not fault her for falling into the grasp of love, for all Morgan had acted it. And then there was who martyred organs…

Several tears dropped from Morgan’s eyes, salty and sour, and they trailed down her cheeks in sticky trails. She blinked them away, allowed herself to feel the pain only briefly, and shuffled the emotions underneath another drag of her Steeple. She was just another sad person in these subway caverns. Frederique was hiding away somewhere, shuddering. Robert had his drink, and Aldous’s eyes dimmed underneath his thick brows, above what she could only imagine was a cherub-esque baby face underneath the coarse beard. A sorry lot, she figured, and wiped away several more tears before drying up the valve for good. She waved the Steeple like a tiny baton as she rifled through her clothes, opened up the luggage and found the long blonde wig, bald cap, accompanying mascara. This was Lea Arnoux’s hair, her color tone. Frederique even put moderately expensive jewelry (not quite, Morgan discovered, merely an illusion of glamor over a shoddy make. Frederique was more than a forger. She was a borderline con-artist, emphasis on artist. She would have done well in the Globe, and it made Morgan wonder how the pair of twins even came to be), but the clothes were Morgan’s, and for the first time in her life she discovered a pestering need to separate the reality from the spectacle, even though that’s all it was. That’s all it ever was.

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Morgan loneliness fueled her sadness, which fueled her loneliness. She paced the room, packed and repacked everything, practiced the foreign “Lea Arnoux” until it became familiar on her tongue. She never needed to play a part of the tourist, had never needed to become enthralled by the glamor of the Globe, of which, for all of Ophelia’s nefariousness, was actually an architectural marvel. There was a cloudy mirror in the corner of the room that Morgan practiced expressions on, feigning excitement, wonder, shock, moderate discomfort if, for whatever reason, her Uppers outfit cross pollinated with a Lowers reality, which sometimes the beggars go because tourists are not privy to the emotional manipulation of the Globe’s less fortunate residents.

The class stratosphere of the Globe was not against cross-pollination, but the Lowers occasionally pandered in the Uppers because the Lowers had no money to give and the Middles were too busy saving for themselves. To acknowledge the unhospitable clash of class temperament would be to validate it, which would make the class discrepancy real. The only truth, one which was enforced by the guard men, was the absolute rejection of the Dredges to visit the Uppers. The reason being that their appearance was too shocking and insulting to wealthy eyes, but Morgan came to understand it that seeing the Dredges was to acknowledge their existence. The Dredges were not in the brochures.

After an hour Morgan had grown tired of her practicing to be someone else, to rebolster her resolve to return back to the city which she had fled from, which had tried to kill her. Her eyes drifted to the window and the blades of grass like a flowing curtain to conceal the hideout. A draft sent shivers of a metallic scent, post-rain. Above this, in the swaying of the twilight sky, the rectangles of the surrounding apartment buildings flashed on like dials on a gameshow, giant puzzle pieces, that connect to form the slice of Manhattan life that Morgan was never explicitly raised but given credence to the belief that Manhattan was a place to be away from, an inferior world. Why else had The Globe, seeking perfection for both Earthly and Heavenly delights, seceded from the mainland? It was beautiful to Morgan, and she could hear the faint chatter of people on their balconies, the *clinking* of ice in crystal glasses. Laughter. A guitar. She could stay here, but she couldn’t. She knew that.

She was heading down the hatch into the abandoned subway network before she realized she did not know where to go. She had a rough mental map, fragments of Robert’s feet turning left or right, the lantern a shepherd’s beacon. She found the lantern, the oil half full, and lit it, coming into a path the forked into a seemingly endless dungeon. The walls were damp and the vacuum between the cement smelled of faint brine. She walked through the corridors, hearing the rumble of thunder of passing subway trains in active stations which she had come to use as an indicator that she was heading in the right direction. She passed: a flurry of rats, tumbleweeds of trash, broken lightbulbs, overturned barrels, puddles of oil spills, mysteriously damp water that was clumpy with algae and a derelict subway train, stationed at a curve atop a throne of moss and city detritus, itself illuminated with a single, miraculous dust-mote plagued ray of light that she could not see the inside of but knew whatever she was starting at was staring back, and at this point Morgan knew she had made a wrong turn. She turned back again, felt the sleeping metal monster behind her, a hovel to whatever lurked behind the tinted, reinforced windows, and came upon the opalescent shimmer that Morgan knew, with a sense of dread, that she could reorient herself.

The colony of psycho-oysters glimmered and shined with more verve than the chandeliers which hung above the Macy’s perfume counters. Their black shellac looked like obsidian along the walls, clamoring along the crusted cement like barnacles. It was so beautiful that Morgan drew a tear, and she ventured into the kaleidoscope, her free hand outstretched, groping into the light. Now knee deep, she made to dip her fingers into the rainbow runoff from the psycho-oysters, felt the thickness of their briny submerged ecosystem. Her hands touched upon a shell, felt its almost fur like quality under her fingertips, and dislodged the jewel like a loose tooth. A sobering chill colonized her then, and she found herself standing knee deep in blue green water, as if someone had turned off the light show. The psycho-oysters gasped like a beating heart. She held the specimen in her palm, saw its tongue, saw the viscous, shining fluid. Instantly she dropped the thing into the water, waded out of it, and drew herself a Steeple, lighting it on the lantern still hanging loft in the other hand. She swore to herself, felt foolish, and, in this dissolution, reached down and took the oyster, putting it at the corner, away from its brethren, where is clung to the wall with such sudden viscosity that it reminded Morgan of an opalescent scab.

She found her way, eventually. The back of the tavern was warm and at once she felt the golden protective light, so comforting against the now torrent of rain from the outside. She brought herself up, dried herself with the nearest towel, and looked up to see Robert drinking a glass of bourbon, smoking a cigarette. He poured Morgan a glass.

“Surprised you made it here.”

“I’m not a prisoner,” Morgan said, and then realizing herself, she corrected, “I wouldn’t abandon my last night in Manhattan.”

“No,” he said, smiling, “I suppose not. Let me know when you want to go back. I know the route.”

The tavern was in full swing, with beer spilt onto the floors, drunkards hanging onto each other singing songs, the bartenders particularly buxom. The place scented of hops and fried things. Morgan sidled up next to the hulking figure that was Aldous, whose gargantuan stature was wide enough to berth two seats, and showed her empty glass as an offering. Aldous gestured to the bartender, and she poured them two fresh glasses.

“Couldn’t resist, huh?” Aldous said.

“I suppose not.” In this context, she could not help but smile next to the living mountain.

“Good,” he said, “good.”

They drank and after a moment’s pause, she gestured to the seaweed intertwined in his beard. “When I first got came here, I thought assumed everyone in this city wore seaweed. Seaweed crown, seaweed blouses.”

He said, “One day, maybe.”

“One day,” Morgan said, looking around.

Aldous kept his eyes on the whiskey, Morgan watched her own swirl. “Last day of being Morgan. That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

She was struck by Aldous’s bluntness.

“You have a long road ahead of you. I understand.”

“And you?” she said, “Why ally yourself to Mr. Forrest’s cause? What have you to gain, or to lose?”

Aldous shrugged and he looked like a giant octopus swaying its tentacles. “My stake begins and ends at Tectonic Biotechnics.”

A flash of shock infiltrated her body, shuddering to her spine. “You’re not…?”

“No. I’m worse.”

“Worse?”

“You are intentionally engineered to be organically perfect. I was the result of an ill fortune.”

“I empathize with any trauma you have gone through,” Morgan said, and she meant it, although it was difficult for her to see any problem above the Queen Bee.

“Aye,” he said.

“Who was the apartment for? To renew?”

Instead of turning to her Aldous just moved his eyes, protected by a thick seemingly brow. “I have a daughter.”

“A Daughter?”

“No. A daughter. Sort of. If she ever finds her way back home, she knows that is a safe haven.”

“Oh,” was all Morgan said, and she felt foolish for saying that. Then recovered, “What is her name?”

“Cassie,” he said, savoring her name, and he closed his eyes, looked like a hibernating bear. “She saved me, and I owe it to her. I was a different person before she came into my life, found me at the docks. I was…just different.”

Morgan knew better than to pester. She remained silent for a second, cast a line thereafter. There was something in Aldous’s aura that made Morgan want to investigate, want to enmesh herself in his protective qualities.

“What was she like?”

“Powerful. She could look at you and your mind would just shatter.”

“She was beautiful, then.”

“No, she was *powerful*. And not in the way I am.”

“You are a large man,” she said, matter of fact.

“I’m strong, she’s powerful. And she’s on a mission. One day she’ll be back. I’ve done my part, almost. When she comes back, I can rest.”

Morgan realized Aldous was drunk. She was beginning to feel a little tipsy herself and still she sipped the refill of whiskey before her. She stood, realizing that this man was caramelizing into his woes. She bid him goodnight and walked into the back room, where Robert was entertaining a woman on the springy couch. Morgan walked back into the tavern, closed the door behind her. She turned face to face with Frederique, who was drinking something crystalline out of a champagne flute.

“Mr. Forrest is with someone.”

“The pig,” she said. “Do you wish to go into the cellar?”

Morgan allowed this slight. She nodded.

“I will show you the way.” She burst through the doors and ignored Robert and his friend with such dignity that Morgan could not help but feel respect for her. She unlatched the door and stared at Morgan as if she was lagging.

Together they walked through the tunnels, Frederique holding the lantern like a shepherd. They passed the pool of shimmering oysters and Frederique, thinking of Aldous but ignoring the notions, reclaimed her hidden bounty. There was a force inherent in these creatures that made her want to covet them, but not for reasons that everyone else did. She pocketed the oyster, which glowed faintly in her pocket.

“Thank you,” Morgan said after the subway rumbled above her.

She was a lithe wraith. “Of course.”

“I know you don’t like me, Frederique.”

“I don’t think I like anyone,” Frederique said, sighing.

They got to the ladder that led to Morgan’s hideaway. An outline of yellow seeped through the latch. Morgan said, “Thank you. For both taking me here and the forgery.”

“Fix this,” was all Frederique said. Tears blossomed from her eyes.

“I will,” Morgan said. “I’ll avenge them.”

“If you fail, I fail,” Frederique grimaced.

“Good night, Frederique.”

“Bonne nuit, Morgan.”

*b.*

They say the Globe is the apex of culture, and it knows it. A shining beacon amidst the already glistening buildings of the Uppers, The Dream is a vaudevillian theatre with no peers. Talking mathematics, it is acoustically perfect, large swathes of clouds above and curved amphitheater-styled seating extends from the pit to the very back where even those in the shadows can hear the rattling of jewelry from the front row balcony seats. The Dream sits more than 10,000 people, which is almost twice the capacity of Radio City Music Hall. There are concessions: buttery popcorn, soda pop, beer for the husbands. There is a crystal fountain that spouts champagne, a crystalline chandelier that fragments rainbows in the atrium, a spectacle.

There are singers who can sing with seemingly two voices at once. There are jugglers who walk on stilts and balance on rolling barrels while jumping through fire. This theatre is a magnet for the performance arts, a temple dedicated to the very awe-inspiring nature inherent in all of us. There are magic acts, escape artists like The Rabbit of which no chain can bind, no trap can snare. Ronald Salt eats lightning before crowds of thousands. The Dream is located in the Uppers, but it recognizes that art comes from all walks of life. It is the destination for all dancers and singers and comedians in the Globe and outside of it, and in this sense the Dream is the sun, a passage to immortality.

The Dream is host to the riveting and inspiring Dreamers, a dance troupe that are in such synchronized perfection as to be automatons. Their legs go on for miles, flipping and pirouetting as if marching into heaven, their scalloped sequined dresses rivaling the aural qualities of the Aurora Borealis. Watch as the Dreamers curtsy in unison, as a hive mind, their curls and tiaras perfect, their smiles all trained to perfection, their bright eyes, wrought from all walks of the Middles and the Lowers, renewed and renowned, the troubles of what have might come before or will come after it all obscured by the limelight, the heat the moment. Their perfect bodies trained into perfection and maintained; their sleeping habits synchronized. What a gift, for the Dreamers, the female spirit captured in such totality! The Dream invests in its acts. The Dream ensures it succeeds. See how their smiles match their eyes. See how happy they all are with their perfect teeth, their perfect breasts, their immaculate skin. It will not last forever, and everyone knows it. That what makes it a dream.

3.

The trip back to The Globe had already exhausted Morgan. She woke at dawn, dressed herself in the prepicked tourist outfit from before: a corn blue dress with a thick fur jacket and accompanying pearls hanging from her ears. She donned the blonde wig and ignored its itchiness. She practiced the name *Lea Arnoux* on her lips, over and over, until it essentially lost meaning, and then she reoriented herself linguistically to provide it meaning, to own it. This was her process in the Globe for new assignments, and it worked swimmingly here. To her surprise Frederique had retrieved her again, like some gatekeeper from the hideaway to the rest of the world.

Their conversation last night had no immediate effects, rather they were lingering and subtle. Frederique actually said “good morning” to Morgan, had not given her any sideways, judgmental glance. She did not help Morgan carry the luggage through the tunnels, nor did she help her lug it up the ladder, that of which was substituted for Aldous’s baseball mitt hands. Morgan came to a light breakfast spread of coffee and cigarettes, the smells of hops and pastries. Robert’s luggage was near the door and Aldous put Morgan’s next to it. As a frame it did look like a summer getaway for two Manhattan socialites.

Robert appeared and helped himself to some coffee, reminding Aldous to chew the pastries thoroughly because no one has arms long enough to perform the Heimlich on him. He was dressed in a brown three-piece suit, complete with a glinted watch. He looked Morgan up and down, nodded, and checked his wrist.

“Grab a pastry and some coffee. We’re off in twenty minutes.”

“You look exactly the same as you were in the Neptune,” Morgan said, “I had to dress in this outfit, and you get to wear what you usually wear?”

“You’re playing the part of tourist,” Robert said, “I’m already a tourist.”

“Hopefully not for much longer, though,” Aldous said.

“Oh yes,” Robert said, snapping himself to attention, “almost forgot. Take out your pistol. Leave it here.”

“Not a chance,” Morgan said. “There are limits to my following your insanity.”

“Crossings check,” Robert said, “they will rifle through your luggage. We’re basically crossing into another country. If they frisk you, see you bringing weapons…then what’s the point of going undercover?”

Morgan knew he was right and as difficult as it was to part with her weapon, she pulled it from the inside of her jacket, feeling now how arrogant she must have appeared to have it strapped to her person, and placed it on the table next to a tower of pastries and half circles of coffee stains.

“I will find another way to kill Ophelia,” Morgan said, more to herself.

Robert smiled, “I’m sure you will.”

After breakfast they set out. The closed pub seemed oddly vacant when compared to the energy of last night. Morgan looked at where she and Aldous sat with unexpected longing. They were close enough to walk the cobblestoned streets to the piers and had gotten in line behind the masses. The streets were different now. Instead of galivanting urbanites it was the morning rush. Taut muscled construction workers, delivery drivers, maids. Bags underneath the eyes of the masses. The loud food cart selling cheap coffee and pastries (that looked very similar to the ones at the pub) annoying the passerby but getting biting customers none the less, portfolios hung limp with still waking hands. The harbor smelled of brine and seagulls. Morning smokers created a smog that cloaked Morgan and Robert as they enmeshed in the masses. Twenty minutes later Robert paid the ferryman for the both of them and the ship traversed the blue green waters of the East River to Ellis Island.

“A ferry to a ferry?” Morgan said. “Redundant.’

“Sort of,” Robert said. “The Globe was originally created to be the beacon for newcomers. I’ve always suspected that the old roots in Coney Island still had that sense of being the gateway to the world. And look, Ellis Island. The immigrants came looking at the Statue of Liberty. Now the port reopened to accommodate passage between The Globe and Manhattan.”

“Like Lincoln Tunnel,” Morgan said, figuring it out.

“Yeah, in a way, but think more symbolically intentional. You’ll see. It’s about the spectacle, even the psychic kind.”

It did not take more than thirty seconds on Ellis Island for Morgan to understand exactly what Robert was referring to. The gateway for immigrants heading into New York City, into America, the Statue of Liberty was the first sight, the first symbol of their new life away from the horrors which they had come. Eons of history lay under her feet, ghosts of trauma and victory and hope spirited through the halls. Once it was obvious, the symbolism became especially heavy handed, almost nauseatingly so. Outside the window of customs this was cemented; she could see the Statue of Liberty in full view, and right around the bend of Red Hook the eggshell arc of the Globe, itself an arcing meniscus of onyx, a world within itself. It was a lighthouse unlike any other.

Morgan held her passport in her hand and trailed her luggage behind her. Robert, a cigarette in between his mouth, one of many smokestacks in the queue, adjusted his bags and craned his neck, his foot tapping with impatience. They moved up in line, two units on a conveyer belt. Morning light shone through the rafters.

“I guess it’s fine time for one of mine,” Morgan said, shuffling.

“I’d hold on.”

“Asinine comment, Mr. Forrest. Plenty of women smoke.” She pointed to several of the women holding their *shimmering* and *light* cigarettes. Then she pointed to the coppered ambered flame of Lady Liberty. “Women are allowed their torch of freedom these days.”

“Plenty of women smoke, yes, but no one smokes Steeples. They are Globe made and given to the Daughters. How would you have gotten them if your passport doesn’t show you’ve been there?”

Morgan could not argue with him, for his logic was unfortunately sound. She tapped her foot, her frustration beginning its slow bubble.

“You can have one of mine,” Robert offered, pulling a cylinder like a magician revealing a card.

“Only Steeples. The other ones make me feel nauseous.”

“Not by coincidence, of course,” Robert said. “Can you make it the next couple of hours? You’re no use to us dead.”

Morgan considered this. Her previous Steeple had been on the walk to the seaport. She had gone longer without one, had existed on handouts spaced days away when she was a beggar. This feat of mental fortitude did not apply to her now. She wanted to ask Robert if she had any other choice but feared his answer. Instead, she nodded, pouted her lips.

“Oh, and call me Robert please.”

“Leave it, Mr. Forrest.”

“Says Morgan. But not my wife, French socialite Lea Arnoux.”

“This is nonsense. We’re related.”

“Customs doesn’t know that, and we need a front.”

“You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you?”

Robert nodded, stamped out the cigarette. “I’m pretty good at pivoting.”

They were almost at the head of the queue. The officers were burley men, clad in uniforms that looked a little bit like bellhops. They rummaged through luggage, invasive gloved fingers weeding through intimacies, pulling out confiscations of bottles and cigarettes, at which Robert nudged Morgan with raised eyebrows, as if proving a point. Then, as they drew near, Morgan realized that she had taken the oyster from the subway caverns and had hid it in her knickers, thinking that the customs officers would have some decency of shame. With her incorrect assumption, she realized that the oyster would most certainly be shucked out, tossed back into the river to join its glistening brethren. Morgan felt foolish then, and embarrassed because she had decided to covet something, *anything*, and it had to be a living creature. Was she hoping for a pet? There was some quality about those shining oysters that made Morgan want to hold them, to contain their beauty, and she had indeed fallen into their dirty salesmen trap, just short of consuming their briny meat themselves. She reckoned the mythology behind them, that when consumed in their natural form without the aid of the trained Globe chefs the oysters bestow incredible power, that some say are the reasoning for the freaks in the hippodrome, the living conductor Ronald Salt. When prepared properly the oysters are of utmost euphoria, cultivated with a special Global technique, their properties waning like migratory birds into a gristly, tasteless mash the farther they were from the New York City coasts. A true local delicacy that brought in terrific revenue by itself. But when consumed raw, they say it took your sanity for one, two days of ascended divinity, and then you get to pick whether you want to keep your mind or your body. This mentality justified Morgan’s pilfering of the creature, although she did not know what she wanted to do with it. And now it was an obstacle that might very well not be worth it.

Already raised into a cloud of irritation from the prickling onset of withdraw, she bent down, rummaged into her luggage, and swiftly, behind the obstruction of the legs in front of her and Robert’s inherent sense to maintain normalcy amidst Morgan’s sudden lurch downward, unweaved a shoelace and wrapped it around the shell of the oyster, luckily still scented with the lingering olfactory kaleidoscope of Macy’s. She tied it around her neck, stuck it in the cleft of her breasts, placed the pearls over the sling.

“Are you serious?” Robert said, now whispering as they neared the proximity of the customs counter. “You went back to the oysters?”

“You said I couldn’t bring my pistol,” Morgan whispered back.

“What are you planning on doing? Throwing it at the Queen Bee?”

“I don’t know,” Morgan said, and she didn’t.

They came to the customs counter, found a baby face underneath an attempt at a coarse beard. He eyed Morgan up and down, lingering over her lips, her breasts. Then he looked suspiciously at Robert, as if wondering how a man like Robert had snagged a wife like Lea Arnoux. Robert presented their passports, and the officer lingered again on Lea Arnoux’s picture. Morgan thought that they looked similar enough alike, but customs officers were trained to notice discrepancies. He craned his neck up and down like a light switch, confirming that he was seeing double. After a second he passed them both back to Robert and began to rummage through their luggage, but at that point Morgan already knew they had passed the test. Without a second glance, he pushed them to Robert and he took all the bags through the barrier before setting them down.

“I think he fancied you,” Robert said.

“He fancied Lea Arnoux.”

They walked to the ferry with all the other cleared passengers. Elderly couples on vacation to the Globe, wealthy families with chocolate covered toddlers in tow, investors who act like this was not a unique experience for them, that business in the Globe was just another day. A couple neared them, asked if Robert and Morgan were on their honeymoon too.

“Absolutely,” Robert said. Then he turned to Morgan, elbowed her in the ribs, and said, a bit too cheekily for anyone else but her to notice, “Aren’t you excited to visit the Globe? They say it’s a whole different world there.”

Morgan did her best to play along, and after the couple wished them best of luck Morgan’s smile faded. Her organs were starting to hurt from a lack of Steeple infusion, but they would be fine, although it wounded her emotionally to know that she was abusing the very biomaterial that her sisters had given their lives for. She watched the Globe ferry return to the port, too early for any of the vaudevillian acts that kept guests entertained in the afternoons and evenings and thought that perhaps her body was hurting to get back to the Globe, a physical manifestation of home sickness.

Because she was returning home.

Part 3.

Robert had elected to stay at the Empress, which was a hotel located in the upper echelon of the Uppers, whatever that means. It was an ornate building with zigzagging curves reminiscent of radio waves. The bricks were a light purple, giving the impression of a large, muted jewel. Like most buildings in the Uppers, this edifice fit with the tradition of anointing a patron saint in the form of some dead god. Such was the case of the Empress, where Demeter resided over the crystalline foyer with her cornucopia in one arm and a bushel of wheat in the other and Morgan could not help but avoid her gaze when they entered the hotel and checked in.

Now, standing on the balcony looking over the neighborhood of Seagate, which was the closest thing the Globe had to a port neighborhood, Morgan marinated in the smoke of her Steeple, each huff and puff lessening her anxiety, washing away every eye that she had sworn could see beyond her façade. The men gave Morgan no attention as they moved from the elevator that connected the port underneath The Globe and shot through the colossal sphere like an endless elevator, too busy chewing on their tobacco or lost in their own mechanical worlds. Morgan was certain that she had seen a familiar Auditor amidst the businessmen, kept a sensitive consciousness to the frog man’s bulbous stature. She passed mistresses, wives, high class bartenders, violinists playing on the gold cobblestoned streets. Some of them were Daughters. She knew their tells if she thought to ask, and it took immense will for Morgan not to reach over the purple and gold concierge desk and take the girl by the shoulders, to shout into her face the truth of Queen Bee, her unknowing servitude towards the unjustified destiny that was coming her way. But she knew better. A wife of a businessman, of which was unclear if Robert was playing a part or pulled from some truths, would never act that way. Instead, she was docile up into Robert pulled into their room, and upon his locking of the door he opened his arms and said *whew!*

But Morgan was already on the balcony, reviving her organs.

After twenty minutes Robert appeared next to her holding two glasses of whiskey, one of which he slid to Morgan. Someone was playing the piano in one of the downstairs cocktail bars. There was the laughter of newlyweds. Morgan adjusted her wig, found it itchy.

“Alright then, you’re back,” he said, “how do you plan to take down the Queen Bee?”

“I thought you were the one with the plan,” Morgan said.

“I am, but I’m testing you,” he shrugged.

Morgan accepted the challenge and knew immediately that she had not thought of what do after getting back to the Globe. She had a clear direction in mind, a concise mission that fueled her desire, but the machinations of the plan fell to the wayside. In this, Morgan felt terribly short sited, realizing now her arrogance that she portrayed in Manhattan, how she, for all of her confidence and ambition, still wore clothes bought by Robert, still had a name conjured by Frederique. She was a part of their troupe, instead of a satellite force with common goals. Morgan opened her mouth to answer Robert, who waited patiently, bright eyes on Morgan and not the crystalline amethyst exterior of the Empress.

“I don’t know,” she said, after a second.

And she didn’t. She could not go back to her apartment in Thunderbolt Alley, it was probably being watched by the Auditors, or worse, other Daughters who have no idea of their participation in this awful conflict. She could not go to her Sisters in case they have learned from the Auditor’s a false story about what happened in Tectonic Biotechnics; Ophelia Tilyou was all but a god to them, and Morgan knew this was true because she felt that way about the Queen Bee once, too. She could go to the Dredges, muster up arms with the faux-Samantha’s and Ophelia’s and Rhea’s, but they hardly had the resources to fend for themselves, and if willingly walking into death to become an organ transplant for a recipient of their choice was any indication, they would not hesitate to pool all of their meagre resources into Morgan, so much that she was an idea to *them*, a symbol of justice and vengeance. Morgan could not bring her mutant sisters to this fate, even though they would walk willingly into that darkness.

“Do you care to listen to me?” Robert said, “Because technically I have done all that was required of me that you asked. I brought you back to the Globe. I only invested in you, heck, even brought *myself* back to the Globe instead of trying to save the lives of the Daughters because of hope that you are just.”

“On with it,” Morgan said.

“We see Ophelia Tilyou as two different forces. You want to kill the woman. I want to kill the idea. I could care less about my ancestral aunt, and if we ever get to be executioner, I promise I won’t fight you for the privilege. But to take over a city you need to take over their sociology. Make the city at odds with itself, make the city choose.”

“I don’t follow,” Morgan said.

Robert gestured to Seagate with his whiskey glass, the brown liquid sloshing in its chalice. “We need to show people that Ophelia’s reality is not the one they have to submit to, nor the one they deserve. We need to convince everyone, from the Dredges to the Uppers and to the Daughters in between, that Ophelia does not have their best interests, that the Globe can exist without being subservient to her wishes. We can’t make the decision for them, Morgan, but we can lead to it.”

“And if we’re wrong?” She asked, “If the people want to maintain their lifestyle?” She thought of her past life, which seemed ages ago but was really only a week; this realization brough a pang of sadness. She would never have questioned The Queen Bee or her Auditors, would have died for them as that was how she was raised.

“Then we’re wrong,” Robert said, “and we pack up and go home.”

“Just like that?”

“Well, if we’re really wrong, then we’ll probably die. Or, I will. You’ll be transplanted into Ophelia first.”

“I’d off myself before that happens.”

“Indeed, that’ll show her.” Then he paused, collected himself, swished the whisky in the glass. He looked like an older man beside her, a man weathered by decisions, by the potential of decisions. “Tell me there isn’t a single person in the Dredges that would wish for a better life. Tell me they aren’t tired of being second-class, no, third-class citizens in this ‘utopia’. Or the Lowers! Are they not tired of being the brunt of the joke? Are they not tired of directing all their anger at the Globe to the Dredges?”

“And the Middles? Are you going to run them through the gamut?”

“The Middles will be the most challenging, I think. They are proud.”

Morgan agreed. The Middles were known for their pride in carrying the Globe on their shoulders, proud of their affinity to Atlas, to industry, bootstrapping. The Uppers were power hungry and fought for their wealth, which was a weak spot, one which Morgan had exploited in her ventures as a Daughter in the past.

Morgan got out another Steeple and started to smoke it as Robert went back to the room. He warned, “Best be sure you savor that one. It’ll be your last outside of the Empress.”

“I smoked these in public all the time,” she said, the cylinder between her lips. “They are not illegal, just decriminalized. You can’t buy them at stores.”

“As a Daughter of Tilyou its not illegal. Any girl smoking a Steeple will be asked where she got it from, will have to reveal the Auditor, or reveal herself to the other Daughters. Surely that was a tell you’ve used in the past?”

Morgan did not answer. She closed the doors to the balcony behind her, letting her mind be alone, the acrid odor the Steeple forming an aural barrier, a temporary shield from herself and the Globe. Killing Ophelia Tilyou was going to be much more difficult than she had anticipated, especially with none of the resources. She had not an Auditor terminal, had no apartment, no ways to contact her Sisters, who would not even believe Morgan even *if* they believed she was an their ilk. Morgan was not pessimistic; she knew if someone came to her and touted the same blasphemy towards Ophelia Tilyou she would not believe it either.

But there was the auditor network, that simple terminal located at various hidden points in the Globe, primarily in the Daughter cycled apartments and suites, or in the back of stores, hidden behind boxes and forgotten about by management. The only public terminals were in the Lowers, meant to be utilized by the beggars, the cement sleeping prostitutes. She might find a direction on there, but if Arno was anything other than a rotund sack of meat, he was efficient, and Morgan could not trust her password to not alert the Queen Bee of her return.

But the terminals might be the only way to link into the Globe. Without this access Morgan was a flea to its consciousness.

“What are your plans, then?” She said, the balcony doors closing behind her. “You plan on holding an election? A rally outside of Tectonic Biotechnics?”

Robert had gotten changed, ditching his plaid jacket in favor of a slightly ruffled button up, his sleeves rolled up to taut forearms. He swirled another glass of whiskey around before downing it. “Something like that. I’m going to a bar.”

“I refuse to even entertain the thought of you partying in the Globe. I expect you have someone to meet.”

“There are dock workers trying to form a union. I plan to be one of the invisible forces that combat the invisible force of the market.”

“Well, you don’t look dressed for the Uppers.”

“Nope,” he said, “but you do. Put your acting skills to use.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a postcard, which featured one of the Globe’s most famous attractions, a sake house in the botanical gardens, the *Requiem*. “This man here will be expecting me afterwards, but now that I’ve got you, would you kindly talk on behalf?”

Morgan took the card, saw the cheap design on the postcard, the giant bird cage of a terrarium. She had been there a couple of times, had waded through the crowds that walk incredibly slowly, savoring every inch of the biome.

“Now you’ve got me running your correspondence.”

Robert shrugged. “Come on now, a guy like me has nothing to hold against your feminine charm. Purse your lips and blow smoke in his face.”

“Fine. Who am I speaking to?” Morgan said, consigning to this, upset that she had allowed this.

“Alexander Noctalia,” Robert said, “he’s an artist. I’ve been following him for a while. People tell me that he was tired of the Queen Bee’s censorship, that his reputation has taken a beating because of his less savory views of the Globe’s taste in art.”

“I’d say having any opinion on art is hardly revolutionary,” Morgan said.

“All art is politics,” Robert said. He reached into the brief case that he had thrown on the bed, pulling out several photographs and fanned them on the table before Morgan. They showed sculptures in marble, onyx, gemstone. Each was of a woman, each poise graceful as if ambered in time, half-pirouette, spread winged. Morgan admitted that they were pretty. “His latest piece, the Trinity, had only one night before men clad in black suits shut the whole show down. After getting himself piss drunk to armor against the public embarrassment, he found that no printing press kept their contract to put up posters, all the radio talk shows told him that his booking got cancelled. What a hangover, right?”

“Those men were Auditors,” Morgan said plainly.

“Whatever they were, they didn’t like Noctalia’s art. His works always have kind of been on the fringe, but it was a spectacle, so it kept in tune with The Globe. But not this one.”

Morgan looked more closely at the Trinity. The first woman was made in ornate marble and platinum, elevated above the others, arms spread wide as if to embrace the world. The second woman was made of limestone and appeared to hold the uppermost girl upon muscular shoulders. The bottom girl was made from cement, her gaze looking up lustfully, breasts exposed. Their bodies formed a sort of orb. All three girls were beautiful.

“I see it now,” she said, snickering.

At the very bottom of the trifecta was a cluster of ceramic women the size of a shoe box, holding the three of them up. It was difficult to see from the pictures, but the miniature women looked miserable, beaten. Ugly.

“The Dredges,” Morgan said. “I’d pay to see that.”

“Apparently a lot of people did. That’s the problem. Look, you talk to him, I’ll head to my part of town, and we’ll convene tonight or tomorrow. Agreed?”

“Not agreed, Mr. Forrest,” Morgan put a hand on her hip, “How do I even know this man will be here tonight? Was he expecting you?”

“No, but the man likes sake, and he’s there every night.”

“With a different woman, no doubt,” Morgan said.

“Perhaps he’s just waiting for the right one,” then Robert’s face scrunched. “A shame you’ve got to keep your hair blonde. I heard he likes redheads.”

Morgan wanted to protest but found herself unable. It was a lead that she could not counter with one of her own, and she knew, deep down, that the justice packaged for the Queen Bee would require patience and strategy, of which she had to admit Robert had both. She wondered how far in advance he had thought, like some grandmaster in chess. Her position defaulted her to Robert’s whims, and it was the only buoy of safety in these calm storms, of which she knew a tempest was boiling just under the surface. Morgan accepted Robert’s terms due to this reasoning, for he was playing this game longer than she had.

*a.*

The great engine of human history is not history itself, rather the ideologies of the time, the zeitgeist, the spirit. It is within this conflict that wars erupt, that countries reform and societies are birthed. For the absolute failure of the self-destruction genome which is activated upon reaching critical population mass, it is a beautiful, saccharine miracle that the world has not completely collapsed upon itself. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they haven’t tried. Is capitalism the spearhead of a zeitgeist meant to instill productivity? Is communism the symbol of infusing equality as the great rotary of history? This does not concern the Globe, for the Globe does not care. Take the Red Scare, that great maroon dread flaking over the American continent. One might say that Uncle Sam was protecting Lady Liberty from an invasive, psychic force. But if Communism is so obviously wrong and the arguments feeble, why the fear of changing the paradigm? Is this ideology not the pandering of hippies and drop outs, jesters and rapists? If it is so obviously misdirected, then why does the lion fear the ant? No. Lady Liberty fears Communism. The one truth is that Lady Liberty is afraid of a potential windfall, otherwise she would not have taken up arms, would have applauded the attempt of the egg heads to build a utopia at the world fair. But look at the Hammer and Sickle! Are the Russians laughing in between their shots of potato vodka? No! Instead, they are putting so many of their boogie men into the gulag, so popular are their actions that even a school child knows a little bit of Russian. Is it not obvious that the two polars of the globe do not fear that they are right, but that they might be *wrong*? And if they are wrong, then what are they? Simply acres of forlorn folk, failed by the scaffolds of their country.

We will take you. Witness the open arms of the Globe first hand, come into her bosom. Bring the communists, bring the socialists, bring the capitalists. Bring the utopians, the anarchists, the Nazis. Bring them all. The Globe does not fear being wrong, because the Globe knows it is right. Its ideology is sound. The only facet of reality worth tapping is the spectacle. Accept this. Own this. The Globe formally invites you to talk your blasphemy, your sacrilege. Give it your best shot, chum. Your shouts will only form another brick in the lattice work of our perfect world. The Globe will change you; you will not change the Globe. And yet you are of the Globe. If you are eaten, then your ideologies were not sound to begin with, and your spirit was weak. And the Globe has no room for naysayers that will not accept its grace. They say there is room below the Lowers, but there is nothing below the Lowers. It is as low as you can go.

I’ve never been there.

Come to the Globe and watch as the world burns with a flame it set on itself. Laugh at the irony. Come one, come all!

2.

The botanical garden was one of the few tourist attractions that Morgan enjoyed, had even used some of the Auditor given tickets for. Large Corinthian columns poked like fingers of God into the top of the glass exterior, swathes of continuous glass on the Globe itself, which gave the cluttered city the impression of a deep-sea diver looking towards the sky. An elevated walkway wriggled through this large oaks and elms, ferns and maples. It went underground to the mushroom exhibit, which has every mushroom in the world. It traveled through different biomes: a dry desert with real tumbleweeds and cacti, woods where the path disappeared into a clutter of dirt, that of which changes with the seasons outside, the swamp, which is by far the largest of the isolated biomes, complete with sludgy black tar that travels from *somewhere* and goes to *somewhere else*. Occasionally Morgan would catch a glimpse of safari-garbed Uppers, themselves outfitted with designer hats, expensive jewelry, ornate gems on their machetes. She passed a family of Middles sweating and swearing, their familial unity wrought with the stresses of having to actually walk the entire boardwalk instead of the ferries that are reserved by tickets that cost pennies to the Uppers.

The Requiem sake house was one of the few restaurants in the botanical gardens. Wedged between an art gallery (now showing a woman from the Lowers, one of the girls that Morgan recognized as a rat child in Thunderbolt Alley a couple years ago) and a small bed and breakfast, the trinity itself crowned the top of a moss and stone hill, complete with a gnarled root ascension all while under the shade of perfect cherry blossoms. The Requiem was a small, wooden thing, built like the hovels in Thunderbolt Alley’s lower rim but aestheticized by the feudal shacks of shogunate Japan as envisioned by someone not of the era nor culture. Not that it mattered. No history of Japan existed without the intervention of American hegemony at the World Faire, and Global children were taught that the spirit of this cancerous impression was one of the reasons for George Tilyou’s secession all those years ago. But anyway.

It was Alexander’s Noctalia’s tie that caught Morgan’s attention, even amidst the floral smells of sake, the sour twang of lemon zest, the whiff of blossom haunting the air. A waitress wearing an almost cartoonish rendition of a geisha robe set a cup of hot sake just as Morgan sat down at the bar, and still, she could not stop looking at that strange pin on his tie. It was a porcelain rabbit dotted with sugar granule sized beads of red and blue, giving it a clownish blush. In its eyes were black pods. She felt him looking at her, reeled in his gaze as if fishing.

“Those are baby clams in the eyes,” he said, “although it’s hard to see with a rabbit so tiny.”

Morgan sat, ignored him, wanted to see what he’s about. He had pale skin that could make him blend into snow, but other than his ghastly pigment Morgan found his broad chin and high cheek bones looked attractive in an imposing, business way. She had slept with a number of men and women on previous assignments, had found a way to mine sexual attraction out of anything.

“Why are the eyes supposed to be clams if you can’t see them?”

“The people that need to know, know,” Noctalia said.

“Who are these people?”

“A secret club of sorts,” Noctalia winked, and Morgan felt the acid in her stomach start to gurgle.

“Not very secret if you’re advertising.”

“If you know, you *know*,” he said, winking, strangely enough, with the other eye. Morgan felt like she forced down a spittle of vomit. “But we aren’t here for that. Cheers.”

He raised his porcelain mug and waited for Morgan to do the same, withstanding the frozen moment of Morgan’s initial reaction to resist, as if he expected it. Morgan clinked, tapped her cup, sipped the sugary tonic. Notes of pear and lavender slithered down her throat. Morgan stared across the battlefield of the bar, curious in an amused way about his toted “secret club”. She had scoured the Globe a hundred times over, and her Sisters on their own asynchronous track would have uploaded any findings into the network. A breeze past through the open-air bar, rustling the cherry groves, the shaded hill top with its rays of magnifying sun. Now that she had seen the beaches of Coney Island from outside of the Globe, she had a hard time believing there was a wash of sand not eight miles from here.

They stewed in their post conversation in silence, fermenting in whatever attractive tension Morgan had emitted and Noctalia had begun to imbibe. They caught sideways glances with one another, Morgan keeping an eye on Noctalia’s sake cup. He looked the part; strangely gangly, attractive in an enigmatic sort of way, like seeing a mulchy ecosystem underneath an upturned rock. She waited until he was almost done with his cup before she turned towards him, her torso suddenly frontal, the oyster shell between her breasts looking like an onyx pendant.

“Pardon me, sir,” Morgan brushed a lock of hair behind her ear, made sure not to scrunch her face at the discomfort of the wig, “but I couldn’t help but notice…are you Alexander Noctalia, by any chance?”

Noctalia’s face broke into a smile, showing a gauntlet of slightly ajar tombstone teeth underneath his thin lips. This was a man who equated an ego stroke to something else. The sake added to his skin’s attempt at a blush, and he feigned humility.

“Why yes, indeed I am.”

“I knew it,” Morgan snapped. “I’ve seen your art.”

A raised eyebrow, reeling in. “Really now. Where?”

Morgan was happy that she researched Noctalia more than with what Robert had given her. “I saw your exhibition at the Electric Bath art gallery a couple years ago.”

“Ah yes,” he said, savoring the memory. His faux-bashfulness dissolved. “The *Abstractions of Divinity.* Yes.”

“And I saw your avant-garde movie about, um, sorry, I forgot. Something about the spectacle.”

“An antithesis to Guy Debord.”

“Yes, that’s it!” Morgan snapped her fingers, letting herself lean into the recollection. “Any, sorry to bother you Mr. Noctalia.”

“Call me Alexander,” the sake had blossomed his cheeks more, making his pale face look like a caricature of French Tudors. He had a vacant quality about him that reminded Morgan as indistinguishable from a porcelain doll. Noctalia gestured to Morgan’s empty cup. “May I buy you a drink?”

“Me? Of course,” Morgan said. Noctalia vaulted from his seat and crossed the empty seats, sitting next to her. The cartoonish Geisha poured another round of sake. They cheers.

“What do you, miss…?”

“Arnoux. Lea Arnoux,” Morgan said. She held out her hand and Noctalia had the verve to kiss it, as if he were channeling an Italian romantic. The rabbit pin stared at her from below, the clam eyes now more visible. Morgan knew these men. He thought he was greater than the sum of his parts, even though the entire scaffold of his personality appeared to be constructed from composite parts. Morgan resisted cringing, resisted how confidentally awkward the porcelain doll before her was. Was this man truly worth the trouble? Was Robert playing a prank on her?

“Beautiful name, Lea,” he said. “So what do you do?”

And Morgan told him what Lea did, constructing a story off her cuff. In her assignments as a Daughter this was one of the few moments in which she actually enjoyed. She told Alexander Noctalia of Lea’s rising actress career, although she bashfully was only starting to get larger roles on Broadway and the occasional American movie, in which she quickly clarified that she actually came from France and that her name was the result of Francais ex-pats who still had a soft spot for their culture back home.

“Born in France but raised in America?”

“In Manhattan. My parents liked the free-thinking spirit of the United States. But nothing like here, in the Globe. That’s actually why I came here. I want to perform in The Dream. The arts in the Globe are fantastic. So free thinking. No censorship.”

Noctalia’s face soured. “I’m afraid that you might be a bit late on that. The scene in the Globe is not what is used to be.”

Morgan feigned shock and disappointment. “How so?”

“I had an exhibit. You’ve probably heard of it. A series of sculptures. I called them, the Trinity. Apparently, it rubbed whomever runs this place the wrong way and I, for all of my role as the paragon of groundbreaking expression, was clipped like a bird not allowed to fly.”

This was good, Morgan thought. He was getting into himself, putting himself on the stage to be martyred. He wanted to the attention.

“I heard of the Trinity, but I never had the chance to go, unfortunately.”

“No one had. It was only for a day,” Noctalia’s dramatism wasn’t entirely unjustified, but his vehicle of expression, deflated, unwound, left much to be desired. She half expected him to place the back of his hand on his pasty forehead. Then his face contorted, twisting into a mesh cloth over a bubbling rage. “It was shut down.”

“By whom?” Morgan batted her eyes. She wanted him to say it.

“The Globe,” he said. That was it. She got in him running, a battery fueling itself. He continued, “It was my magnum opus. A multifaceted piece. Russia has Mother Russia, America has Lady Liberty. What does the Globe have? Three goddesses?”

“For each strata, sure,” Morgan trailed him along.

“And what of the people that hold them up? Don’t they get any recognition?” He had downed his sake and ordered another. Noctalia was well and truly drunk now. His lips had a curious pink gleam to them as if someone painted him to look like he had warm blood.

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“If you think the Lowers are the lowest in the Globe, you are wrong my dear. There are others below it. There are always others below it.”

Morgan resisted a sad smile. She had never allowed the Dredges to infiltrate her psyche. They were like any other strata in the Globe, a constant. It was not until the mutant sisters revived her with their own infernal cost that she harbored resentment for the Dredges. Not the people within, for she felt sorry for them, and now, a biological kinship in more ways than one. Rather, she hated the Dredges because they existed, because the Queen Bee allowed them to exist, and they did not even get the dignity of validation. She thought again of faux-Ophelia, clamoring up onto her operating cot like a wrinkly toddler, the bunch of them sharing their last Steeple with her, imbued with their hopes.

“They’re erased from the brochures, you know,” Noctalia said, raising one painted on eyebrow. “I bet you didn’t even know they existed.”

“You’re a genius,” Morgan said, and she meant it. She leaned closer to him, allowing Noctalia to glance at her exposed neck, smelling the scent of Lea, seeing her own mollusk underneath her chin. “It’s a shame that the Globe took your art down. I would never allow that to happen.”

“It’s hard to fight against an unnameable force. I thought The Globe loved me. They loved everything else.”

“Because you were supporting The Globe’s vision of itself, I think.” Then she added, “But who am I to say?”

Noctalia considered this with a pensive nod, a look far away. The sky was turning twilight, purple and orange paint strokes. The giant glass exterior offered one of the best local views of the sky in the Globe and Morgan made sure to take a second to appreciate the view through the cherry blossoms. Soon the palm gardens would be closed for all except those who were staying at the inn and this sake bar itself.

Morgan began, “Pardon me for being forward, Mr. Noctalia, but are you here with anyone tonight?”

He pointed across the courtyard with a bit of confident, drunken verve. “I’m quite alone, staying at the inn. I’d say I love it, but it’s not the Globe sponsored artist loft in the West Elm. And the bed is cold.”

“I can help with that,” Morgan said, smiling, even putting the energy into her eyes.

Noctalia made to respond but as he did so another girl appeared as if summoned from the spirits at the bar, a djinn clad in glitter and jangling jewels. She looked as if the Uppers had manifested an absolute image of itself; long legs underneath a silken dress, high cheek bones. She smelled of grapefruit and pine, and she inserted herself between Morgan and the tormented artist.

“Pardon me,” she said, blushing, acting bashful. “I hate it interrupt your date, but I just want to say Mr. Noctalia that your work is so inspiring.” She had an accent that was of here but not of here. She and Morgan caught eyes, a spark of familiarity activating between the two of them.

Noctalia, now subject to the attention of two woman and thus forced to play a delicate game, looked at Morgan and said, as if challenging her to disagree, “Oh, it’s not a date, but um, thank you very much Miss-”

“Bijoux,” she said, “french for Jewel.”

At this Noctalia smiled. “Two French girls! What a coincidence.”

Bijoux turned her body towards Morgan, forming a glittering, opalescent wall that reminded Morgan of the shimmering oyster bays. She looked over her shoulder, nose upturned.

“Bonjour,” she said, and then turned back. She reached into her cleavage, pulled out a card. “I’ll leave you to it, but I wanted to say that I am a gallery owner of a new gallery in the Uppers, the *Mirror*. I’ve heard of what The Globe did to your exhibit, of how you’ve found the Trinity smashed into pieces.”

Morgan’s brows raised. Robert had told her that the Auditors had shut down the exhibit and suffocated any attempt of promotion. Even Noctalia did not admit, in his dramatic rendition of cosmic injustice, that black suited men had trashed his work. This must have struck him more than he would care to admit, otherwise he would have used it to reel Lea in his bed through the angle of some charismatic sorrow.

“An injustice,” Noctalia said, “I’m glad you see it that way.”

Bijoux put a hand on Noctalia’s arm, “If you have five minutes, I’d really rather talk to you about this gallery opening. I think you could generate quite the spectacle.”

Without a thought Noctalia lurched up from the stool with a verve of drunken confidence, swaying a little bit but trying not to show it. Bijoux interlocked her arm with his and together they sauntered out, Noctalia himself holding the business card like some fare. Morgan sat stupefied on her stool, watching her catch walk away. There was something off about this girl. Robert told her that Noctalia had a weakness for feminine attention, and for worship. It appeared that the latter trumped the former, although Bijoux’s glamourous appearance combined a bit of both. It was as if the girl had a mission. Morgan thought of waiting for a little bit, sipping her sake, thinking of ways to stroke Noctalia’s ego to get him to take her somewhere quiet. He was so close to be swayed, so primed for the secret combination of words that would get him on board with Robert’s crusade and thus make her a step closer to the otherwise impenetrable vicinity of the Queen Bee.

Noctalia had not returned to finish his drink, and the waitstaff were beginning to get antsy at Morgan’s lingering, looking at her from behind their cheap makeup with a mix of sympathy for a rejected tryst and itchiness for her to leave. It was at this moment that Morgan knew that Noctalia would not be coming back, his mannequin-esque frame gone for good, chasing opportunities to reclaim his sullied reputation.

Morgan made to leave, embarrassed that she was unable to complete this objective, wondering how the course of Robert’s plan will have to pivot accordingly. She walked out of the café, sniffed the last of the saccharine perfume in its threshold, and returned to the tiny village atop the hill, the sky now illuminated with a yellow fog. Stars did not appear above the Globe, the lighthouse on top of its massive North pole so strong in its wattage that a light-yellow nebulous cloud beast lingered in the place of the celestial sea. But the Globe believed this to be a symbol in and of itself; the lighthouse was meant for foreign nationals to say *this is the new world, not the phony one behind us*, and the lack of stars were supplemented by the fact that they had all relocated here, in the Globe itself.

Morgan walked down the path, underneath the shade of the shaking cherry blossoms, the limbered palms. She passed several Uppers talking about their excursion in the hidden swamps, a group of Middle teenagers who thought they are hiding their night time exhibitionist tryst. Morgan sniffed the air again, smelling the faint brine of the sea waft through the gaps in the ceiling windows, smelling the familiar and comforting ichor of a Steeple. She made to pull one out now, they always help her think, but as she did so she realized that it was not her own stash that was emitting the scent, for her collection was bulwarked underneath several blankets and pillows to hide its olfactory existence. What is more, the smell had lingered, was faint, detected only by a familiar nose.

There was a Daughter about, somewhere in the gardens. Perhaps she was hiding in the trees, or within the brush. Perhaps she was bathing in the hidden swamp with the Dredges, her sixth sense allowing her to escape the novel persecution of the adventuring Uppers. Or perhaps she was staying upon the hill, in the little inn, wearing nice perfume and…

Morgan straightened to attention. It was the girl. Bijoux. She was not an art gallery owner, or if she were, it was not a permanent occupation. Morgan cursed herself; she had allowed herself duped, caught unawares to the invisible hand of the Daughters. She pivoted, ran up the gnarled root path, up past the bamboo and the petals and the preserved bonsais that hung in crystal chalices. She went into the inn and walked to the receptionist, a young girl wearing an equally cartoonish geisha costume and make up to obscure that she was defiantly not of Japanese descent.

“I’m looking for Alexander Noctalia,” she asked.

The girl made a point to look at the leger. “I’m afraid there is no Alexander Noctalia here.”

Morgan stared at her, looked her up and down to assess for any sorority comradery like she had in Tectonic Biotechnics. If this girl was a Daughter, she had not revealed it. Perhaps because she could not assess if Morgan was a Daughter herself.

“The artist,” Morgan said, “if he’s not here tonight, surely he’s been here the last couple of nights.”

“Sorry, ma’am, but unfortunately I have no record of Mr. Noctalia.”

“He’s been here for the past two weeks. He’s a regular at the *Requiem.”*

“Ma’am,” the girl said, and this all Morgan needed to hear.

Morgan made sure not to cause a scene, but right after closing the slotted doors and returning into the night sky she clenched her fists and her nails cut into her palms and she released a low growl. The light beating of helicopter blades twirled around the Globe like a little moon. Morgan kicked at the dirt, feeing foolish, feeling stupid, feeling left out. She had failed, and was beaten by a Daughter, the forces of The Globe stacked against her. She swore and wanted to kick a tree, and in her ire she saw what looked like a porcelain disk in between the ghastly light of the *Requiem* and the thick carpet of shadows leading into an alley. Morgan picked up the shining rock, saw that it was the blushing clam-eyed rabbit. Morgan thumbed the icon, accidentally pricked herself before pinning it to her necklace, just behind the dormant psycho-oyster. If this really was a secret symbol, Morgan could not trust if it was a good one or not and did not want to advertise herself to find out.

She went into the alley and found herself in between old bottles of sake, a cemetery of wrinkled cigarette butts, cardboard boxes. Nestled within the papery maggots was a crumpled steeple, smoked down to the nub. But no Noctalia and no Bijoux. Morgan held them both in contempt for a second, and she used this to squander the remains of her pride to a point of disassociation because her organs were starting to fail. With only allowing herself a woe-is-me whimper to acknowledge her pitied, failed state, Morgan picked up the Steeple carcass, put her lips over the imprint of Bijoux’s burnt orange lip stick, and lit the remains for a meagre half a puff using a forgotten box of matches that were sticky and drowned with old sake. It took five of the six matches and the successful one burned the tips of her fingers.

*b.*

The architecture of the Dredges is at the whims of the architecture of the Globe. In the nature of a sphere, the Uppers and the Lowers have a very similar square footage, with the Middles being the largest of the social strata. This was designed. The Dredges exists underneath it all, worming in between large bolts and pillars, the large piping which is the foundation for many of the Globes social services such as plumbing, electricity, etc.. Instead of neighborhoods all contained in a large circular plain (even the Lowers have some attempt at a sky), the Dredges are an undercity consistent of labyrinthine twists and turns, a series of infinite rooms leading to infinite staircases that go both up and down like an MC Escher painting consummated with a mine shaft, all while oozing mysterious slime and lit by gas lanterns discarded by the Lowers when electricity funneled down to them by the Middles when electricity funneled down to them by the Uppers. There is no rhyme or order the Dredges, the dimensions of the hidden city a myriad pockets and closets, long twisting hallways that are inevitable dark alleys where any semblance of law is snuffed out like a thumb and forefinger over a candle.

There are no jobs in the Dredges because it exists in the periphery, in the space between atoms of the Globe’s skeleton. There are no schools in the Dredges, because there are no children; those young enough are privy to the nature of the Dredges as quick as they could wade through the sludge which leaks into the street and through the walls like slowly weeping pustules, those with children know a better life is begging on the streets anywhere but here than to be here at all. There are no landlords in the Dredges because there are no apartments. There are no shops in the Dredges, although this does not mean people here do not buy and sell goods. They just don’t use money.

The only consistency in the Dredges is the prevalence of myths. The Sludge Maiden, who died in the black tar pits and now condemns brave children to the same fate. She weeps tears of ichor. Or Herr Ick, the silly pale man that floats through the halls, only visible in the half light of the gas lamps, who drops coins like a cookie trail to lead to his rooms of sharp horrors. Or the Crocodile Man, who eats the children and the Lilipudian midgets, who swam up from the exiled waters of Manhattan and does not like bright lights. These are the myths in this micro culture, these are the stories that haunt these damned halls.

The only sense of order is the beginning of the Dredges, created either by sympathetic Lowers or Dredge residents who see themselves as more than they are. It is the axle that connects the two strata, validates one another, although it is always one way. It’s where the Lowers go when even the modicum of justice insults them. Yes. You read that right.

There are some residents of the Globe that have never seen the Dredges. And the Dredges like it that way.

~3~

Morgan converted her sulk to anger, and instead of wallowing her way back to the Empress she walked with a lead foot and clenched fist. The onset of nausea was beginning to infiltrate her thoughts and when she reached the hotel room, she strafed past Robert and, in one swoop, lit a full Steeple while walking onto the balcony, finding some elation in the verve of her spirit. Robert must have understood Morgan’s temperament, for he lurked outside, swirling his glass, already bobbing back and forth from the vesper of booze. After a couple minutes Morgan sighed and gestured him onto the balcony. Together they looked at row houses of Seagate, beyond its own artificial boardwalk that could not compare to the length of Coney Island, or even Atlantic City, and beyond the still water of the artificial bay that shone a black ichor, almost like tar, underneath the sole building size port window in the Globe. A single dark cloud floated over a yellow fingernail of a moon.

“You were right,” Morgan said, “Noctalia would have been a good ally.”

“So it didn’t go well?” Robert said, and Morgan could tell he was not trying to sound disappointed.

“I was…intercepted,” she said. She thought of Bijoux’s face, if that was her real name. She thought of her giraffe-esque physique blockading her and Noctalia, the tender and seductive reach of her slender fingers adventuring between her breasts, so intricate and intentional was her guise that it was almost poor taste, an insult to Noctalia, and, at the time, an insult to Morgan. “A Daughter got in the way.”

Robert snickered.

“What’s so funny?”

“That’s just…terrible,” Robert said. “How are you holding up?”

“Fine,” Morgan said, “Tell me of the Unions.”

“The Warehouse Boys are divided,” Robert said, “but not all of them. Some of them are just pissed off drunks hating the cosmic imbalance but unable to say why. Others are happy molding to whatever boot lays upon them.”

“Some union,” Morgan scoffed.

“But there are those that see. It helps that their contractor, Jebediah Minkton, is a grade A son-of-a-bitch,” Robert said, then he paused, sipped his whiskey, furrowed his brows in disgust, “one of the workers had a crate fall on him. Took out his leg. Instead of paying the worker out and giving him leave, Minkton fired him. And the lawyers are under Minkton’s control. The Warehouse Boys can’t prove it, but I believe them.”

“I know Jebediah Minkton,” Morgan said. “He’s never once tried to shake the status quo and has never been a target of the Uppers. But the Auditors have a tremendous database on his business rivals. Whomever was stationed in the Uppers knew exactly when any threat to his empire had come into the Globe.”

“Is the Queen Bee protecting Minkton?”

“No. The Globe is a free state for the markets. If a better shipping company came along it would win by market law. But Minkton has never shaken up the stratosphere of the Globe, has always made sure the money funnels up.”

“And the Lower are happy because they have jobs, and the Middles are happy because they aren’t the Lowers,” Robert said, “a not unfamiliar mantra.”

“We need access to the terminals,” Morgan said. “They will have information on what happened to Noctalia and will show us what’s going on with Minkton. It’ll also let us stay ahead of the curve.”

“The Daughters, you mean?”

“Bijoux was sent to meet with Noctalia. That means an Auditor gave her the assignment. That means Queen Bee gave the Auditor the assignment. Anyone glassed by the Daughters is deemed a threat to the hive.”

Robert chewed on this, nodding. Then he said, “Don’t go making rivals, Morgan.”

“Rivals?”

“Bijoux. That fact that you’ve ambered her name means you plan on settling whatever debt she owes you.”

“She owes me Noctalia,” Morgan said.

“Don’t be a sore loser,” Robert said, then he made to leave. “It’ll get you killed.”

Soon after she heard the shower running, and Morgan was left to stew in her failure once more.

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The Dredges were not easy to get to, and this was by design. An elevator rose from the bulwarked threshes of the boardwalk in which the Globe resided, balanced on its god-defying socles. The lift shot past the Dredges, concealing the humid chaos in the Lowers, revealing itself to show industry manifested in the Middles, the buzzes and whirs of factories and deliveries, and illuminated into the Uppers, as if to say that the true destination was there. Noctalia was not incorrect; the Dredges were a community created by the runoff of The Globe, a diaper, the excess of filth. It was prison, a hovel, a gurgling, nutty sea of lamentation. Those in the Dredges did not have jobs in the other strata, because the Dredges do not do anything, because the Dredges are not there.

Morgan and Robert started their morning waiting in one of the many horizontal lifts. They were in the morning commute, where those on the business trips took the shuttles from the manicured hedgerows of the Empress to other parts of the Uppers, where scientists meekly awaited the latitudinal public transportation to take them to Tectonic Biotechnics. Morgan wondered how many of them were in the Gene Division and hid herself behind Robert’s shoulder or the rim of her disposable coffee cup even though she had left the purple hotel as Lea Arnoux. They entered the lift, squeezing in the way sardines do down in the fisheries in Lowers, and Robert made what Morgan thought to be a hyperbolic show of pulling out a brochure, elbowing the morning commute, a grand display of all the attractions and amusements of what each strata of the Globe had to offer, pointing both innocently and obnoxiously at each museum, concert hall, shopping mall. The shining Uppers residents were too polite in their own ways to say anything which might jeopardize their reputation, and besides they were used to tourists; the Uppers was a tourist haven. They also expressed displeasure in the ways that the Uppers do, in a way that Morgan could easily see; their *tutting*, clearly uncomfortable secession of space, even a slightly murmured growl. Morgan wondered if Robert was getting some sick pleasure out of inconveniencing these folk, or if he was leaning into the high of the performance.

The businessmen stopped at the half levels, flushed out into the glinted streets. The remaining scientists exited into the only Tectonic Biotechnics stop, which gave Morgan a sense of relief. All that remained was the two of them and several others. The elevators going *up* from the Lowers had a different population make up.

This lift led to the Junction, which was a Middles platform that was considered the nexus of all the lifts. Aside from the one elevator bringing in tourists from Ellis Island, no elevators traversed the entire scale of the Globe. Morgan considered the vertical subways, and if this metaphor rang true, then the Junction was a busy hive of intermingling class and power, a grimy network of electricity. Above them was a canvas of steaming pipes that gave the entire structure the impression of being in an iron. Morgan and Robert passed shoe polishers, musicians, street sellers. They passed barkers and food carts. They passed businesses selling tourist trinkets. Morgan recognized some of the people within this mess; a homeless girl between the Racket and the Coney Lift, a tired eye glass shopkeeper. Morgan was certain that she recognized Rhea holding the arm of a wealthy tourist, her lithe body clad in a corset with the depths of her cleavage drawing eyes. Morgan suspected that this smile might be genuine; she was no longer eating rats and begging for Steeples in Thunberbolt Alley. Morgan shied away, created distance from any scent of Steeples as if they were invisible barriers, bouncing her around. There were some Auditors, clad in their black suits, that only Morgan could discern. They weren’t looking for Lea, but they were looking for Morgan, and she kept to the comfort of Robert’s arm.

They passed a man on a dais with skin painted gold. He wore only a loin cloth and upon his shoulders, like a boa in some feathered revelry donned iron chains. He stamped his feet and yelled with such intensity that his prophesizing came out in one, almost drunken slog. Amidst a curtain of humid steam and the random metallic pings of pipes above their heads, the man spat and swore to a meagre audience, primarily his own followers and the odd tourist who stopped for the novelty of it all.

“What’s the deal with that?” Robert said, trying not to point.

“The Cult of Atlas,” Morgan said, still clinging to Robert’s arm as if she were blind, “they are not an entirely new development. They believe in the god, Atlas. You know, the one with the world upon his shoulders? At first it was a symbol that was a little on the nose, but they are not entirely off, I think. The Globe really does run on the obedient backs of the Middles. Overtime their symbol has turned into somewhat zealot territory. The bible says that the meek will inherent the Earth. The Cult of Atlas thinks they are the architects of the new world. Very silly, I’d say.”

“Are they sinister?”

“No, they’ve been like a small growth in Queen’s Bee’s ecosystem.”

“Ah, like a cancer?” Robert said, a mischievous sparkle in his eyes, the cogs of an idea churning.

“More like a benign growth,” Morgan answered, “Every once in a while, we were asked to follow up on them. Some of my Sisters even had to pretend to be followers for a time, although I was never picked.”

“I wonder why,” Robert said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Perhaps the Auditors thought you were too suggestible.”

“Or perhaps they thought I would lean to into the role, like I have with all my assignments.”

“Or that,” Robert said and shrugged in such a way that Morgan could not refute. Then he said, “Have any of your Sisters actually been indoctrinated enough to become a full-fledged member?”

Morgan considered this. “Probably not. We would have hunted her down for defecting.”

“Like Bijoux,” Robert said, connecting the dots.

“Yes,” she ground her teeth as if hearing the name caused her pain.

And all the while Robert’s eyes never lost the twinkle.

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Robert sniffed the stale air, made a point not to sour his face. Morgan watched him look around, glance at the exposed pipes that occupied the ceiling like an open wound in the architecture, the steady metallic dripping that gave the impression of slow, but persistent, rain. Morgan had spent time in the Dredges, more than she would have liked. If the only hope to hold onto when assigned to the Lowers was the knowledge that you’ll be rotated out with a 66% of something better, than the those assigned to the Dredges had a cynical beacon, one which Morgan instinctually evoked in herself now. She had even been operated on in here, and in this Morgan felt the need to protect the Dredges. Well, not the Dredges, but the people. Well, not all of them.

The foyer was at the end of a hidden alley in the Lowers that was slimy and winded like an unfurled intestinal tract. It looked like a waiting room in a dentist’s office, and the strange simulacrum of order before the chaos in the darkness of the halls made Robert shift uncomfortably from right to left. The poor Manhattanite couldn’t help it. Several busted chairs with cauliflower cotton puffs occupied the damp walls. There was a draft somewhere, and in the claustrophobic quality of this labyrinthine neighborhood, Morgan was unsure if it made her feel happy that there was some semblance of air flow, or if the Globe would come crashing down upon it. A man stood behind a desk that was behind cracked safety glass. It looked like the teller at a bus depot, complete with reams of sopping yellow paper, second-hand filing cabinets that had been slammed with a bat or a metal pipe. Steady plumes of cigar smoke filled the fishbowl, dirtying the already hundred times stale air. Like Charon before the great river of bones.

Morgan knew this man. He was not employed to man this station, as he had taken it upon himself to levy the transit between the two floors. She suspected that a part of it was his proximity to the Lowers, which by logic made this the safest place in all the Dredges.

Robert knocked on the protective glass with his knuckles, one hand in his pocket. “Excuse me?”

The man looked up, the pyre of his chewed cigar bobbing.

“He’s sees you,” Morgan said, “he’s just ignoring you.”

“He was reading the newspaper,” Robert said, gesturing to the folded print on the folding table beside him.

“Dated seven years ago,” Morgan said, looking at the date. She pushed forward. “Excuse me, sir. Which way is the Fete Bazaar?”

“Fete Bazaar?” Robert said.

“Can it,” Morgan said.

At this the man’s eyebrow raised. Morgan understood why. They were dressed as if preparing for a cocktail in the uppers. They must appear nothing short of alien. He snickered, “You have no need for the Fete Bazaar, girl.”

“It’s none of your business to determine what I need,” she said.

“I’ll tell you for a coin. I know the likes of you have it.”

Morgan looked to Robert and Robert sighed. He reached into his pocket, pulled out several bills. He passed the imp a dollar.

“More. The price of my information is more.”

“Are you kidding me?” Robert said.

The imp took a puff. Some of the smog seeped through the cracks, tickling Morgan and Robert with an acrid tendril. “If I don’t take it from you, someone else will. Especially where you’re going. Especially how you’re dressed.”

“This is silly,” Robert said. “You’ve been here before, Lea. You don’t remember where it is?”

“I know where it isn’t, and the Dredges are big. It’s a moving market.”

The imp chuckled. “So the broad *has* been here before. I wonder what for? To kill the man who you took to bed so your husband here wouldn’t knock your eyes out when he found out? To evade the laws of human decency? The botanical gardens aren’t enough for the likes of you?”

“It’s no business of yours. Robert, give him the money.”

Robert grumbled. He passed the notes underneath the barrier. Two pink sausage fingers reached out from underneath the fishbowl of smog like pincers of a scorpion. A sopping noise of a tongue licking fingers, followed by the flipping of the notes occurred, and then the imp said, “West End. Underneath Minkton Electric.”

“Minkton Electric?” Robert said, “A coincidence?”

“They are so far apart from one another that they might as well be in different continents, but they do refer to it as the Minkton Heart,” Morgan answered. An issue dawned on her. In the past she was able to stop at a Sisters apartment in the cover of night to switch costumes for the assignment in the Dredges. She had hosted some herself. It was not a requirement for the Daughters but an unspoken courtesy. For as challenging as the imp was, he was right, they looked like sore thumbs, and Morgan could not escape behind a veil as a rich socialite and come out from behind the curtain full of scabs and smog and clothing made of potato sacks.

“Thank you, sir. Now let us in.”

“Pardon?” Robert twisted.

“What did you say?” The imp said. “I’m not letting you in. I haven’t opened the door for anyone. Ever. I sure as hell won’t open it for you. Even if you have money.”

“I’m not you giving my clothes,” Robert said.

“Storing is the word I was looking for,” Morgan said. She returned her direction to the smog cloud. “You’re right, sir. If we head to the Fete Market like this my husband will be pillaged and I’ll be raped before I could even assess what has happened. I propose we store our clothes here, under your patient protection.”

“You ain’t getting in, lady.”

“Then our belongings will go to someone else. And they will be sullied. Let us in, let us store the clothes and belongings and if we don’t come back, they are yours. If we do come back, we’ll take our clothes and my husband here will give you more money. No one will know.”

The imp considered this. After a second, he said, “Where are you two really from?”

“Does it matter?” Morgan answered.

The imp grumbled and unlocked the door. They entered into the small room, more akin to a ticket booth as the imp tossed the keys onto a nearby table. Their heels stuck to the floor from some mystery adhesive and their bodies were immediately shrouded into silhouettes from the thick smog. It felt like walking into an ashtray. The room was hardly designed for one person, much less three.

Morgan began to undress. Even the imp had enough dignity to pretend not to look, although even if he tried the smog clouded most of their bodies, a trinity of smoke spirits in a sardine tin. Robert undressed gingerly, and at first Morgan thought that it was because he was in the presence of woman, but then she considered this was the least of his problems. He had dressed down to an undershirt, although his lined pants and shoes were difficult to obscure. Morgan instructed him to go outside and step into some puddles, and he seemed to have learned during this endeavor that resistance was futile. Morgan did not feel bad for her companion, for she, understanding the ebbs and flows of generational wealth, was under the complete assumption that Mr. Forrest, being of relation to Queen Bee herself, had enough wealth to not only fund a revolution but also cloth himself. With this, Morgan obtained a shameless satisfaction watching him sully his own clothes. If the man wanted to fight for the Globe, he’s got to get his hands dirty. That was a mantra which weaved through the Daughters too. She herself had discarded her jacket even though the Dredges were about ten degrees colder than the rest of the Globe. She rubbed the wall with her fingers like an artist’s palette and applied the smudges to her chemise as if applying warpaint, hating, on principle, that smoke was infusing into the silk by the second and recognizing at the same time how hypocritical this position was.

Robert was waiting for her, arms crossed, tapping his sullied shoes. Morgan was alone with the imp and they must have looked like two cartoonish shadows.

The imp said, “You’re mad, you know.”

“Indeed I am sir.”

Then the imp soured, his clouded expression hardly visible. “I’ve been in the Dredges long enough to connect dots. I may be ugly, I may be poor, but I ain’t dumb.”

“You strike me as industrious,” Morgan said, and she meant it.

“I used to live in the Uppers.” The imp said, and Morgan wondered why he had said this.

“I see.”

“Someone is gonna come for you, I bet. Types like you leave footprints in the sand.”

“And what will you say to them?” Morgan thought firstly of the Auditors, and then rationalized that they would not step foot in the Dredges. If the Queen Bee was aware of Morgan’s return, then it would be an assignment for the Daughters. It could be any of her Sisters, but Morgan could not help but envision Bijoux’s oceanic yellow eyes.

“How much money they got.”

“Will you now,” Morgan stood straight, arms at her hips. She felt like she was speaking to a child. They are stared at one another until Morgan continued, “You’ve got a soul in that tiny raisin of a body in there.”

The imp grumbled.

“What’s your name?” She sighed. She heard Robert call her name from outside the booth.

“I’m not telling you my name, Lea.”

“Alright then,” she said, and with the speed of a viper snatched the keys to the booth. “I imagine you have one set of keys. You can lock yourself in. We’ll let you out.”

The imp shot from his squeaking chair, the chewed cigar falling from his lips like a beacon in a fog. He jumped up like a toddler trying to reach something higher, and Morgan wondered if this was one of the forcibly relocated Liliputian residents. Morgan herself was on the taller end, which, like any size, was a situational boon or bane. Now it was the former, and she dangled and jangled the keys above his stubby, groping fingers.

“You best be hoping we get back. Otherwise, you’ll be just as displaced as we are,” Morgan said. She left amidst a string of flurry of swears. The door shut behind her and she and Robert stared at one another from across the tiny islands of black puddles.

“Was that necessary?” He asked.

“Taking the keys? It was the only way. I trust that we’ll be fine.”

“No. I just bought these shoes.”

They were two ragamuffins clad in scabs of grime from the walls. An odd odor enshrouded them both, and their hair was sticking and itchy.

She said, “Revolutions are dirty, Mr. Forrest. You had your plan, now we’ve got mine. Onward to Fete.”

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Morgan and Robert walked through the dark hallways, stepping over and through puddles, ducking underneath exposed, rusted pipes. There was no master plan in the Dredges, and they passed several homeless encampments that had grown like weeds in entire carved divots in the wall, apartments with one, two, three families, storefronts that work on barter systems, their wares taken from the Globe or from somewhere else. Robert was propositioned several times by scantily clad women in the darkness. Morgan recognized some of them as her sisters.

“Don’t they assume I’m a married man?” Robert said, “You’re standing right here.”

“For someone has intelligent as you, you’re quite naive sometimes,” Morgan said.

“It just seems that they’d have better luck saving their energy for a more surefire proposition.”

“Oh, Mr. Forrest,” Morgan said, shaking her head.

They turned a corner. A bead of perspiration hit Morgan on the cheek and she wiped it away with the back of her palm. There was the smell of a Steeple lingering in the hall, but since there was little air ventilation Morgan could not deduce which direction it was coming from, or how long it has been here. It was not time for her to have one, anyway. They had a couple of hours before they would need to head back to the Empress.

Robert continued, “You said this Fete Bazaar is always in a different spot. Why?”

Morgan shrugged. “It’s where people gather. They happen randomly, sometimes lasting for only a day, sometimes lasting for months. They usually start in an apartment and end up spilling out.” They came upon a clearing, “Look, behold your privileged eyes.”

Before them was the largest atrium in the Dredges which was located underneath the largest steam powered hydro-generator in the Globe, which itself was advertised as being larger than Grand Central station when it was first built. Exposed pipes the size of elephants and coils the size of pythons lined the top of the atrium, occasionally singing its metallic-radiator pangs that reverberated through the halls like a coin down a very long shaft. Steam leaked from the rusted vats and perspiration spat upon the tiles and into grimy puddles. It looks like the heart of a machine above the atrium, beating, pulsing, the weight of the Globe upon its shoulders. A small lake of multicolored sheets formed ad hoc tents. Scabby blankets unrolled with a crunch to form storefront floors. Smells of weak stew bubbling in pots underneath a layer of incense. People talking, growling, shouting, whispering, even laughing. Sounds of sex behind feeble curtains. A whole city block of pandemonium, of commerce.

“Since there are really no new goods introduced into the Dredges, a lot of it is just clothing or supplies that are cycled amongst the people.”

“Well, surely there must be something to stimulate the economy?” Robert said.

“You have sex, of course,” Morgan said, fittingly as they passed the groans of two people behind a curtain, their silhouettes merged. “Then you have people with fruit that someone managed to get in from the Lowers.”

“Good to know the Lowers have fruit, at least.”

“It’s more expensive in the Lowers, if you can believe it.”

“I can.”

“It’s really only those who can take from the upper strata that really make out with anything here. They are the rule of law here.”

“The merchants?”

“Yes. The good ones. You’ll see. Factions galore. Sometimes entire families are in on it. Others it’s a pack of children, or prostitutes.”

“Were you apart of any of them?”

“I’ve been apart of many of them,” Morgan said.

“Have you encountered a Sister in another faction?”

“Yes. And we both did what we had to do, but I’ve always left a pilfered Steeple in their pockets when I was done.”

Robert looked at Morgan long enough for her to see gears of thoughts activating in his noggin. After a second, he blinked these away as if these were sand in his eyes and he said, “Why are we here? To see your mutant Sisters?”

“Be kind, Mr. Forrest, they’ve saved my life and when you retake the Globe you’ll find them a proper home that fits the size of their malformed hearts and their sacrifices.”

“I didn’t mean to offend.”

“I know,” she said. “I’m just reminding you to not forget them.”

“What exactly are we looking for? An Auditor’s terminal, right?”

“Indeed,” Morgan said. They passed two beggars with cups out, jangling change. A knife was on their laps in case anyone decided to pilfer from them. One of them was a Sister. “But I can’t access the terminals.”

“You can’t ask a Sister for it, either.”

Morgan grabbed Robert’s wrist and pulled him into the latticework of the Fete Bazaar. A dumpling of steam dissipated and clouded the avenues in a light, humid fog. They moved past stacks of old blankets, handfuls of dried beans, old coffee. Children were dancing to music played with discarded rods on tin cans. Some passersby were flipping coins their way, although it was of the lowest denomination. Morgan hoped that Robert was seeing this interaction; the people in the Dredges were poor, but they were still people. The had heart just the same as the rest of them and if he planned to coup the Queen Bee then he needed to see all aspects of the world he would inherent.

“Oh!” Robert said, gesturing to a bunch of children in a booth. “Liliputians. You don’t see those every day since they’ve been annexed.”

“Not little people,” Morgan said, and she blinked back the advent of tears. “Don’t wander too far, Robert. You may look the part of the Dredges but you still have shoes on.”

“What does that mean?”

“The operative word is ‘have’. Be on your wits, is all.”

Robert smiled. “Thanks for calling me, Robert, ma’am.”

Morgan watched him head to the square. He walked with a certain swagger that reminded Morgan of a man who has never been unconfident in his life, or had become so threshed by the storm of urban life that in order to navigate it he needed to slice through it with a carving knife. He walked like a Manhattanite. Now Morgan turned and approached the booth, her heart beating, her organs pulsing with guilt, her lower lip threatening to tremor into absolute hysterics.

Faux-Samantha stood over a collection of misshapen candles as if they were totem of worship. She rubbed one sleepy eye with a claw-esque knuckle while the other one, no larger than a quarter, blinked idly. She yawned, “Would you like to trade wares?”

“Look at these candles,” Morgan said, keeping her glance away. “A place like this could use some candles.”

“The candles were burned in memory of some of my relatives.”

Morgan remembered them. The candles in the background after they had saved her life. After they had ended theirs. “Why don’t you keep them then?”

A pursed almost non-existent lip. “Then we would miss the Fete Bazaar.”

Morgan released a gasp. She blinked away the onset of a tear, and in the side of her face she saw Faux-Ophelia’s wrinkled toddler visage, puffing away in the back of the tent, smoking clove cigarettes to mask to the secret puffs of the nubbed Steeple. Her body was a wrinkled larvae wrapped in craggling blankets.

“Stop bothering the lady, child,” Faux-Ophelia said.

Faux-Samantha stammered. “I’m sorry, miss.”

“I wasn’t talking about you. I was talking about *her*.” Faux-Ophelia’s head raised and with her yellow cat eyes pierced into Morgan’s soul.

Morgan pulled out some coins. She knew better than to display such wealth but she needed to repay her aborted Sisters with whatever she could. It was justice. It was right.

“You’re not from here, are you?” Faux-Ophelia croaked.

“Yes. No.” Morgan considered her words. “Yes. I am.”

Faux-Ophelia stared Morgan up and down. “What’s your name, girl?”

“Lea.” It hurt Morgan to lie.

“Lea…” Faux-Ophelia tasted the words on her tongue. “You don’t look like a Lea.”

“It’s she that I am, ma’am.”

“We are only who we appear to others, Lea.” Faux-Ophelia smiled, made a show of smoking on the Steeple.”

“Put that away,” Faux-Samantha said, “you shouldn’t smoke in front of our patrons.”

Morgan understood this: *No smoking Steeples lest the Daughters discover you*. It was code, much like how Morgan and her upper strata Sisters conversed when in the urban serendipity of the Globe. She had not practiced this tongue in several weeks, and had a feeling that if she were to encounter the same double speaking Daughters that she used to connect with then it would be like picking up an old instrument, yet she had never expected to discuss it with this miniature, wrinkled version of the very monster she was trying to kill.

“It’s fine,” Morgan said. “I was leaving.”

“Surely you’re looking for something else, Ms. Lea?”

“Yes,” Morgan said, and she knew her voice was beginning to croak.

“On with you then, you’ll only find trouble here.”

Morgan turned away, felt chastised. She yearned to hold her asymmetrical sisters and apologize for her progress, apologize for the life that was given to them, apologize for the horrors that neither they nor she asked to be afflicted. Apart of her was happy to find refuge in the anonymity of her Lea persona, but she wanted to see them, wanted to check on their status with hope that these weeks have been somewhat kind to the lot of them, after they had experienced so little warmth. While Morgan was in the glitzy Macy’s and trekking across the harbor wearing expensive clothing, they were here, an invisible people, phantoms in an already ignored fragment of the Globe.

Morgan left them, found Robert watching a troupe of children bang a rhythm using discarded rods on upturned rusty tin pails, strumming on bandaged and grimy ukuleles. Several coins lay before them, a show of generosity that could only come from the Fete Bazaar. As she approached, she began to see Robert more as a vulnerable fox, himself standing there, arms at his hips, entranced by the performers. Several rat children were lurking behind the stalls like panthers, ready to upend his pockets, ready to stab him with the shard of a broken plate if necessary. The whole thing was a ruse. Morgan knew the signs because she had helped perpetrate them, had passed along the training of the older rat kids to the new ones. It was a doctrine of the Tilyou’s Daughters to never explicitly change anything, just gather information, and rejoin the slipstream of the urban strata. Had Morgan mind to change their tactics she would have told the tiny musicians to pretend that their hunting companions were not there, to ignore their panther-like approach instead of playing harder in an attempt to cement their victim’s attention. Not that it mattered. Robert was enthralled, even as the rat children readied their hinds to pounce.

“Surely the buskers in Manhattan are better than this?” Morgan said, sidling up to Robert just as the children were beginning their assault. They returned to the shadows of the awnings after Morgan nonchalantly gazed around her, scurrying like found cockroaches.

“This whole place is fascinating,” Robert said. “I’ve always heard about the Dredges.”

“You have? In Manhattan?”

“Since I’ve never been there. They were nothing but concepts to me. Like a poor nation overseas. But it was always my intention to visit. And I love them. Because they are a part of the Globe. And I will make things better.”

“Let us hope so, Robert,” Morgan said, keeping an eye on the both the drumming children and their stalking companions.

She used this opportunity to scan the rest of the makeshift courtyard, the center being the middle spoke of a large, tent laden clock. Robert began to speak but when he noticed Morgan’s patient eyes he pretended to be distracted. After a second, she found one of the peddlers, a blonde girl with stripes of tar in her hair and a torn sweater, make her way out of the meager barrier of the stall and disappear within the threshes. She walked with a limp, bobbing in between crates of soon to be rotted fruit, chipped cups, grimy plates. Morgan was unsure if the limp was real or if it was a part of her ruse, but she knew a Daughter when she saw one, and Morgan was pretty positive it was Amber, one of the Daughters that was an escort for a foreign national looking for an expensive menage-a-trois. There was a sixth sense inherent in all of them, and Morgan knew that once they started looking for a rogue Daughter then the effectiveness of Lea Arnoux would be on thin ice. Until then, Morgan had the advantage, one which she intended to capitalize.

They followed the girl several yards behind, making sure that no one was watching them. Eventually she slipped away between a crack in the cement wall, far away from where the piping tendrils of the metal heart above. The echoes of her feet on cold puddles sounded like a coin down a well as she traversed into the darkness, her sense of memory the warden to the total darkness which had engulfed her. It was such a void and so was the opening that even the most hardened of ambushers would be smart enough to know that it was a dangerous venture, the path itself protected by its reputation. But Morgan knew better, and even when she traversed this sticky and odorous path herself once before, she still held onto a makeshift knife, just in case. Sometimes, when she was confident enough in hiding the switchblades that the Daughters sometimes equipped in the Uppers, she would bring them too.

Robert came to a stop at the edge of the Fete Bazaar. The great machine exhausted its humid mist over the kaleidoscope of tents as if informing them of their placement at its perimeter.

“Do you have a plan?” Robert asked.

“Yes, for you to stay out of trouble. If you find yourself needing reprieve, go to the candle makers.”

She left him before he could answer, slipping through the crack in the wall, Smells of ichor and fecal matter invaded her like a necrotic phantom. A subtle scent of brine. The close proximity of the walls scathed Morgan, who admittedly had forgotten the intimate twists and turns. The Daughter’s assignments were on rotation by some hidden algorithm invented by the Auditors. It had been several years since Morgan had been assigned to the Dredges.

Ten minutes in she saw the faint glow of a terminal monitor bouncing off of the walls. Amber’s body was a silhouette as she approached it, turned it on with her fingerprint. Morgan watched from behind a corner, rubbing the oyster between her breasts with her thumb and forefinger to keep her heartbeat at bay, her breathing steady. If Amber were to turn around, she would not see Morgan, but if Morgan had decided to abandon this stalking, she could not trust she could leave this hidden path fast enough to avoid detection. Morgan waited until the familiar *ping* of the terminal before she hunched and crept behind her like a stalking panther. Amber was bent over the keyboard, her fingers tapdancing upon the letters, the ghastly glow of the terminal face enshrouding her like some digital angel. It was an odd scene; she looked like Amber the peddler from the Dredges, complete with several missing teeth and an accompanying body odor that smelled faintly like moss and cat urine, but her hobbled fortitude was diminished as if taking off an apron after a shift, or tossing aside a mask backstage, for Amber the Daughter had revealed herself, and she reached into her pocket and pulled out a Steeple and lit it and just before she opened her lips to accept the cylinder Morgan was upon her, one arm wrapped delicately around her sister as if in a dance, her left hand reaching out like an elephant’s trunk to take the Steeple from the peddler’s hand and tighten around her throat with one fluid motion. Morgan could kill her, but she would not. Could not.

Amber fumbled, obviously caught off guard, and tried to turn to her pursuer, but Morgan knew this, knew her line of thinking, and instead hit Amber in her solar plexus until she coughed, shook, fought for purchase as slipping on ice. Morgan wrapped her arms around her sister, keeping her head forward so she would not see Morgan’s face behind Lea’s façade, keeping her arms pinned as if enthralled by an octopus so she would not reach towards the terminal. Amber pushed back on her heels and the two of them stumbled onto the ground, Morgan’s spine taking the brunt of both their weights. Yet Morgan knew that Amber’s strength was wading, as even with the fumble where Morgan’s purchase over Amber’s body weakened, she did not take the advantage to free herself.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Morgan said, repeating it over and over until Amber’s fists turned into pats, until her writhing turned into sleepy adjustments.

The two of them laid there for awhile, Amber silent, Morgan seething as the adrenaline still coursed through her veins. Morgan let Amber go and she tumbled off, her eyes glassy, a tongue lapping absently over her dry lips.

Morgan rocked onto her rear, found a fleeting moment of peace between cradled hands, and grabbed the dropped Steeple, somehow still lit. She smoked and contemplated what she had just done, rocking on her heels, trying not to become entirely sensitive to the situation. She positioned Amber against the wall where her corporeal form would have at least a little comfort.

She smoked the Steeple to a nub, doused it on one of the slimy rock walls, and then crushed it under her heel as she approached the terminal, becoming embraced by its neon aura. Her fingers placed upon the keys, feeling the familiar, albeit sticky and grimy interface at her whim. Strangely enough, it was the first time that Morgan felt at home, but there was an undertow of discomfort that she could not shake, and in fact had allowed to remind her that she was no longer welcome here, even though she was able to navigate the terminal with ease. She thought of her past life, logging onto the terminal to see any Auditors comments, any hints of direction on how to complete a task. The terminals were the nodes of information within the Globe, containing an encyclopedia of passwords and intelligence, of whispers and hunches. It had stocks, comings and goings, itineraries, receipts. It had an intangible meeting point for other Daughters to confer with one another while keeping their assignments. It was also how the Tickets were printed out, the once a quarter gift from Queen Bee by proxy of the Auditors to remind the Daughters of their transitory nature, to empower them thus. The Terminal before Morgan’s fingers was a digital cornucopia of knowledge, and aural cornerstone, the very pulse of the Globe. And now Morgan was sneaking onto it, fearful of being caught like a child with their puffy hands in a cookie jar, all while Amber lay in a forced slumber.

Morgan danced along the keys, knowing that she would prefer more time than she could accommodate. She went onto the Auditor’s file, a sort of public board for comings and goings, a way for the other Daughters to know what their sisters were doing. If only they knew that this was a farce, that this itself was a controlled aspect to the Daughter’s reality. Yet Morgan ignored this, accessing the data base for any information that the Queen Bee saw as potential threats. If the adage ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ was true, then this would be the most apt roadmap, and between Robert’s canvassing and Morgan’s sulfuric intent, with a bit of luck, they could prosper, and Morgan would not allow herself bested by that damned Bijoux again.

Morgan found her suspicions true regarding Alexander Noctalia; he was currently locked away like a buried painting in a non-disclosed location, with several members of the enigmatic Rabbit Club shying away from any public displays of art. The Rabbit Club must have been the group that he was referring to, with the porcelain bunny masks. How had Morgan not known of this before? There were hints of the Warehouse Boys forming a union against the industrialist Minkton. And there were others. A defector from the Palm Gardens who has gone missing from the Daughter’s watchful eye. A sociologist. The Atlas Cult, which Morgan did not put much clout. There were others plotting against the Globe, each in their own way, some of them not even aware that their antics were against the hegemonic might of the Queen Bee. Morgan printed the sheet and folded it like a fortune, putting it in between her brassier and her breast since her clothes were with the imp in the foyer. The weight of the paper felt like a beaten heart against her, pulsing with dissent, each aural throb another buoy in the torrential sea of the Globe. She and Robert could parse them out later, strategize as they did with the Warehouse Boys and Noctalia, strategize what they could do better so as to not let them fail again.

Out of curiosity Morgan searched and printed any high priority assignments and, as if answering to her call, found a kaleidoscope of snapshots detailing her face upon the screen. Images of her as a beggar, shop keep, busker, whore, receptionist. Her smoking a Steeple in the windowsill of her previous apartment in Thunderbolt Alley (cementing that the apartment was compromised), her buying groceries in Smittons, the exclusive grocers in the Uppers. Her outside of Tectonic Biotechnics, once put together, not yet collided with Arno, and once again, in her flurry to escape, a frozen snapshot of her organs failing, her body hunched over. Morgan perused the document, found her crime to be TREASON & HI THREAT & TO BE ELIMINATED AT ALL COSTS. There was a Daughter assigned to the case: Bijoux. Morgan swore to herself, clenched her fist and slammed on the terminal as if it could apologize.

“You poor girl,” said a croaking voice.

Morgan jumped turned on her heels, rotating to see Faux-Ophelia hobbling through the crack in the wall, her cane creating fresh ripples along the ichor puddles, her toddler legs struggling to hold herself upright.

“Ma’am,” Morgan said, shocked. Her eyes darted to Amber.

“Don’t ma’am me. I’m your age. Maybe younger.” She hobbled over, reached her liver spotted hands to Amber’s forehead. “They will find her like this. Or she’ll wake up. If she wakes up. Then you’ll be utterly screwed, Morgan.”

“I needed access to the terminals,” she said, “I didn’t know how else to get this information. I’m working with people now. They have a plan.” Morgan found herself blurting out sentences to qualify to the Faux-Ophelia, to give a status report that the sacrificed organs of her closest ilk were not for naught.

“I trust that you trust them but look at this. What will happen if they find this girl? What will happen if they don’t?”

Morgan didn’t answer. They watched Amber writhe in the corner, glimpses at her psyche beginning to reject logic and embrace infernal, intimate philosophies. After a second, she said, “I’m trying to avenge our sisters that saved me.”

“And I trust you shall. Now I have to do my part,” Faux-Ophelia said. She revealed a blade and hobbled over to Amber, using her crumpled body to lower herself onto the black wall.

“Ophelia!” Morgan said, throwing out her hands.

“We are what we appear to others,” she said. Then she took the rusted blade and sliced discs of flesh from Amber as if she were carving a ham. Blood gushed from her thighs, her forearms, mixing with the ebon water until it looked like a oil spill beneath their feet.

“Stop it!” Morgan said.

“I’m not killing her, I wouldn’t do that. It’s not her fault,” said Faux-Ophelia, and then she began to carve into her own wrinkled and liver spotted forearm. Morgan knew better than to protest, and when Faux-Ophelia was done she made a point to show Morgan the lacerated butcher’s tray that had become of her chicken bone arm. Faintly, beneath the sunspots of blood, was carved *RUN*.

“Blame her on me. The Auditor’s won’t make a show of her death. They will think I was working with you, but I’ll already be dead.”

“They’ll kill you.”

“You are an idea, Morgan. There are more ways to sacrifice.”

“I’m tired of people sacrificing themselves for me. Come with me. Mr. Forrest can-”

“You think you are exempt from sacrifice? We are scaffolds to an idea. You will be making the greatest sacrifice, Morgan.”

“Don’t do this,” Morgan said, but by now Faux-Ophelia was blinking dumbly next to Amber’s lacerated body.

“Already done,” she said. She displayed her arm again, wiped away some blood with the hem of her smudge caked skirt. “Look. Now Samantha and I are one of the same.”

Morgan stared, feeling stupid. She made to take off her itchy wig, to give proper respect to her sister who did not deserve the cruelty of this world.

“What are you doing? Don’t see you see, Morgan? Run. Run!”

So she bolted, tears streaming down her face, her already smudged mascara rendered into sunspots of octopus ink upon her cheeks as she battered herself ricocheting between the crack in the wall, groping blindly along the damp and cragged rocks until she birthed from the crevice and fell to her knees, scrambling up as if pulled to ascension by an invisible marionette string, until she found Robert in the threshes of the Fete Bazaar and collapsed into his arms.

“That isn’t good,” he said, holding her. He pulled her close and she allowed him too. Then he pulled her between a barrier of crates, and she allowed this as well. After a second of her elations Robert said, “Money is on that being Bijoux.”

Morgan looked up, wiped her eyes. At the edge of the Fete Bazaar, separated by a ghastly torrent of sludge reminiscent of a moat, stood Bijoux clad in clothes belonging to an Uppers woman on safari in the Botanical Gardens. Some of the Dredges, knowing this unspoken relationship, shied away from her across the palleted platform, those in the stalls whispered their caution to one another. Her presence impressed upon the entire strata a sense of unease. And she stood tall with her netted safari hat bound behind her jewel nested hair, fire orange eyes looking over her shoulder at the hidden crack in the wall. She looked around, rested a bolt action rifle over her shoulders, lips pursed.

“That’s the one, right? From the Requiem?”

“Yes,” Morgan had collected herself, her anguish now dominating whatever initiative to hunt was programmed within her. “A quick note, Mr. Forrest, but now would be an apt time for me to tell you that in addition to achieving the list of our potential allies I have come to the knowledge that Bijoux’s sole assignment is to hunt me.”

“That’s a lot of words to say that we need to hightail it out of here.”

Bijoux scanned the crowd again, her eyes passing over the hodgepodge of bodies in the Fete Bazaar. Wordlessly she armed herself and began to enter the perimeter. In normal circumstances anyone wielding a firearm here would be sacked by the many peddlers carrying their broken plate-shivs and ad-hoc Molotovs, but instead everyone ducked and evaded her gaze, the lively biorhythm of the orbit of commerce now turned into a hushed pulse of silence. She stared through the scope, arms poised as if plucked from the military.

“She’s coming,” Morgan said, finding herself immediately embarrassed for being frozen. She opened her mouth to say something else, but Robert was already pulling her through the alley of tents, working doubly until Morgan recaptured herself and then they were in pace, keeping low together.

“Right.”

“No, left.”

“Okay. Now right.”

“No left.”

“No, right!”

A bullet zipped over the awnings of the stalls and panged into the cement wall, sounding a deft thud. Another *smashed* into the artery steamer of the Minkton Heart, sending a harsh metallic reverb.

“She’s going to pop the damn thing!” Robert said.

“She would never hurt the Globe,” Morgan panted, “she’s sending a message that she’s in charge.”

“Be that as it may, we still need to leave.”

An exhume of steam burst out of an open valve, clouding the Fete Bazaar into a steamy, mineral smelling cloud. The space between the stalls became obscured, the various wares reduced into silhouette abstractions of shapes, the people store front mannequins frozen into expression of cower. Morgan and Robert turned a corner and saw Bijoux’s beehive hair-do in the middle of a clearing, the shadow of her rifle an black extension of her profile. They fumbled backwards, made their way around, trying to be quiet amidst the frozen chaos. The Dredges knew better than to run from the Uppers. If the stories were true about hunts, the Uppers liked it when they ran. And if they weren’t…laws worked differently in the Dredges, and the Globe would not care to apply justice to an invisible class. Bijoux had effectively taken the Fete Bazaar hostage.

They turned another corner and all roads seemed to lead to Bijoux, who had no clear path of her own but somehow was an obstruction of each exit, as if she were legion. Morgan, hiding behind a table, felt soft fingers clasp upon her hands, and the familiarity of them was all she needed not to squeak. Faux-Samantha’s cleft lip peaked from over an array of candles.

“Make sure to light one for me, sister.”

“No. What are you doing?”

Faux-Samantha pulled her sleeve over her forearm, revealing a line of scars. *RUN*.

“My disguise didn’t fool you, did it?” Morgan said.

“No. But it did tell us that our job is not done, because yours isn’t,” she whispered. She grabbed another blade from within her other sleeve, much like Faux-Ophelia had, and stood rounded the table.

“This is insane. Don’t do this!” Morgan whispered. She could not bare to lose another sister.

She lopsidedly loped into the alley, one leg dragging on the cement ground, one arm hanging somewhat limp to her side. “We are what we appear others. Do I appear expendable?”

“Let’s go,” she said, “Mr. Forrest and I-”

“Run, Morgan. Have it be known that the aborted daughters died not as Tilyou’s Daughters, but daughters of the Globe.”

Faux-Samantha disappeared into the mist and Robert pulled Morgan by her shoulders, keeping her down below stacks of blankets, past the façade of Dredge peddlers frozen in fear. They popped out of the mist and entered the cold and damp halls, their feet echoing in the puddles, their pants exasperated ghosts. In the distance, amplified by the claustrophobic acoustics, was the sound of an attempted struggle, a pitiful and gurgling war cry, followed the resonating pulse of the bolt action rifle.

By the time that she and Robert had returned to the foyer, Morgan had become engulfed by grief. Her hands twitched, her lip trembled. She was not the same Morgan that had left the imp in his smoke box before, and before they rounded to his grimy abode Robert put his hands on her shoulders, looked into her eyes, and said nothing. Morgan had no idea that this silent act was the anathema that she needed.

They came to the foyer, found the imp smoking another cigar. He came to attention as they approached, putting down the old newspaper, shoving his rested feet off the desk.

“You actually came back,” he growled.

“You sound upset,” Robert said.

Morgan manifested the keys and unlocked the door. She let herself into the murky haze, tossed their clothes over her arm, and stopped in the threshold. “It’s a promise I meant to keep all along, you know.”

The imp grumbled, held out his pudgy hand for Morgan to drop the keys. “Whatever it is you did over there, I don’t want no part.”

Robert was upon her. He pushed Morgan into the room, closed the door, locked it. They were three packed sardines again.

“Mr. Forrest!”

“Please leave already!”

Robert put his finger to his lips. He tucked Morgan into the corner, drew his back to the wall. In the cigar smog the imp’s lit pyre rotated as he swirled his chair to meet the new guest. Even through the cigar smoke, the olfactory identity of the Dredges, and the iron twang of blood, Morgan could smell Bijoux’s underlying scent of lavender and honey, of faint Steeple. Both Morgan and Robert were huddled in the corner, looking like caught raccoons, right out of Bijoux’s line of sight

The rifle clicked as she adjusted it over her shoulder, the beehive hairdo obscured now by the imp’s hot box. She said, “I’m looking for a girl.”

“I’ve seen plenty of girls around here.”

“Plenty of girls.”

“Yes, ma’am.” The imp’s chewed on the cigar, and Morgan could see this was a nervous tic.

“Have you seen a girl that looks about my age and isn’t from the Dredges?”

The imp did not give a sideways glance to Morgan or Robert. He shook his head. “I have not.”

“You’re the gatekeeper. I’ve seen you before. I have not known you to be honest.”

“I’m sorry to say that I don’t recognize every girl that comes by. Even those as pretty as you.”

“Even those as pretty as me.”

“No.”

A silence erupted between them, one which thickened into an ever-increasing chance of Bijoux knocking down the door. It would be two on one, three providing the imp would want to squash any conflict, but still Morgan was unconvinced that Bijoux was more equipped for battle than she. In this void Bijoux stared at the imp and before the imp could shudder and break she nodded and left without another word. The imp released a sigh of relief and set to ignite another cigar.

“Thank you, sir,” Morgan said, peeling herself from the wall.

“Yeah yeah,” he said, “whatever mess you got yourself into that made *that* follow you, you best be sleeping with one eye open all the time.”

“Well aware, sir.” Robert said. “I guess we’ll be on our way, now.”

“Now, you’re going to wait two hours and then leave,” said the imp. “You think that monster of a women is going home? Your scent is still hot and if she finds you she could come back here and…”

“Why did you help us? What interest is it of you?” Morgan interrupted as Robert managed to situate himself on one of the stools in the corner, his knees hitting the imp’s desk.

“Because your name isn’t Lea, and I’ve seen a lot of people ‘round these parts and a lot of them are like that psychopath there.”

“As dangerous?”

“Yes, but in different ways. And if she is hunting you, then whatever you’re doing is in the best interest of the Dredges, or in the worst interest to the Uppers.”

Morgan chuckled and found herself amused with this. It was a laugh that came suddenly and it felt unearned considering that she had lost two sisters today who had given up so much to propel Morgan to succeed.

“What?” Robert said, “What’s so funny?”

Morgan wiped away a tear that might have been the last pebble of genuine sadness. “It’s times like these that I wonder what we are saving at all.” She turned to the imp. “What is your name?”

“I’m not telling you my name incase that bitch with the rifle catches you and makes you squeal.”

“You really think that if she catches us *you’ll* be her concern?” Robert said. “The dames got a point. You’re stuck with us for the next two hours. Might as well get comfy.”

The imp grumbled and puffed on his cigar. “Mitch. My name is Mitch.”

“You look like a Mitch,” Robert said, adjusting himself on the stool.

“Night to meet you, Mitch. Thanks for offering your place to us for a couple of hours.”

“”Offering’ being the operative word,” Mitch said.

“Indeed, indeed,” Robert said. He eyed a soggy stack of cards on Mitch’s desk, near the ashtray. He opened the pack, ignored Mitch’s requests, and fanned the cards to ensure a full pack. Then he said, “Anyone up for a game of incredibly quiet poker?”

*c.*

Silks, buttons, chiffons, garters. Chemises, drawers, gowns, bowties. Cufflinks, watches, lapels, ties. These are but the meniscus of the deep waters of the fashion forward Globe. Imported silks create the softest shawls, fur from hunted wildebeests die in another country and come to the Globe to be remastered as a coat. Defeated snakes and alligators from the Australian outback are material for the cobblers. The production line is international, yet all the gears of commerce and trade are oriented towards the lighthouse on top of this great Utopia. The Globe is proud to be fashion forward. It is proud to be disruptive against the norms, as all fashion is political. You have the flappers, the sweater vested Ivy’s. In the Globe you have models. Models everywhere. Look at them outside of Fiddler’s Department Store, showing their beads and their perfumes and their twinkling gold dresses. Look at the men tying their glowing ties, the silk infused with viscous extract from the psycho-oysters through a secret method known only to the brainiacs in Tectonic Biotechnics!

Summer fashion features light jackets and sundresses made from kelp. During a picnic you can see the shimmering dresses in the sunlight along the rolling hills, much like the clusters of the psycho-oysters themselves in the bay. The fall features wool cardigans and sweater vests and everyone looks as smart as they feel. In the winter come exported cloaks, sometimes from Manhattan, but those are usually discounted and left just out of reach for the Middles, who are proud to be behind the “cool” and wear wifebeaters and khakis and clothes meant for utility.

They say you can spot a Globe man and woman from afar. You can pluck them from a crowd and put them right in your pocket, so beautiful is their gold sprayed skin, their melanocytes infused with a special chemical that makes your skin look as crystalline as a diamond, or as deep and wealthy as the bars of gold found in tombs. They walk around like colored mannequins, perfect in their state, their fingertips. The world is infamous for dividing its own race by axiom of skin tone. You have the yellows across the sea, the negros in the hotlands and their backwards civilization, the conquered reds by the white, who now traverse their own history on the backs of their night skinned brethren.

What is the color of the Globe? Here is a counter question: are you not blinded by the glitter abound? Like the pharaohs of old, or the dragons of older, the Globe is a concentration of wealth. To be covered in gold and adorned with silver is to pay your way into the afterlife, and the black makes you invisible to the parasites lurking in the River Styx. All this talk and yet everyone knows it is for naught, for the Globe is immortal.

The Globe is gold. And the people within are gold. Isn’t the connection obvious?

4.

No amount of showering could eliminate the effects of the grime that had infiltrated Morgan’s person. After redressing in Mitch’s cramped foyer post, they managed to work their way up from the Lowers to the Middles and finally to the Uppers, where their expensive clothes looked disheveled but were otherwise unmarred, and those in the Uppers riding the elevators back to their penthouses or hotels were too polite to comment on Morgan and Robert’s odors. Robert, for all of his resistance to being cooped up in the smoky sardine can after the chaos in the Fete Bazaar, seemed to vent his anxiety via the displeasure of those cramped within him, and this childhood mischievousness calmed Morgan somewhat, too, although this was merely bandages holding back a bursting emotional dam that she made no effort bursting in full upon returning to their suite at the purple bricked Empress.

And now she tended to her wounds and wallowed in the purified water coming from the golden ornate shower, complete with four independent jets for a full body immersion. Even the most hardened of Daughters would appreciate the cushiness of this transition between assignments, and Morgan was no exception, except tonight, which was an incredibly painful exception. There was the grime of the Dredges still on her, barnacled in places on her body she thought impossible for anything to be, and during her venture into the crack in the wall, the tussle with Amber, the spilled blood, the fleeing out, and then the almost blind escape from the mist fallen Fete Bazaar, she had experienced an array of cuts and bruises enough to rival a leopard. Then there was the gap in her spirit, the sudden absence of Ophelia and Samantha, sisters who had given all that they had to ensure Morgan’s survival. Guilt ran through her veins, pumping into her martyred organs, the unwanted prodigal child.

After drying and switching places with Robert, who was patient enough with Morgan to allow her to sulk in the steam while he nervously sipped whiskey in his filth, she set about looking out of the windows at odd angles to avoid being seen from the outside. She put her ears to walls, checked for any lurking people outside of the porthole. Several maids dragged their carts away and Morgan instinctively grabbed a kitchen knife, which was dull but would come in handy, and she felt foolish for being so paranoid. Yet she had seen Bijoux’s assignment, which meant that the Queen Bee and her auditor’s must have created a hit for her, must have suspected that she was either hiding in the Dredges, or that she would have come back to the Globe. In this sense Morgan felt hunted and stalked, vulnerable to the whims of the city, the many eyes of the Daughters that she knew existed. And now her only allies in the city were foreigners. Robert was right; taking over the city required a change of paradigm, of reconstruction of hegemony, and Morgan felt a flame in her soul that ignited as she glanced sideways out of the Empress at the glittering Uppers before her, at the hotels and the restaurants and the arenas, at the shopping malls and the water parks and the gardens.

Robert came out of the shower drying his hair. He still had enough shame to get dressed outside of her presence, and instead snuck between a Chinese divider and flopped the towel over the partition, his silhouette somehow manifesting a glass of whiskey.

He spoke to Morgan like a man who did not know what to say. “I’ve never been so dirty in my entire life. I swear there are metals in that steam or something. I feel like I’m about to oxidize and turn green!”

Morgan smoked a Steeple in the bathroom, cupping her hand around the smoke, puffing it into the vent. She felt like a convict with contraband, or a teenager evasively smoking reefer. Daughters have a nose for their special cigarettes. It was a beacon that gave Morgan a comfort of community even during the most trying aspects of an assignment. Now it was a curse, and soon, Robert’s stash would run out. So, there was another problem. When she finished, she found Robert standing over the ornate dining room table. The Honeymooners Suite in the Empress was akin to a small luxury apartment, complete with a kitchen, a small dining room, and a den carved into the floor much like a conversation pit. Before him was string, markers, a cork board. It reminded Morgan of her endeavor to solve Samantha’s murder, and now they stared at one another, herself emitting Steeple from her pores, himself nursing whatever wounds with a tumbler of grainy ichor, and both clad in their evening wear. It was as if the day had never started, or if they had never left.

“Quite the grocery list,” he said.

Morgan nodded. “Before we begin, I feel obligated to tell you that Bijoux’s assignment is to find me and kill me.”

“So that was her,” Robert said, “I can see why you hate her.”

“She won’t stop. Daughters commit.”

“Then we will too,” Robert said. He had already begun organizing the papers into papercut islands. “So Noctalia is out, gone to the threshes.”

“The Rabbit Club will notice he is gone,” Morgan said, “mustn’t forget that.”

“Rabbit Club?”

“Some artist cult or something,” Morgan shrugged, wincing at where she bombarded her shoulder against a rock wall. She returned to the war map before them. “We have a fashion designer who is under watch for his clothing line. How can that be subversive?”

“Fashion is politics, my dear.”

“Don’t call me that,” Morgan tutted and pointed to another dossier. “A council representative in the Lowers calling for a redistribution of wealth from the Uppers. Surprised she’s not trying to work through the Middles first.”

“You’d think they would be on the same side,” Robert said, “well, discounting those Atlas weirdos. Oh, look, that’s two cults.”

“Look at what you’ll inherit.”

“Cults arise from a need to have a counter belief system,” Robert said, suddenly pensive. “It’s a religion like no other.”

“And the religion you believe in, Mr. Forrest?”

“The spectacle, of course.”

They assessed the others. There was an Uppers city planner who, after a couple drinks, had released some unsavory comments about the planning disparity among the strata. A group of college professors from Tilyou University who have been teaching of-age Daughters without their knowledge. Angry bartenders in the Lowers and Middles complaining of long nights and no pay. There was an ambiguous line between what Robert constituted as a brick in the scaffolding of revolutionary progress and simple “ne’er do wells”, as he said with no patch of irony. For example, Robert dismissed the suspicions of angsty young-workers in the Middles who toyed with the idea of looting expensive Uppers clothing stores. Likewise, he dismissed the Auditor’s surprisingly paranoid visage of teenagers lurking outside of convenience stores, or even teenagers in general. Some musicians were put into one pile for being anarchist for spectacle (at which Robert’s definition of spectacle appeared to differ from what he constituted as theirs), while others he put into a pile grouped with others he saw might have value. So strong was Robert’s vindication towards “the cause” that Morgan had no choice but to wallow in both her ineptitude and her own anguish, assuaging her fiery need for momentum to Robert’s surprisingly cool and strategic demeanor.

Within the cloud of two glasses of whiskey that helped to sooth her wounds, she began to see Robert in a new light. He lorded over the table like a general planning out a military strike, a cigarette cradled between his fingers with various stacks, each with an algorithm of notes. He was a canvasser, a campaigner, a politician. With a brow furrowed in concentration, he looked older, more tired, driven by the ideals of the future he demanded. Aside from their shared genetic history, there was little of Queen Bee in her great-nephew, and vice-versa. Morgan wondered where she was in this, and if genetics really meant anything at all. Faux-Ophelia’s words whispered into Morgan’s ear: *we are what we appear to others*.

Before long, Morgan found herself stretched on the bed, her head a stupor of alcohol, the soft jazz that Robert had put on and was absently tapping his foot sonically lulling her into slumber, buffering against the wounds her body had experienced less than 24 hours ago, belaying the horrors of the mind which had begun their steady encroachment like a colossus of the sea peaking its brows to an unsuspecting city.

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Morgan, now privy to Robert’s canvasing, opted instead to follow his lead with their next endeavor. He did not need to bring up that her last spearheading resulted in a technical success at the loss of two lives and a target on Morgan’s back, and she knew that he knew that it did not need to be said. Besides, the Queen Bee’s abode was hidden to even the Daughters, known perhaps to only one or two of the most trusted Auditors, of which Morgan knew that Arno was among them. It was he who personally activated the hit on Morgan, had signed the hunt for her head with the stroke of a pen using the same hand that made sure to tuck packets of Steeples into her palm, the same sausage fingers that he would sometimes and unwelcomely wrap around her waist, the lower of her back. Morgan pondered how she would kill him as she drained one of her last Steeples to the quick. Robert made no secret that he had some packs left, and then this would pose another problem. Probably about two weeks supply, he said.

Now wearing the skin as Lea Arnoux, she walked arm in arm with Robert as he nodded to other men with their wives or mistresses, happy couples that have aged together reminiscing by proxy of the youth. They passed underneath the pearl sculpted Demeter and past the crystal fountains, Morgan keeping her head low, knowing that the receptionist was a Daughter herself.

“How can you tell?” Robert whispered.

“You just know,” she said.

Then she considered his words, found her own explanation wanting. The question had made Morgan nervous because no one had ever asked her this before, and Robert noticed that she was quickening her step to the safety of the hotel bar. He ordered two Bloody Mary’s.

“This will calm you,” he said. “Now you’ve got to stop being weird.”

Morgan sipped, soured her face, and said, “This drink is terrible.”

“Different tastes, I guess,” Robert said.

After a minute Morgan began again, “You know how someone you know very well can exist in a room in silence with you? Being alone together?”

“It’s a rare form for people in my line of existence.”

“It can be reserved for siblings too,” Morgan validated. “I’ve never asked, do you have any siblings?”

“Genetically you could be considered my sibling. You all could.”

“Robert.”

Robert adopted the same look that Morgan saw him wear last night when looking over the dossiers. Whatever images were flashing through his mind could not be positive ones, as his eyes turned into slants as if trying to find some pattern in the molecules between them. Finally, he said, “I had a brother. Died during the war. Shot down.”

“You said something about the Globe not helping America. Is this one of the reasons?”

“I’d be lying to myself if I said it wasn’t one of them, and I’d be lying to you if I said it was the only reason. I have a sister too. She lives somewhere in California. I haven’t seen her in many years.”

For reasons Morgan could not explain, she knew this was a topic better to broach another time, if at all. “Another way I could tell,” Morgan said, picking up the conversation again, “is an absence. Such in the way that when you’re in an empty room and your back is to the door but you feel someone enter. Like a presence. But Daughters don’t get that presence with one another. There is no change in atmosphere. The absence of their presence is an indicator.”

“As long as you understand it,” Robert said, paying the check. He revealed a bag and placed it in Morgan’s hands. “And they can see you too, right?”

“It works both ways. We’re the same person. I’ve never asked them about it, since most of them don’t even know, but I figure that’s probably a rule. A sixth sense.”

“Use this knowledge to your advantage,” Robert said. “Look in the bag.”

Morgan rummaged through the container. How he must have had time to go to Ephraim’s department store, one of the wealthiest clothing stores in the Globe and a pinnacle of Upper socialite fashion, was beyond her. Perhaps when she was asleep. In the bag was a ball of blond fur ball.

“Another wig? Are you serious, Mr. Forrest?”

“You only call me Mr. Forrest when you’re upset with me,” Robert said, plainly.

“One wig is uncomfortable enough, thank you. And I’ve just gotten acquainted with Lea Arnoux.”

“And Lea Arnoux was in the Dredges yesterday,” Robert said. “You don’t think Bijoux won’t somehow trace it back to her? That costume is compromised.”

“Mitch won’t tell,” she said, and she felt this to be true.

“He doesn’t need to. You’re operating on the assumption that Bijoux will not upturn every sad cement slab in that place.”

Morgan growled. The wig felt looked pretty enough; long cascading straw-colored hair that reminded her faintly of the sunflowers. She was not fond of discarding Lea Arnoux. She was not fond of fabricating this new version of herself, either. Her fingers touched through the itchy make and landed on something heavy and deft. She had felt its weight when she levied the bag from Robert, and now, gripping her hands over it, she looked at him from over their cylindrical satellites of half consumed Bloody Mary’s. The coldness of the pistol brushed against her skin.

“How?” Morgan whispered, suddenly on alert.

“Aldous,” Robert said, “he brought one for me too.”

“But how?”

“When you were asleep, I went back to the Dredges. We connected in the same sewers you came out of when you I took you to Manhattan.”

A pang of warmth boiled in Morgan’s body. She had forgotten how much she missed Aldous and his colossal charm, his outwardly barnacled personality that, upon getting to know him, was more of a front put upon him than willfully erected.

“But that would imply Aldous swam all the way to the Globe without being caught.”

“Our Aldous is…a special man.”

“You couldn’t have chosen to present this to me in the hotel room? If we’re caught with this we’re more than screwed, Mr. Forrest.””

Robert shrugged, “Lea Arnoux lives in this room, and Lea Arnoux is going to go into that bathroom and become someone else. As for the pistol, do you think anyone who is being shot at thinks that they are protected because they followed rules? Bijoux is after you. She’s of the camp to open fire in a market, I’m sure you can remember.”

“My ears are still ringing,” Morgan said, and a pang echoed in her heart as she thought of Ophelia and Samantha.

She stood, grabbed the bag, and disappeared into the powder room, where she disappeared the pistol, loaded, and heavy, in a strap on her thigh underneath her dress. Then she discarded Lea’s mangy wig, relieved now that she could get the smell of the Dredges and the smoke of Mitch’s nest out of her hair. She adopted the straw colored hair and stared at herself in the mirror, looking at her worn features, the bags under her eyes. She had never looked old. None of the Daughters did. This was something that Morgan had not realized. Some look younger than others, but none of them look *old*. Perhaps it is the Steeples that kill them, in the same way that murdered teenagers don’t die old either. Like Lea Arnoux and the countless assignments given to her by the Auditors, Morgan had no qualms in adopting a new persona, complete with their own beliefs, personalities, values. Morgan prided herself on being an exceptionally good actress, had even been an actress at *The Dream* once to take down a play write who was smuggling contraband into the Globe. Yet she understood, now confronted by the limitations of her own reflection, that no character came to her, that it was just Morgan in the mirror at the Empress, or rather, not Lea Arnoux. It was then that Morgan thought of Frederique and the pains that she had gone through to give life to Ms. Arnoux, had perfected her handwriting, her peddling in a socio-economic class, the deliberate dress of a newly married woman. The woman standing before Morgan now was…whom? Just a girl with a wig.

The toilet flushed and Morgan reached for the pistol at her thigh, grateful now for Robert’s volatile planning. A woman walked out and began washing her hands in the clam shell basin next to Morgan, and in the silence of the running stream Morgan kept her gaze at herself, discreetly eyeing her neighbor. She parsed for that sixth sense of another Daughter who had somewhere taken a break in their hunt for her, had looked for *RUN* on her forearms that would denote an ally. Eventually the woman caught wind, and, now standing erect, looked no older than Morgan herself.

“Isn’t the Empress just beautiful?” She asked, breaking the tension.

Morgan blinked to attention. “Um, yes.”

“Are you here for a bit?” The woman was now drying her hands on the expensive linen.

“A bit,” Morgan said, aware that she was giving non-answers, now painfully sensitive that in her return to the Globe she had become terribly incapable of sustaining normal conversation, her words uncontrollably laced with paranoia. Morgan offered, “And you?”

“A week. My honeymoon,” the girl said. “First time in the Globe.”

“Mine too,” the words flooded out. She tried to think, however painfully, of Arno’s articulation for her personas, and, with a sympathy reserved for Frederique in general, her storytelling craft. She thought to say that she was also on her honeymoon, but Lea Arnoux was discarded like a faulty animal pelt in the bag next to her. Instead, she said, “I’m visiting a friend. From school.”

She began toying with her hair, fixing the wig which had begun to itch. She was surprised that the barnacle next to her had not noticed. Or perhaps she did and was too polite to say anything.

Making small talk. “Where does the friend live?”

“In the Middles, actually.” She was unsure why she said that, her tongue rolling on the momentum of the conversation, herself hyper-aware of the tension rising in her skull, incredibly self-conscious as to her own dimensions, the two of them standing before the mirror together like two idols. Morgan thought of her many sisters in the Middles busking on the subways, on the streets where the Uppers concentrated their wealth to purchase “cool”. Morgan continued, “She’s a musician. She’s playing in a couple of shows in Thunderbolt Alley.”

“You’re going dressed as that?” The girl said, immediately.

“No. Yes.” Morgan nodded.

The girl fished into her pockets and revealed a cluster of iron beads that shimmered like black pearls in the artificial, aquarium light of the Empress female bathroom. “Here, these are what all the girls wear in the Middles. Iron beads.”

“Something about Atlas, right?”

“Something,” she shrugged. “My husband grew up in the Middles. Of course, he makes enough to stay here, but we went to a show. I bought them to fit in, but now I’ve fit in enough and he’s taking me to the cocktail bars tonight.”

Morgan received the beads and attempted to braid them into her hair. The girl jut forward and Morgan resisted every urge to repel her. Her hand worked into Morgan’s hair like a seamstress, tap dancing onto the golden faux-silk with the onyx beads, braiding them until her scalp was a string of digits on an abacus. The weights were not sufficient enough for Morgan to feel them, and the beads made her feel almost tribal.

“Well, I’m off then,” the girl said. She made to leave. “I’m Claire, by the way. I hope we cross paths again. Oh, and find yourself a leather jacket. You’ll thank me.”

Morgan smiled with more genuineness than she thought she could have mustered. “Claire,” she said.

Back at the hotel bar Morgan presented herself, eyed Robert for where he was hiding his pistol and was pleased to find it was well hidden. He asked her name and she answered: “Claire.”

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Robert’s prescience made a display outside of the elevator when he handed Morgan a bind of cards as he lit a quick cigarette amidst the new morning crowd.

“I’ll be talking to the Warehouse Boys again,” he said, his lips halfway clasped around the cylinder.

“Minkton.”

“They will listen,” Robert said, “I have a new angle. The dock workers know that their union representatives are crooked. They know Minkton is exploiting them. Sometimes you need smoke to see the fire.”

“Okay, and?”

Robert revealed another card. Morgan wondered how far he had gone when she slept. “Jason Albrecht. A pro-bono lawyer. ‘Unsullied’ if you will. Or ‘dirty’, depending on if you ask the wrong people. If I could get him to represent the Warehouse Boys, I think we’d have a better shot at their fealty *and* upending Minkton.”

“Minkton is a capitalist,” Morgan said, tapping her foot. “He only follows the Queen Bee because she sits on the throne.

“Shows his loyalty.” Robert soured. “There shall be no room for Minkton when I am the head of state.”

“Let’s wait on that answer,” Morgan said. She held out her hand. “What’s the assignment?”

“You don’t have to say that. I’m not an Auditor.”

“I’m being ironic. Claire is ironic.”

Robert shrugged her off. He placed the card in her hand and Morgan read them. “A group of hep kids in the Lowers? A bowling alley attendant? Mr. Forrest come, now. These are hardly the scaffolds of revolution that you tell me you dream of.”

“Ah, so this is upset Claire,” Robert smirked, somehow keeping his temperance.

“Don’t patronize me. I got you these names, didn’t I?”

The elevator came. The Uppers crowd shuffled in. Robert made to go but Morgan grabbed his arm and they became an obstructive rock in a river, the crowd moving around them, elevator doors closing and the pneumatic velocity pulling downward, and still Morgan kept her gaze until Robert began to sweat.

“You did your part, and now I need to do mine,” Robert said.

“Elaborate, Mr. Forrest.”

“You aren’t a canvasser.”

“A politician.”

“Yes. Our approach is to change the personality of the Globe. Only then can we challenge the Queen Bee. In the Dredges you did as you needed to do and I’m thankful.”

“I did what I needed to do and I can do this.”

“Talk to people? You’ve tried.”

“Don’t throw the failure of Noctalia in my face,” she said, “you know what happened there.”

“I’m not blaming you, I’m only observing what I’ve seen in others. You can’t talk to people the way this operation needs.”

Morgan recoiled. “Excuse me?”

“Power does not transfer through brute force. Temporary power does. But that’s working harder, not smarter, and the result is what one would call a bad stew,” Robert explained. “You need to change the minds of the people, the paradigm of the city. What we are involved in is more political than you think. We need allies and they need to be committed to the cause.”

“You act like I’ve never had a conversation with anyone in my life,” she said, “you seem to forget my entire existence in the Globe was being privy to all circles.”

“With the help of the Daughters, the guidance of the Auditors, and all on behalf of the Queen Bee,” Robert said, “don’t you see? The Tilyou’s Daughters are weapons, no more than the pistols carried by police officers. You worked at maintaining a status quo, not upending it. And you worked as a Daughter, not as Morgan.” Then he paused, failed to resist smiling at the sentence fabricated in his head. “How many people out of the Queen Bee’s thumb know your name, your actual name?”

Morgan paused. She counted Frederique, Aldous, Robert.

“Exactly.”

Morgan clenched her fists. “Fine. Morgan can’t rally people. But Claire can. Give me someone in the Middles. Someone connected to the music scene.”

“The music scene?” Robert snickered.

Her brows furrowed. “Music has its pulse. The underground has its pulse. Are you familiar with *Marseilles*?”

“The French Revolution song?”

“Exactly. A revolution song. The peasants were dominated by the regiment. That song, which came from the dust of their poverty, invoked something in them. It reminded them that they have a pulse.”

Robert considered this. Then he shuffled into his deck of cards again and handed her another dossier. “Alfred Snow is an underground record maker and musician whose studio is in the Middles. It’s called Electrostasis. His bandmates are a lot of up and coming musicians exclusively from the Lowers and Middles, and a lot of the Uppers teenagers are listening to it now. I actually think I heard one of his songs playing in one of the shops on the way here. As you know, the young will inherent the world left by the old, which is why the old wants to maintain as much grip on the young as it can. There are three different Daughters after him. One has an alias of a bassist who is recording. Another is a girl who has taken a liking to him and I’m not sure if they’ve slept together. Another a beggar from the Lowers who will ask him for money and determine that the amount is not enough when the fake-paramour of his gives the signal, of which Alfred will be stabbed in the middle of the street.”

“I’m familiar with how the Daughters work. The assignments are very intricately linked. I must ask though, if Alfred Snow is at such a risk of being murdered, why is he not a priority for you?”

“Because I’m turning the Warehouse Boys, and I’m but one man. For now.’

“But it’s a life.”

“And we’re playing a great game, Claire.” As Morgan grabbed the tiny dossier Robert retained his grip so that they were both tugging on the card. Before releasing, he said, “Don’t fuck it up. If they find me, I’ll be on the Daughter’s watch list. If they find you, then we’re all fucked.”

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The *Electrostasis* was at the end of a long, unevenly cobblestoned street in the Middles called Litmus, which Morgan had found to be a rather interesting and apt name. From the main street Tectonic Biotechnics loomed on its large hill like some apathetic watchtower, as if it knew that it belonged to the Uppers, which it did. Actually, from the hilltop of Tectonic Biotechnics, Litmus was one of the few neighborhoods easily definable within the urban/suburban patchwork illuminated by the fake sky. Chinese paper lanterns strung like lines of laundry over the tenement houses which had historically been reserved for the lower echelons of the Middles. Defunct factories were dwarfed of course by the ninety-story height of the fake clouds, but loomed over those walking between. It was a distinctively congested area, taking qualities of the Lowers lack of space with the comfort of the safety net of a Middles proud endeavor to simply survive. Litmus had become a haven for musicians who did not mind living in relative squalor when compared to the picket fence zeitgeist of the bootstrapping mentality, had become a sardine can of artisans feeding off of the energy of one another while simultaneously celebrating it.

Morgan navigated between the closely packed houses, the paths illuminated by the neon lanterns, each sporting a different sign in a language that Morgan did not know. Talismans of deflection against some encroaching spirit, perhaps gentrification without realizing that the Litmus itself might be an engine of such a cause. Open air shops flanked her sides and she smelled: laundry detergent, floral spritzes, an array of umami enriched soup and exotic foods, the briny smell of unshucked oysters of the un-psycho variety, fish guts, sake. The sounds: people moving, footsteps on the cobblestones, the clanging of burly workers carrying crates of vegetables passed by the Uppers, stationed, like totems, musicians playing outside, trying their best to navigate this world that they feel is musically lacking without them in it. People in cafes were isolated isolas even here, playing soft music amongst the humdrum of the neighborhood, the relaxing nature of the gathering space too polite to take up more space underneath the sentinel-esque posts of the warehouse-lofts, the singular visage of Tectonic Biotechnics as if urging to be worshipped.

Morgan walked in Claire’s metaphorical shoes, looking for people like her, looking for women in leather jackets a size too big, shoes with points on them, the iron beads. She knew the Litmus was an incubator for some semblance of counter culture, so much so that tourists were actually invited by the Globe to check out, much to the local chagrin. As such, the Litmus had balanced a careful and respectful line with the Globe, even though itself did not know even know it was playing the great game of the Queen Bee. So far the Litmus had not prodded the hibernating conflict, had not rocked the relationship that it had been permitted because it did not even know it is a component in keeping it steady. Until now.

The Litmus existed because the Queen Bee allowed it, and all the Daughters knew that it would end when the Queen Bee demanded it.

Morgan found the girls she was looking for, and, like Claire in the bathroom, found a second-hand store and purchased a leather jacket that clung a little tightly around her arms and ended at her palms. She purchased a pair of boots and tossed her flats in the trash, feeling only slightly bad to abandon them since they had come from Macy’s and on Robert’s dime, and that Morgan had picked them out herself. Instead, she rationalized this sacrifice with a course correction for Robert: don’t make her chameleon into a role without the proper equipment.

Now, standing in front of a grimy mirror, a kaleidoscope of people moving back and forth behind her, Morgan examined the Claire that had manifested. Straw colored locks tied up in iron beads. Boots and a leather jacket like a three-dimensional shadow. The lanterns cast an orange neon glow over the street but even in this colored haze Morgan could see that the jacket and boots were asynchronous with the Uppers dress she was wearing, but this itself was synchronous, fortunately, with the rest of Snow’s followers. She heard a couple of girls fawning over a record, giving into fantasies of taking him into bed, which was both intriguing for Morgan and slightly shocking for her to hear. They said that the music was authored by Alfred Snow, so that meant he still intended to change the Globe via sonic intervention. Morgan asked for directions and then she was down two streets and could hear the *Electrostasis* sound studio like a siren song a block before it unfolded to her.

It was a smaller venue, one of the dilapidated warehouses that once was a canning factory and had since been carved into a variety of different uses and storefronts. Next to it was a sandwich shop and an apartment building, both of which Morgan was surprised that they had not gotten fed up with yet. A crowd of people stood outside of the building, smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. There were several faint undertows of Steeples amidst the crowd, and Morgan made a point to shy away from any large clusters. Her head was Bijoux’s assignment, but the entire Auditor network knew about the hit. Several guitar players strummed to their own beat along. A drum circle. A girl singing. They were not waiting to enter Alfred Snow’s music box. They were waiting to be noticed by him. Morgan was impressed by his pull already, although, thinking now of her French national anthem, could not see how these strumming fools would have any engine to challenge the Globe. But Morgan knew better. These poor saps were buying into the version of Litmus that the Globe prohibited under faux-reluctance. Then, cutting through the thresh of beads and song and leather, Morgan could hear the *Electrostasis* activate, the sounds coming from within like some great and beautiful roar. She could only describe the sounds as *rough*, as *hardened*, as *angry*. The vibrations carried with them at such resonance as to carry their own pulse that sharpens a blade. It was music unlike she had heard in the Globe prior, it was music, for the first time in Morgan’s life, that she could determine was not for any cochlea in the Uppers, the sounds in active defiance. Coming out of the *Elecrostasis*’s practice stage was the makings of a Middles anthem, and everyone below.

Morgan walked through the crowd, looking the part but feeling off. Several men tried to talk to her and she leap frogged their attentions to near the door of the dilapidated music studio. She thought of raising her knuckles to knock but, clad in her leather jacket with iron beads ringing her hair, she felt less poised to do so. Instead, she made to enter and a busking musician, fortunate to have gotten so close as to be potentially noticed by the great Alfred Snow, informed her that she can’t simply walk into the *Electrostasis*.

“You’ve got to be invited,” he said.

“I’m with Mr. Snow,” she said.

“We’re all with Mr. Snow,” he said, gesturing to the crowd. “We’re all Snow.”

Someone shouted from the crowd, “A bunch of snowflakes makes an avalanche!”

“A bunch of snowflakes indeed,” Morgan said, wishing that she could calm her nerves with a Steeple, glad that she only wanted one out of habit. She turned back to the busker. “What I bring is good news for Mr. Snow,” she said, and then, realizing that this was no gatekeeper to the *Electrostasis* quarters, jut into building while ignoring his protests.

The musicians were just finishing up their set, the vibrations in the small studio still ringing powerful enough to make them all ignore the influx of their groupies outside as the door opened and closed. The pianist was looking over notes sipping soda pop. The saxophonist was cleaning their reeds. The drummer was a black man, which Morgan found to be perhaps the most telling of the *Electrostasis*’s appeal with revolutionary youth; this was a cross-pollination that Morgan herself felt was not a volatile position, but a lot of old fashioned people across the entire stratosphere of the Globe would have disagreed. The bassist was a woman with long, silky hair adorned with beads, her frame dwarfed by the massive upright instrument. She wore a scabby fur coat that hung over her palms, not unlike the Morgan’s own sleeves. This was a Daughter, Morgan could smell not only the lingering Steeple on her but knew via that unexplainable sixth sense. Morgan kept her eyes away, looked towards the guitarist who was pouring himself and the drummer a tumbler of whiskey.

“No visitors, we’re practicing,” he said as he sat down and started to tune his guitar.

“She’s a pretty one,” said the saxophonist, who Morgan found to be strangely androgynous. Morgan could not stop glancing at them.

Morgan noticed that the bassist finally perked up, having made a point of ignoring the invasive female energy. Morgan figured, Daughter loyalty aside, that a lot of women entered and left here like a revolving door, their faces pressed up against the glass as if the musicians themselves were fish. Morgan wondered if this Daughter had crushed on her bandmates, had resigned to being ‘one of the boys’.

“I’m here to see Mr. Snow,” she said, a little directly. She ignored several snickers from the pianist, who started fiddling around with his keys. “I am a representative of the Dream.”

The musicians stopped playing. The Daughter even perked her attention. The guitarist grimaced. “You’re wasting your time. Al has no intention of performing at the Dream. That’s for Uppers and tourists.”

“Any of our reputation would be squandered if our Middles and Lowers roots saw us put upon the chains of the oppressors,” the saxophonist said.

The drummer: “Our music isn’t for Uppers ears.”

The guitarist: “And besides, we wouldn’t perform there even if Al turned.”

Bassist: “…”

Pianist: “It’s why we were recruited, to keep his arrangements pure.”

Guitarist: “You look like you come from around here. But you work for the Uppers?”

Bassist: “Wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

Drummer: “Classic Uppers.”

Getting into Alfred Snow’s proximity might have been a lot easier with the bassist’s assistance. Instead, whenever she gave Morgan a glance she had to break away, fearing recognition. Already this story would weave into the Auditor’s files, the story of a Dream representative coming into the Middles. The Daughter made to leave and Morgan had a feeling that soon she would return with the knowledge that the Dream had not commissioned a speaker to meet with Mr. Snow, that the Dream’s loyalty to the Queen Bee and the superstructure of the Globe had remained as stalwart as before, that Morgan was the rogue Daughter she had surely heard so much about.

“At least give Mr. Snow the agency to reject me,” Morgan said.

The musicians exchanged glances. The saxophonist said, “Rejecting the Dream. That could mean something.”

The drummer poured another glass of whiskey. “Alright then,” he said, “see for yourself why your kind isn’t welcome here.”

Morgan smiled as genuine as she could muster. Then she walked down the only hall in the studio and went to the only door at the end of the hall. She knocked, heard rummaging, knocked again, waited long enough for the musicians to begin fiddling with their music, sans Bassist, and Morgan knew that she was checking the Auditor files, or en route to do so. She knew this because Morgan would have done the same thing. If memory served, there was an apartment building twenty minutes away with a terminal. Unlike the Dredges and most of the Lowers, the terminals wee hidden by mere real estate. Eventually Morgan heard a groan and her heart dropped, thinking that either the bassist had instead outright murdered Mr. Snow, or his false girlfriend, another Daughter by Robert’s incredible parsing, had determined his death needed to be expedited. Morgan kept her hand near her thigh in case she needed to unsheathe her gun, and after warning that she was entering the room burst open the door to find Alfred Snow splayed out on the couch with a brunette in between his legs, bobbing up and down, his moans now horribly incorrectly perceived.

The woman unsheathed herself from his groin, a tendril of spit lining her lips and his penis like spider’s silk, and he redirected her mouth back onto him. He locked eyes with Morgan. He had a face that was both young and old, lines of a permanently worn intense expression ambering cartographic etches on his face, his hair a tinge silver that hung over eyes which sparkled even underneath the dim office bulbs.

“Ever hear of knocking?” He said, slightly positioning himself while the girl continued her work.

Morgan felt hotness in her cheeks. She stammered, “I did. I knocked. I mean, I knocked a couple times.”

“You can see I’m a little busy,” he said, fighting to keep his face from relaxing with pleasure. This was some game to him. “How did you get in?”

Morgan said, “I let myself in. I’m a representative of the Dream.”

“The Dream!” Snow chuckled with such gusto that the girl between his legs gagged a little bit. “You bring that up to the musicians out there?”

“They thought it would be amusing for you to tell me to fuck off yourself,” she said.

Snow looked at her up and down. He tapped the girl on the head and she released herself, wiping her mouth. Wordlessly she kissed Snow on the check, collected herself, and made to leave the office. Morgan stepped out of the threshold and they levitated in the opening for a moment, holding onto a space where the girl, whom Morgan knew was a Daughter, sized Morgan herself up. No doubt she would confer with the bassist about this. It was a game they were playing, one which Morgan was privy to herself. The Daughter could not say anything now for this would compromise everything. Instead, she left and Morgan invited herself to shut the door to Snow’s office. Now the two of them were alone in the small space, big enough to fit a springy couch and several chairs over a cracked and second-hand glass coffee table. The room smelled of bodily fluids, alcohol, greasy street food wrappers. Alfred went over to his desk, slouched over his stool, and organized the various composition papers.

“They tell me that your music is electrifying.”

“Hence *Electrostasis*,” he said, lighting a cigarette. “You get shocked enough to paralysis and then you either move past it or you die. But that’s not why you’re here, Miss.”

“Claire Redwood,” she said.

“Miss Redwood,” Snow said, and even though Morgan was not attracted to this man, with his young but hollowed eyes, his unkempt bristle on seemingly malnourished cheekbones, there was something charming about the way she said her fake name. She could see why people would champion him. She could see why the Queen Bee was watching him. *The poor sap*, Morgan thought.

She continued, “The music you’re playing is rowdy, incomprehensible, and irritable.”

“A lot of words that have a lot of different meanings to a lot of different people,” he said dismissively.

“The Globe could do with your kind of music,” she said, and she meant it.

“Not for sale,” he said, “my music is not for the Dream. It’s not for any of you Upper’s folk. It’s for the people who built the damn Globe.” He waited for Morgan to respond but she held her tongue. She knew she had lit a fuse, and still he was not throwing things at her, not telling her to get out. She would feign offense, let him barrage her with fists of whatever contained anger was seething within him. It helped that she agreed with Alfred Snow, for the most part. Seeing her stalwartness, Snow continued, “You’re from the Dream but you look dressed straight out of Litmus.”

“Not convincing enough for you?”

“You’re a sheep in wolves clothing,” he said, “dressing like you are one of us, but all you do is perpetuate the inequalities of the Globe. The tourism, the money. That’s what matters to you, and you and your people aim to commodify sound so it can become *your* sound. But it’s not. Or, you aim to commodify my sound before it becomes *our* sound. Don’t you see? Once you give an identity to a group of people they realize that they have an identity. And they will fight for it. As is their human right. Have you never heard of an anthem before, Mrs. Redwood?”

“An anthem is functionally uncompromising.”

He crossed his arms, the smoke from the cigarette trailing from one side. “Could not have said it better myself.”

Morgan locked the door and raised a hand to silence him before he could protest. She lifted some of her skirt and revealed the edge of the pistol after his initial excitement for what was happening in his head had shifted temperatures. She crossed the room and sat on one of the crusted cushions, not too far from where Snow’s bare buttocks had laid not twenty minutes ago.

“Listen to me, Mr. Snow, I’m not very good at this,” she said.

“I can tell?” He said, “I think? Look, I—”

“Mr. Snow you’re being watched. There are hands that you keep near you which aim to do you harm.”

“You made that very evident,” he said. Surprisingly he kept his cool. Perhaps he sensed that Morgan was not aiming to kill him.

“Those in power of the Globe have recognized your anthem. They fear that *Electrostasis* might invoke a counterculture that they cannot appropriate. Which means control, in this context. You were right, Mr. Snow. There is censorship. Have you heard of Alexander Noctalia?”

“The artist? The one that went AWOL after that god awful exhibit?”

Morgan slanted her eyes. “Who told you that exhibit was burned?”

“The *Daily Globe*.”

“And here you are reading Uppers newspapers while trying to carve your way through the bastion of Uppers censorship.”

At this Snow lit another cigarette, this time with shaking hands. The drummer was banging absently in the background. The saxophonist began practicing his scales. Someone knocked on the door and Snow told them to fuck off for a minute.

“You’re telling me that you are not from the Dream and that people are trying to kill me? Who are you?”

“I explain if you give me some of your time. We need to leave now, though.”

“Because someone might kill me?”

More knocking. The bassist was calling for another rehearsal, wondering if Snow had finished his tweaks yet.

“Her and that girl you were with.”

“Nancy,” he said.

“Sure. Nancy,” Morgan smiled. “The bassist was sent to infiltrate you, see if you had any rebellious tendencies. Which you do.”

Alfred Snow smiled and blushed underneath his unkempt bristle. “Thank you.”

“Enough of that,” Morgan said. “And Nancy is a groupie that just showed up at your doorstep? There were no others? I saw the throngs of women outside. Why her?”

“Because she was the prettiest,” Snow shrugged, “They throw themselves at me. It’s only fair that I get to pick which ones I spend time with.”

“She was designed to fit into your sexual profile of attraction.”

Snow shook his head. “This is just another ruse. You’re telling me that my bassist and my special friend are plants from the Uppers?”

“No, the Queen Bee. I know it sounds. They are referred to as Tilyou’s Daughters.”

“Tilyou’s…the Queen? What? How do you know this? Why should I trust you?”

“Because I used to be one of them,” Morgan said. “I know it’s hard to believe, but you need to believe me. I’m trying to save your life.”

Another knock. The guitarist spoke, his voice muted behind the door, and Snow shot up from his chair, grunting, ignoring Morgan’s caution. He opened the door a crack. “What?”

“Mary Beth said the composition needed more work. She was saying that it needs more structure if it’s ever going to get out of Litmus and into the ears of anyone who would listen. I don’t think it’s right, but she’s trying to get everyone else on board. Just so you know.”

Snow shook his head and closed the door, relocking it. “Mary Beth has been a bit odd. I thought it was because she was a female musician in a male band, or maybe she had a crush, or she thought Nancy was a hangnail, or…”

“Nancy is there to ensure that your anthem will change the hard way. Mary Beth is there to ensure your anthem will change the bloodless way.”

“So let her infect my anthem from the inside or, if I’m too headstrong, a crazed fan will gut me like a fish?”

“It’s not your fault, Mr. Snow. You represent an idea now. Just like Noctalia.” Morgan thought of Robert and his Warehouse Boys, his union halls, his pub meetings. He was a natural charmer, one which Morgan did not possess but Claire just might.

“An idea,” Alfred said, toying with the thought.

Morgan raised her hand, “Your music gives the people hope. It gives them an identity. It inspires them. It’s not the Uppers or the Queen’s. It’s *ours*, and that frightens those who want to stay in power. But you already knew that.”

Another knock. Mary Beth sounded from behind the door, “Al? Come out here. The boys went on break, and I’m stuck with Nancy. She opened up a bottle of that whiskey you like. I think I’m coming around to like her. You’re right. She’s very pretty. Why don’t you come out? We’ll go upstairs to your studio for a bit.”

Morgan swore to herself. The glances that Mary Beth and Nancy had exchanged with Morgan on the way in had reared its ugly head. Three women, all using aliases, all communicating through cues. She could bet that they checked the terminals to ensure the rogue Daughter was among them during her entire conversation with Alfred Snow.

Alfred shrugged, gestured to the door, held up three fingers and mouthed “Menage a trois!”

Another knock, more forceful. Nancy said, “If not, we’re going to come in there. I’ve got to finish what I’ve started, Al, and Mary Beth said she’s hep to it. You’d like that, right?”

Morgan stepped closer to Alfred. “You’ve got the sheet music?”

He shook his head. “Memorized.”

Morgan could only trust him. She eyed a window leading into an alley behind the *Electrostasis*. “Let’s go.”

“I can’t just leave. People will think I sold out.”

Morgan considered this. Robert would have already planned, she knew. Still, she needed to think of some plan out of this. What wouldRobert do?

She pointed to the window. “Leave through there. Climb on the roof, announce to your followers that the Dream has taken notice of you, and that you’re insulted by it. As such, you’ll be relocating. Do you have a private space you go to? A pub? A café?”

Alfred said, “I’m fond of the Last Drop, it’s a speakeasy that sells,” at this paused, eying Morgan up, “illegally imported alcohol.”

“Listen, you idiot, I’m more in the fire than you. If they catch you, you’ll be barred from music, might lose a couple fingers. If I’m caught…”

More knocks. They were forceful. The hinges on the door bent.

“Just go!” Morgan said, and Alfred opened the window. Before climbing out Morgan called back, “I’m sorry, Mr. Snow. You didn’t ask for this.”

He smirked. “Yes I did. Maybe after you’ll tell me your real name.”

“At the Last Drop,” Morgan said, and she watched Alfred hop out of the window.

The doors unhinged and out burst Nancy and Mary Beth. They were not the coquettish, sexual duo that Morgan had first been impressed upon, and nor did they have their claimed bottle of whiskey.

“You’re one of us,” Nancy said, dropping her persona, her back arced.

“We checked,” Mary Beth agreed, “and there is nothing saying that a Daughter is a representative of the Dream at this moment, nor is there a Daughter from the Uppers supposed to come meddle in our assignment.”

Morgan shook her head. “You consulted bad intel, then.”

“Or you’re the rotten Daughter that everyone keeps talking about.”

“That’s not me,” Morgan said, “I’ve heard of her. She was in the Dredges last week. Have you checked there?”

Mary Beth and Nancy exchanged glances. Nancy stepped forward as Mary Beth closed the door. Nancy pulled out a Steeple and handed it to Mary Beth, and they both lit it. The ichor permeated through the room, and Morgan was forced to armor herself against its addictive scent. Her knuckled whitened as she fought to grab at the cylinders.

“Where is your Steeple?” Mary Beth said, leaning on the door, crossing her fish netted arms.

“You don’t care to join us?” Nancy smiled, “We can talk.”

“I left them in the Uppers,” Morgan said. She etched closer to the window to avoid the Steeple’s olfactory aura; perhaps she could crawl her way and escape like Alfred. He had enough of a head start. But then the girls would follow her.

“Sounds like you’re scavenging them,” Nancy purred, adopting the same voice that she had when her lips were in between Alfred’s thighs.

“Like you don’t have an auditor,” Mary Beth said. She took a drag, blew smoke into the room, at Morgan’s face.

For what it was worth, Morgan was glad that the two Daughters were in the room with her, since that meant that neither of when were within arms reach of Afred Snow. He could spirit himself away from this mess she had imposed upon him, run through the cover of the alleys to that sticky dive bar. It was envisioning his travels in her mind’s eye that she remembered what Robert had informed her back at the Empress: there was a *third* daughter, a beggar, armed with a shiv and waiting for him. Morgan shuddered at this, and feared that it was visible to her sisters. Of course, the beggar would need a signal from either Nancy or Mary Beth, but what if she didn’t? What is Alfred Snow’s harried person gave it away? She had captured two of the spiders, but a third was outside, impossible to wrangle. Morgan began to speak but was interrupted by Alfred Snow’s amplified voice on top of the *Electrostasis*, and her heart steadied knowing that he was not yet in the alleys, even though remaining he was no better. Could he not follow directions?

He yelled, “Dear my followers, residents of the Litmus, brothers and sisters alike in the Middles and Lowers and Dredges. We are divided, and the Uppers that aim to coopt our sound, our unity, our identity, have attempted to do so today. I have been threatened with force and arrest, and as such, I will be forced to withdraw from the public eye. But fear not, for our anthem will continue. Do not see this as a threat, or as weakness. Those in power want to maintain power, and will do whatever they can to silence any hope that is not under their control. For hope is what creates identity, hope is what creates revolution. Keep your ears open. I play for those underneath the Uppers. Good night!”

Outside the crowd had erupted into a volcanic sonic mesh of swearing, crying, and panic, Alfred’s speech galvanizing what little revolutionary flames burned in the stomach of each of them. There was movement as people tried to storm the *Electrostasis*, and Morgan figured that, with her contact with them just an hour prior, they were hunting for her. Claire from the Dream worked, and Morgan, amidst this chaos and the urge to murder these two Daughters for a Steeple, felt at home with the very act of this donning this identity. Robert Forrest was wrong; Morgan was better at this than he gave her credit for. She just needed a role.

Nancy and Mary Beth turned back to Morgan. Nancy asked, “What did you do?”

“What I was assigned to do,” Morgan said, and then added, “what I wanted to do.”

A torrent of hammering against the doors of the *Electrostasis* vibrated through the building. Shouts and swears ascended to a raucous crescendo.

“The people are rioting,” Morgan said, “how are you going to deal with that?”

Nancy stamped the Steeple with her heel. “By feeding you to the lions.”

Mary Beth added, “And giving your corpse to Bijoux.”

“You’re a disappointment to the Queen Bee. The False Daughter,” Nancy added.

“I know,” Morgan said, “If I’m a disappointment to you, then I’m proud to be your black sheep.”

She had stalled long enough for Alfred to escape into the nethers of the Litmus, with enough chaos to perhaps distract the beggar stationed to nab him. Now she edged towards the window, away from the riot in front of the music studio.

“Don’t you see, False Daughter?” said Nancy, “The people are rioting because their champion is gone. They need a figurehead or they will turn to chaos. That is what the Queen Bee represents. Order. Peace. It comes in inequality. Surely you used to understand that.”

“The Middles, savages. Imagine how the Lowers would react,” Mary Beth added, “or the Dredges. One sign of the ruling power trying to coopt and they would rather destroy it than let the Queen Bee possess it. What good does that do?”

Morgan looked at her sisters. Even under this garb she was certain she had seen a smudgy, cartoonish simulacrum of their faces in the Dredges. If only they knew. But Robert’s voice sounded in her psyche: the Sisters would not understand because they were too indebted to the Queen Bee. They had no idea they were even on a leash, or how to question why the leash was there was at all. Robert’s intuition was correct, there was power in agency, and the residents of the Litmus and the followers of Alfred Snow had recognized the match set before them, even though Morgan paraded as the symbol of all that they hated.

But Nancy and Mary Beth could not reveal this.

Her Sisters charged at her, and Morgan sidestepped to allow Nancy’s momentum to crash into a shelf of records. All Daughters were trained in a myriad talent, ranging from sensual to physical to sexual to mental. They were all practiced con-women, all highly calculating statisticians, all adept assassins. However, there was a degree of variance amongst them, a product of the tides of assignments. Some years needed more Daughters in the Dredges, in the Lowers. Some years required a softer, sensual touch in the Uppers. Morgan was raised in the Lowers, in the nook not far from her “old” apartment in Thunderbolt Alley. These girls had Uppers grafted all over their face. She would not be able to beat them at their game, for it was already too entrenched when Morgan had gotten to Litmus. But now it was not espionage or intelligence, it was three Daughters, the only lie amongst them being their true names. Morgan had brought them to her level.

“Alright, then,” Morgan said, readying herself.

Mary Beth advanced towards her and landed a punch right on her nose. Morgan tasted a torrent of copper in her mouth and a subtle *pop* and she recoiled, holding her nostrils, eyes over her bloodied knuckles. Mary Beth grabbed a stationary guitar and swung like an axe, obliterating Alfred’s office in her wake. Morgan ducked, shoved her shoulder into Mary Beth’s stomach, and brought her elbow to the faux-bassist’s brow, knocking her off kilter, splitting her forehead. Morgan spat on the ground, tongued her teeth and found nothing to be ajar. Then she looked around the room, the signs of a localized tornado from their scuffle, found Nancy amidst a pile of broken records, Mary Beth holding her rapidly swelling noggin.

“The Queen Bee lies,” Morgan said, feeling uncomfortable with what she had done. She had never laid a hand on her sisters before. Even though their assignments were solitary, or their only interaction with one another was in the venin-diagram of their personas, she felt a bond with them that had now shattered like a broken window against her fists. She went to Nancy, pulled at her elbows. “The Queen Bee lies, my sister! She is fooling you both.”

“False Daughter,” said Nancy, and she slumped in Morgan’s arms.

Morgan turned to Mary Beth, “Come with me. You’ll see.”

Mary Beth leaned her head on the closed door, a curtain of blood draping down her face. She coughed and held her ribs. “Bijoux is coming for you, False Daughter.”

“You called her?”

“We didn’t need to. She’s always coming for you.”

The riot had busted into the *Electrostasis*, a great beast of anger and righteousness. They would find Morgan and see her as the Dream, the Uppers manifest. *Good*, Morgan thought, *let Claire be the enemy.*

Morgan rushed to Nancy, rummaged in her pockets, and retrieved a half-full pack of Steeples just as the noise made its way to Alfred Snow’s office. Morgan ran to the window and leaped out just as the crowd had barged into the door. She could hear Mary Beth’s screams of agony and confusion of being assaulted galvanize their anger.

She ran through the streets, boots splashing in neon tinted puddles, her jacket tossed into a lumpy pile of garbage. She found herself in an alley, hid behind a wall as people ran across. The Litmus was alight tonight. She was several blocks away from the *Electrostasis*, so word must have traveled fast in this small Middles neighborhood. She grabbed at her wig and tossed it into a puddle, revealing her auburn hair, fluffing it to give it levity against the containment of the wig. Now Morgan, she found a passing rioting crowd and disappeared into it, their shouts and pumping fists an effective guise against any Daughters that might be tailing her. Either Nancy or Mary Beth had consulted the Terminals for Morgan, which meant that they had updated them as well. She would have done the same. If Bijoux was half the hunter everyone claimed her to be, then she would already be in Litmus now, or at least en route. This possibility sent a shock down Morgan’s spine. She could not risk another slaughter in the Dredges, could not leverage Faux-Ophelia, her younger sister in an elderly woman’s body.

Morgan needed to find the Last Drop. She had lied to Alfred to get him out of the window, but she had no idea where it was. As if on transit she left the rioting crowd which had begun to occupy all the side streets in a chaotic, destructive dance, and asked a merchant where the Last Drop was located only to find that anyone who didn’t know where it was didn’t deserve to know. Morgan asked a passerby but experienced similar results. Stamping her feet, looking over her shoulder for a bloodied Mary Beth or a red-eyed Bijoux, Morgan instead tied her hair into a knot, tore a sleeve on her shirt, and wrapped it around her face to conceal her nose and mouth. She found a moderately drunk punk playing guitar, to aloof to notice the small-town riot, and pinned him against a wall. After a minute he told her the location in an alcoholic vapor, his eyes red from tears. Morgan felt bad about this exchange, but now was not the time. Adrenaline shieled against physical and emotional wounds.

The Last Drop was a dilapidated bar on the outskirts of the Litmus, nestled on trolley tracks between this and another equally, although less popular, neighborhood. She could have taken a trolley but needed to stay in the shadows, and as she walked within the darkness, under eaves, she had developed a limp. Behind her the main streets of Litmus had dwindled into a low raucous, which Morgan suspected was a standard. When she came upon the Last Drop she almost wept.

The bartender stationed a beer on the counter and eyed Morgan as she took it. She was handsome, a mole that might have been an accent in her youth. Eyes that reminded Morgan of Faux-Ophelia.

“In the back,” she croaked.

Morgan took the beer, remembered her time with Aldous and the others in the Rival Clam. She passed people that looked like they existed on the in-between, much like this bar. People who had aged out of the Litmus, had found their genuine counter-cultural ambitions to be squandered by those who had taken over the Litmus itself. Morgan understood why Alfred Snow had chosen this place. He was of the Litmus. Those who hung outside the *Electrostasis* like hang nail were co-opters just like the rest.

She found him well and drunk in the corner of the pub. Wincing, she sat down in front of him. The beer helped. There were two glasses of whiskey in front of him.

“You’ve ruined me, you know,” he said, head cradled in his hand.

Morgan was silent.

“What’s your name?”

“Morgan,” she said.

“Pretty name,” he said, and then pushed a glass over the table. “Look like you needed that.”

Morgan downed the drink, felt it’s slithery fire course through her.

“Nancy and Mary Beth? What happened to them?”

“I took care of them,” Morgan said, wrinkling her nose. It wasn’t broken, but it was banged up.

“What happens to me now?” He asked.

“Mr. Forrest will take care of that,” she said, “but keep making your anthem. If the Litmus reacted this way at your exodus, imagine how riled they will be when they see you rise from the ashes.”

“That’s the thing about music, Morgan,” Alfred said, “music is an idea. It doesn’t die.”

5.

“’Controversial and chaotic musician Alfred Snow incited a riot in the Litmus neighborhood, located in the Middles. Witnesses claim that he had blamed a representative of the Dream for attempting to take away his creativity and had engaged the crowd to destroy the *Electrostatis* as a result. Mr. Snow remains absent from the public eye. If you have any hints or direction to his whereabouts, please contact your nearest precinct’,” Robert tossed the *Global Podium* on the table and began to light a cigarette, shaking his head, “Morgan, you’ve turned our ally into a fugitive.”

“I’d say I’d galvanized a movement,” Morgan said, sitting by the windowsill, lighting one of her pilfered Steeples.

It felt good to have her own stash again; Robert was generous with them, but their supplies were limited, and while she did not take fancy to someone controlling her Steeple cache, it was no different than Arno or the other Auditors. Robert offered to give Morgan the entire stash, Morgan knew that if she had control over her Steeples she might not be pushed to action. She was well aware of the Pavlovian influence which gripped upon her psyche.

“Galvanized?” Robert said. He ran a hand through his hair, tapped his foot. “Morgan, you said you would handle it. Now the Middles has a scar and the Queen Bee is all over us. You said you confronted two Daughters?”

“They were handled,” Morgan said, looking out to the glistening Uppers.

“You didn’t kill them,” Robert said.

“No,” Morgan said, and she stared at Robert across the room, inviting challenge. They were weapons, perceptively slaves to the Queen Bee and the Globe hegemony. Morgan could not fault them for opposing her, it was their task, and their only purpose in life was to fulfill that task to the fullest. Then her mind wandered to Bijoux, a bees nest hairdo bobbing in between grimy stalls, firing into the crowds. Bijoux would be the only one that Morgan would kill, and she would whisper Ophelia’s name as her hands tightened around her throat.

Robert snapped, “I’m here.”

Morgan shot back to reality. She stood, poured herself some whiskey, downed it. Her wounds had settled into a numbing pain, and today was the first day in a week that she had been able to breath entirely out of her nostrils without feeling something dislodge high up her cranium.

“You asked me to handle the musician. I did.”

“Only because you begged me to allow you to help,” Robert said, “I didn’t think you’d ‘galvanize’ an entire neighborhood.”

“You hardly even read the news,” Morgan said, “and you weren’t there. If I did not intervene, Alfred would have been murdered by my Sisters. I had to do something. I thought you’d be impressed.”

Robert made to retort but drew back. He chewed on the inside of his cheek. “The Middles definitely hate the Uppers now.”

“Good,” Morgan said.

“Not good.”

“The Uppers are the controlling class in The Globe,” Morgan said, “this whole time we’ve been targeting those who challenge that predisposition. What was the term you used…hegemony?”

“Not the point,” Robert said, “we’ve got to unite the Globe and only then can we wrestle it from the Queen Bee’s grasp. All you’ve done is create more class friction.”

“The Uppers are more sympathetic to their lessers then you give them credit for,” Morgan said.

“I find that difficult to believe. The Queen Bee is very serious about keeping the Uppers happy. They like prospering on the backs of the rest of the Globe.”

“Again, Mr. Forrest, you really ought to consider differently,” Morgan, “back when I was under the Queen Bee’s guise I had just as much assignments in the Uppers as I did elsewhere. Politicians, lawyers, teachers.”

Robert considered this. “Fair point. But can we use anyone that you’ve contacted before?”

Morgan shook her head, “If they aren’t in our dossiers now, they’d be impossible to find.”

“Well, now we’ve got a famous musician we’ve got to keep hidden,” Robert said, “so there’s another thing.”

“He’s fine,” Morgan said, “his family practically owns the Last Drop, and he has made a point to not go there anymore in case the popularity brings the establishment to doom. He’s laying low, staying in his childhood bedroom.”

“Making music?”

“All he knows how to do. When he finds a way to put his anthem on the air, it’ll be like kindling to a fire.”

“I hope you’re right,” Robert said, “I want you to be right.”

Morgan stood and looked over the remaining dossiers. She knew that somewhere there was one for Morgan herself, now on more Auditor’s desks, files in Terminals. While she would consider her time in Litmus a success, she had also managed to raise awareness of herself to the Globe proper. It was hard enough that Bijoux was hunting her. Now the other Daughters were truly aware of her presence. What did they call her? False Daughter? Morgan believed herself to be the only real one of the bunch.

“And the Warehouse Boys?” Morgan said, taking a stand and asking Robert for updates for once, “You’d gotten Mr. Albrecht to represent them, mold them into a union?”

“Even with the award of a free city, the man wants more money than I’m willing to give. The Warehouse Boys need representation in the courts, if only to show how legitimate they are, but they don’t have the coffers to pitch in and I wouldn’t ask them to.”

“Do you trust the lawyer?”

“No,” Robert said, “and there you have it, evidence of us both making mistakes.”

A silence loomed over them. They looked at the remaining profiles. More artists, singers, architects. More policy planners, law drafters, teachers. The list was endless. Drops in a bucket. But that was how the Queen Bee and her regime maintained control over the city, by isolating any threats until that was all they were; tiny puddles that could not form an ocean, at the whims of the sun to dry them up. The Daughters were assassins, actresses, brawlers, but what they really were was a force of nature. They Daughters simply were.

A knock on the door shook Morgan to attention. She crushed the remains of her Steeple in her palm and grabbed Robert’s pocketknife.

“Good thing we’ve got some help,” Robert said, smirking at her reaction. He went to the door, knocked a strange pattern, a strange pattern knocked back. He looked over his shoulder and said, “The knocks aren’t necessary, but we’ve got to have our jokes.”

He opened the door and Frederique slipped into the room. She eyed the room, saw the large bed, eyed Robert and Morgan with an upturned nose. “One bed?”

“I sleep on the *chaise*,” Robert said, attempting to sound French.

“Frederique,” Morgan said, putting down the blade.

“Your nose,” Frederique said. “You look awful.”

“Thank you,” Morgan said. “What are you doing here?”

“I brought her here,” Robert said, “and she asked to come.”

“I was twiddling my thumbs waiting in Manhattan for you, waiting for the Globe to burst across the water.”

“Did you come by the ferry?”

“Obviously,” she said.

“And your name didn’t strike the guards as noticeable?” Morgan said, “You share the same last name with your brother.”

“I got here the same way you did,” Frederique said.

Morgan shook her head. “And you’re staying here, at the Empress? How did you manage that without the company of a husband? Anything less here would have raised eyebrows.”

“Your paranoia is healthy but exhausting,” Robert said.

“Necessary and dire,” Morgan countered.

Frederique poured herself a glass of wine. These months had done something to her grief. Morgan would hesitate to say that her mourning had been healthy, but her emotional instability was indeed less volatile now. Perhaps due to the wine.

She said, “I’m staying the Middles. A boarding house. Coppers Way.”

“With the immigrants,” Morgan said.

“You know of them?”

“The Queen Bee keeps a watchful eye on Coppers Way. She tolerates them because immigrants are unavoidable. It would be too rough on resources to police them, and to much noise meant revealing the Queen Bee’s invisible presence to the Globe. In fact, it’s only immigrant tenement housing by reputation, although I personally have seen people come in. Mainly from Manhattan.”

Frederique frowned, “Why would anyone opt to go here instead of Manhattan?”

Robert smirked, “Same reason people go to Manhattan from anywhere else. The promise of a future. In this case, it’s one crafted by the Queen Bee.”

Morgan said, “Are you safe there?”

“I am. We have friends there.”

Morgan eyed Robert. This endeavor of his encompassed more than he had let on. Then again, his previous life mission was getting people away from the Globe. It was only natural that he would make some friends along the way. Morgan ran a checklist of people she had been assigned to assassinate, thieve, or ruin and wondered how, in both their past lives, he had been thwarted by her own influence.

“I’ll be the Pine Docks tonight,” Frederique said. “Can I count on you, Robert?”

“What’s at the Pine Docks?” Morgan asked, feeling stupid for asking.

“Are you protected, Frederique?” asked Robert.

She pulled up her sleeve and revealed an air powered switchblade. Then she pulled up the hem of her dress and illustrated the pistol latched atop her fish netted thighs. “Yves was a healer, a thinker. He was the noble one.”

“Do you ever wonder what you might have been had Yves never gone to the Globe?” Robert said, swishing his whiskey.

“All the time,” Frederique said.

“What’s at the Pine Docks?” Morgan asked again, and then she said, “I’m not going to ask again.”

Frederique raised her eyebrows over her wine glass and whatever flick of sympathy she had felt for her Sister’s lover’s sibling had threatened to extinguish.

Robert answered, “Oysters.”

“Psycho-Oysters, you mean,” she said, “How do you plan on salvaging them? Must I remind you that you do not have the full allegiance of the Warehouse Boys or the other potential unions. The Pine Docks are owned by Minkton.”

“Which is why we were going to go under night,” Robert said, “but now you’ve gone and spoken very loud.”

“You were not going to tell me about this,” Morgan said, “I don’t take nicely to secrets, Mr. Forrest and Mrs. Moratz.”

“There are a lot of moving parts to this, some of which have developed recently. Your job is to keep the Daughters away from the us and help unite the populace. Frederique’s job is to forge realities.”

“What hokum,” Morgan said, crossing her arms. “I give that she’s a good forger, but listen to yourself.”

Frederique said, “We plan on unearthing the psycho-oysters. The Queen Bee uses them for her cloning.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yves did,” she said, “and I believe him more than a test tube infant like you. The psycho-oysters are the main power source to the operation. Take them out, we’d be neutering the old bitch.”

“They power everything. They are even in your Steeples,” Robert said.

“I’ve not been driven mad,” Morgan said.

“Because the brine of psycho-oysters runs through your veins,” Frederique said. “Do you remember the cluster of them in Manhattan? On the way to your hidden room? They were for Samantha. Yves and I were working on how to create Steeples from scratch for her.”

Robert stepped between them and then relaxed, “Look, if we take the psycho-oysters, then the Gene Division at Tectonic Biotechnics would lose resources. The entire Daughter cloning facility is the Queen Bee’s most powerful and influential mode of control. You could argue that power rests in the Auditors, but I think we both know who you’d rather fight in a boxing match.”

Morgan’s spine tightened. “You plan on ending the Gene Division.” She sat down, fingers twitching for another Steeple. “You plan on ending the Daughters.”

“We plan on controlling production, is all,” Robert said. “The Queen Bee is nothing without her Daughters.”

“Is this why you didn’t tell me of this plan? Because you thought I would protest?”

“Yes,” Frederique said, “and you are.”

“The Daughters are innocent,” she said. Her mind went to the vats, the half-formed fetuses, the forgotten ones in the Dredges. “They don’t understand the world we live in.”

“The Daughters are weapons,” Frederique said.

“Then best be sure they aren’t pointed your way,” Morgan said. She had a duty to her Sisters, even if they didn’t like her very much. It only Bijoux she had a problem with. Morgan stood, “I’m coming with you.”

“You are not,” Robert said. “We can’t jeopardize this.”

“You’ll need me. I’ll be able to sense the Daughters.”

“You’ll jinx us,” Robert said, “you lost Noctalia and evoked a riot in Litmus.”

“Exactly,” Morgan said, “the Queen is angry. She knows about us, which is why the Daughters are put on alert, and Bijoux’s sole purpose is to hunt me. Don’t you understand? The Queen Bee is starting to see us as a threat. So, while Bijoux is hunting me, she’ll be defending the docks, too. If I were Bijoux, I’d predict me to be there.”

“Then why would you go?” Frederique asked.

“Because if I’m not there and she is, she’ll notice whatever operation is going on, and you’ll be out of luck.”

“Don’t martyr yourself,” Frederique waved Morgan away.

“I’m coming,” Morgan said. She ignored Frederique and stared at Robert.

“You think you can take her?” He asked.

“I think I can try.”

“No,” Robert said, shaking his head, “You’re very appearance brings the Queen Bee’s judgement on us.”

“It’s better this way. Don’t take it personally,” Frederique said, and Morgan detected a snicker.

Morgan opened her mouth to respond but instead poured herself a glass of whiskey to quell what she had hoped was the last pangs of her healing nose. She went out to the balcony and let them go on with their plans. It bothered her that after all this time, especially after Robert himself was almost caught in the cross-fire in the Dredges, that they still possessed the arrogance that their own Manhattan cunning could defeat the Queen Bee’s control.

But they weren’t in Manhattan anymore. And Morgan was coming along whether they wanted her or not.

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The Pine Docks were located in the outskirts of the Lowers, at the bottom end of the sphere. The boardwalk was at the end of an artificial lake that led, via a hydraulic contraption in the lower hull of the Globe itself, to the board walks of Coney Island and the East River. The Docks were built as an after-thought in the great scheme of Tilyou’s design. At first he had decreed the nation-state as self-sufficient, which gave the Globe its renowned botanical gardens and patented green infrastructure (localized almost entirely in the Uppers). It was good timing that he calculated that the Globe was going to starve by sheer resource mathematics, because he had also been advised to create tourism in his utopia of the spectacle, which, like any city in the world, was a pillar of its economic success. Thus the submerged Ironside Gate, which allowed one or two ocean liners carrying imported goods in large shipping containers to travel to the base of the Globe, wait as an aquatic elevator brings them to Koch Lake, which belonged to the Globe, and finally to Pine Dock, which as of twenty years ago and due to hidden influential nudges, was owned by Minkton, the capitalist believing he had earned his wealth not because the system was unwittingly rigged for him but because of pure business acumen.

There were poems written by sailors and artist’s alike detailing the awe experienced from the technology of the Globe, to be admitted into the secluded utopia that stood like an egg over briny boardwalk planks. To skirt the ports of Manhattan and then see the artificial lake span to the end of the horizons, all encompassed by a sky of exposed pipes and rafters...it must have been a marvel to witness.

Morgan crushed the last of the Steeple underneath her heels. She was close enough to the lake to cloud her scent with brine and gasoline to be noticed by any Sisters. This also meant that they would be cloaked as well, which was why Morgan made sure to be hidden in the shadows of the stacked shipping containers containing various imported goods. They were primarily rust colored, sometimes dark brown or moss green, but in the artificial light of the lanterns they all took the same, bleak color reminiscent of a void. To the engineers of the Globe’s credit, they did an incredible job emulating night and day cycles from within, especially for those in the core of the sphere, where the great, sky scraper sized windows were visible as if from a horizon. The Globe could down its inhabitants in permanent artificial light, or terrible, unending darkness. But surely this would drive those affected mad? Morgan wondered if this was one of the contributing factors to the primality inherent in those who live in the Dredges.

She also wondered, however briefly, what was in the shipping container to her right and left, above her noggin and below her feet. There were clothes from outside of New York City, even the country itself. Perhaps electronics from Japan. The Globe fancied itself as the center of the world, but it could help but comply with its commercial entanglement with its international neighbors. She looked to the open blackness of Koch Lake, a several mile wide star-studded strip providing minimal light over the water, and realized that this was the Globe’s waterfront. Pockets of shimmering, kaleidoscopic oil spills radiated from deep within its briny ichor; clusters of psycho-oyster beds like sunken pockets of treasure.

The Pine Docks were illuminated by great stadium lights in their main warehouse, which were located next to the largest port. Several Minkton guards patrolled the area, wielding batons, lips puckered for whistles around their throat. Well, they might have been Minkton guards, but if she knew anything about that man, it was that he was protected on all fronts. They might have been hired thugs from the Lowers so Minkton could distance himself from any cruelty he had purchased them for. They patrolled from large towers and loitered at the docks, clearly bored.

Morgan scanned the vaults and rafters for any signs of her Sisters. Minkton had a tendency to only hire male muscle, and whether that was due to design or his own biased intuition was beyond Morgan. If the Daughters were here, they would be out of the sight of Minkton’s men, just like Morgan herself. If it was Bijoux, then perhaps she might be louder. She wondered what level of action Bijoux was assigned by her Auditors. The Queen Bee knew that their exiled Daughter had left and returned, and Morgan could only imagine that she was furious. Especially since Morgan had been offered the throne of this strange city. In a way, she had more right to it than Robert, such was the way of dynasties. Perhaps she could have taken the throne, created structural changes, made her Sisters residents and not weapons, civilized the friction between the strata. All that instead of hounding for Steeples, pulling wigs on and off, almost broken noses. But this would not have been correct, for Morgan knew that the Queen Bee had expected her to follow in the generations long endeavor of domination. And now, coming back across the harbor as Lea Arnoux, she did not want the throne as Queen Bee, and would make sure that Robert would not follow suit. There were two constants within the nebula of the Globe. Tilyou blood has coursed through its infrastructure, and the Daughters were tasked with protecting it.

Whatever that meant.

He eyes flicked to one of the glowing pools. It was difficult to see under the cover of the night and so far away from the watch towers, but there were little boats along the water, one with Robert and another with Frederique, each containing a group of Warehouse Boys that took turns rowing, setting traps, collecting, shucking. Morgan had met them only briefly, and there were flashes of curious recognition amongst some of them. In a past life, she had been tasked to meet some of them at a bar, knock into one another at a store, proposition in an alley. She had determined them to be unproblematic, a short fuse that was loud but amounted to nothing more than a candle flame. If only she knew they needed an activator, a catalyst. The Queen Bee recognized the might in numbers, which was why each assignment was isolated. Robert seemed to understand this too. The Globe was strong in shoulder from holding itself up, and if only the muscles knew of one another.

Several kaleidoscopic spots seemed to dwindle at the edge of Koch Lake. Harvests of psycho-oyster clusters transported from briny nets to black, lead laden bags. All seemed well on the port side. The guards none the wiser and no signs of Daughters. Morgan nodded and climbed up the warehouse container to her left, watching the other side of the docks that lead to a beach for the Middles and the Uppers tourists who endeavor to “slum”. The area surrounding the Minkton Warehouses was a factory for silicone at the far end and in between a modest boardwalk that contained several hot dog and pop stands, carnival games, popcorn huts. It was a boardwalk resort because it was there, and made to attempt to combat the Neptune in the Uppers or even the Coney Island Boardwalk of which the massive Globe itself was perched. Morgan eyed the houses, looking for guards in between the rows, Daughters above. She kept her eyes peeled for the bee-hive shaped hair of Bijoux, but it was difficult because Morgan herself needed to keep to the darkness. She had been outfitted with the pistol Robert had given her and a makeshift blade that one of the Warehouse Boys had given Frederique without knowing of her hidden knives, but this was nothing compared to the resources of that the Auditors would allow Bijoux. Each assignment earned a stipend, varying on the placement in the globe and the target. Even the beggars were given a modest allotment for one final meal before resorting to grubs and mice. With Morgan as Bijoux’s entire locus and the Queen Bee’s disdainful backing to rectify her exiled heir, Morgan could only assume that Bijoux was equipped with coins straight from the Globe’s own purse.

Which meant night goggles, rifles, piano wire…

Several boats drifted in the darkness, snuffing out what little escape of the rainbow aura from the psycho-oysters. Morgan could not tell if it was Robert or Frederique’s boat but she was glad that one of them had made it underneath the docks. The meeting point was incredibly close to the center of the Middles, bordering into the Lowers, traversing underneath the rows of streets and Middles echelon housing. It would take the boat upwards of 4 hours of moving silently under salt infused scaffolds to make it to the sewers. In that time there would be ample opportunity for the Queen Bee’s hands to infiltrate. Her companions would be at this all night.

Morgan returned to her post on the other side of the container, found an influx of Minkton’s security getting into boats, beginning to row into the far, black void of Koch Lake. They did not put on their headlights, perhaps to make their approach innocuous, perhaps to avoid attracting attention from the Pine Dock’s neighbors, who were Middles families, and Middles families were prone to gossip. An artificial lake bed dotted with glowing spots, Morgan watched the Minkton Men row silently and diligently to the edge of the central warehouse watch tower before disappearing into the abyss completely. Her eyes widened. But someone must have tipped them off. Was it Minkton himself being particularly cautious? If so, why on this night, after Robert and the Warehouse Boys had scoped out the area, targeted this day and time?

Morgan’s nose wrinkled at the possibility of Robert’s careful planning gone awry, of another possibility that someone he had chosen to trust to embark on this mission had informed Minkton. She could only hope that the final boat would make it out on time, and she had no idea if it was Frederique or Robert who would be forced to make a quick getaway. She aimed her pistol, hand slightly shaking. She was a good shot, but firing from this angle, this far away, would require a degree of luck, but at least she had the confidence of its six rounds to make a mistake, or at least draw attention. Still her hands wavered, knowing that if she were to fire then all focus would be on her, that the entire whispered notion of Robert’s endeavor would explode into an obnoxious, self-promoting firework, and then the Queen Bee would *really* be on them. But if she didn’t, then the guards would capture their second boat, and then…

…she felt a wave of calming familiarity envelop her. As if existing in some paradox, she had learned to no longer take this familiarity for granted; she disappeared into the shadowed awning of the shipping container, catching whiffs of the brine still permeating off it, the shellacked barnacles. There, across the port, was a figure standing on their own platform of shipping containers.

Morgan contained herself, attempted to be as still as the containers around her. Whether it was Bijoux or someone else, it was with supreme confidence one of Tilyou’s Daughters. The silhouette arced their shoulders and a crack of thunder struck across the sky, echoing from the rafters above the grey holographic. A comet struck the metallic corner of the container and Morgan recoiled, swearing. At once the sirens in the warehouse went on, aggressive whining on the port, flashes of neon and sapphire. Minkton’s security men flooded onto the docks and Morgan saw the singular boat still venturing towards the shimmering psycho-oyster colonies. She felt in between two tides, Bijoux on the right, across the docks, and what would be the inevitable capture of her allies without her intervention.

She peaked her head out of the metal cover of the shipping container, held her breath as she waited for the rifle to fire. *Come on,* she thought, *fire, fire, fire at me!* She saw the silhouette prepare to fire and Morgan snapped back as a starburst of stars exploded to her left. Smelling sulfur, gun powder, she turned, took her pistol, and put the boat into her sites. They had gone farther back, almost out of her vision. She fired, designed to miss, hoping that the bullets sunk deep into the Koch instead the Minkton guards. She could not bring herself to kill these men, only distract them. She fired several times, thought she saw one of them buckle, a shoulder wound, perhaps, and just as she saw the security ship begin to turn back to the port she another shot from Bijoux’s rifle across the way and then a streak of fire across her arm, like a serrated blade. Morgan buckled, retreated back to the darkness of her metal perch. Some of the Minkton guards had diverted and were beginning to advance on the containers.

Morgan leaned back and held her arm, her hands over the wound as a curtain of thick blood seeped between her fingers. No bullet, only a graze. Frederique and Robert had warned her not to martyr herself, had made her recognize how important her life was to this operation. Now she had Bijoux at one end of the port and Minkton’s men advancing upon her at the other. She felt paralyzed atop her perch, waiting for the tide to rise and sink her, cowering at the storm clouds over head.

No, not cowering. Morgan was a Daugher of the Globe, not of Tilyou. She had contributed to this imbalance of power, made Queen Ophelia fear the returned Daughter. The security here meant they understood the threat of taking the psycho-oysters. Robert’s plan had succeeded. The Queen feared. And now she would fear Morgan even more.

Morgan unstuck her hand from the open wound, wiped the blood on the leg of her dungarees. She revealed herself to Bijoux, peeking out from a different corner, feeling the salty draft from the Koch Lake. Then she withdrew as Bijoux fired again, exploding another comet nearby, the sparks sizzling against her shoulder, vacuuming her world with a metallic ring. Bijoux should be making these shots, but she’s not. She’s also not warning Morgan either. Morgan coursed her memories for Bijoux’s dossier, remembered the words *mechanical, unflinching*, *successful*. Then Morgan positioned herself as an assignment, thinking a Daughter would: Morgan had evaded Bijoux once before; she must have forced Bijoux to experience her first defeat. And this must be gnawing at her.

Each shot measured thirty seconds. Morgan had fired a similar rifle, once, when she was tasked to spook a venture capitalist from Boston who had come to inspect the Lowers as a potential site for business. One shot was all it took for the man to flee the Globe.

Morgan grunted, pulled her arm to the top of the shipping container, lifted herself. She was perilously high up; a fall from this height would not kill her, but it would break her bones, and Morgan trusted that she could belay Bijoux and the Queen Bee’s wrath for so long, such was the ire that she had evoked in them. Bijoux fired again, the sonic boom almost knocking Morgan off balance. Koch Lake and its shimmering colonies was like an abyss to her back, and below she knew she had attracted the attention of Minkton’s security men, entire threshes running alongside her as if trying to find a way to storm castle gates. So if she fell to her left, she’d be mauled by Minkton’s men, probably raped, too. If she fell to her right…

She eyed Bijoux across the boardwalk, slinging the rifle onto her back. She ran into the alleys, disappearing into the shadows. Morgan knew that Bijoux knew that both of them knew these streets. The Globe was etched into their cognitive wayfinding with as much familiarity as their own organs. Morgan herself was not sure if this was the result of those black filled vats in Biotechnic Tectonics, or if knowing each nook and cranny was a skill learned by all Daughters, but right now this advantage she had over all others was null. And the hunt was on, the angry shouts of Minkton’s men, now distracted entirely, unable to keep up with their vaulting assailant. They moved like raging bulls, a great wave that would eventually disperse. All Morgan needed was to flee from Bijoux’s grasp; losing the men would be easy.

At last, she made it to a small clearing, surrounded by shipping containers stacked like bricks and unused machines. Large pipes and corrugated steel sheets lay like fallen idols on the splintery boards. Tool boxes and saws and shovels lay where tired hands put them, waiting to be picked up upon daybreak. Minkton was expanding to another part of Pine Docks, and it became evident that this would squeeze out any competitors in the Globe, a near-monopoly against other shipping magnates such as Jeremiah Fang, Lien Schuch, the Bear. The skeleton of this new warehouse was itself a merchant’s declaration of war.

Morgan made a note to remember this as she sprinted over the construction, the fallen planks, the silvery beads of bolts and nuts. Shipping containers, once her platform, now stood over her like spires, iron gauntlets pointing to the fake clouds above. The darkness made it difficult for Morgan to navigate, but she could barely make out the dim neon blue of one of the elevators that would spirit her away up or down the Globe. She only needed to flee and both Robert and Frederique could reconvene with their psycho-oysters and the narrative would be that the someone tried killing the Minkton security men, which was exactly the cover that Robert could easily craft.

At last, Morgan knew that the inevitable had come, that she was foolish enough to think this confrontation would not come to pass. She felt a sudden calm, which alarmed her.

“Come out,” Morgan said, ducking behind several barrels of cement mix, unholstering her pistol, “I know you’re here.”

A sultry voice, contained but quivering, like a shaking scaffold, duct tape over a cracked damn. “If I wanted to remain hidden, I would have. But I wanted you to know I was coming for you.”

Morgan tried to triangulate where Bijoux was coming from. Her voice bounced from the metal tools to the alleys created by the containers, circling like an eagle scouting for prey, the sound amplified by the crater of machinery and industry.

Bijoux continued: “I know you were in the Dredges. I know it was you in Litmus, too. And I bet by now you’ve come to learn that my assignment is to find you. The False Daughter.”

Morgan remained silent.

“Did you think it was an Auditor who assigned this to me? No. It was the Queen Bee herself, our great and powerful Ophelia Tilyou. To pick me among all the Daughters to hunt the cancer that had infected our world…it’s a great honor. Most Daughters go their entire lives not even knowing that the Queen Bee exists. She’s a myth, a legend. A god. And when God reveals herself to you, your purpose is validated. *Galvanized*.”

A soft crunch of boots. A stream of briny wind carrying from Koch pushed over an empty can of beer.

“And you, *Morgan*. You rejected the Globe. You looked at the face of God and said ‘no’. What does that make you? What does that make me? Are we both not the ire and charity of the Queen Bee, of the Globe? And you have the arrogance to reject everything that the Queen Bee has given you, given us? My dear sister, you are a cancer.”

Morgan heard shuffling, her heart racing. Then the scrape of a match, a faint wisp of flint. The smokey crackle of a Steeple, its aroma like a beckoning finger behind a curtain. Morgan fought the rising urge to attack her for a Steeple, so powerful was the pull. She felt as if she were on the precipice of some great void, and she allowed a fleeting thought to pass that suggested she might die here, at Bijoux’s hand.

“Is this the life you want?” Bijoux yelled, blowing puffs of Steeple laced clouds, “You want to kill the Queen Bee? You want to upturn our world? Was she not kind to you, were the Auditors not gratuitous? Don’t you see, Morgan? People go their entire lives without purpose. We were given purpose, instilled with it in our blood. We are the Globe, and the Globe is the world. How dare you try to over-turn it? How dare you!”

Morgan leaned back, drew in her breath. The graze on her arm had ruptured again, sending a warm curtain down. How long had she been bleeding? She looked down, saw the trail of her wound around the corner, a tracking signal for the way she had come. It was dark now, and the shipping containers offered good cover, but Morgan knew that the second Bijoux looked at the boardwalk underneath her feet, she would find a trail painting directions to Morgan’s location. It did not help that Bijoux herself was clouded by the aura of Steeple, her voice echoing to a near phantasm ascension. Like a djinn, Bijoux was bound to strike out of an electronic cloud, hands grasping from the ether.

“Did you see them?” Morgan yelled back, holding her pistol, attempting to focus on the immediate sounds; crunching of boots at her flanks, the low inhale, exhale from Bijoux’s lungs. “Did you see the vats?”

Silence.

“You did, didn’t you? At Biotechnic Tectonics,” Morgan shouted, feeling Bijoux lurking behind several crates like a patiently stalking panther.

“We are of the Globe more than anyone else,” Bijoux said. Morgan could not detect reservation in her voice. “We are better than anyone else.”

Morgan shook her head. “So if Ophelia asked me to rule the Globe, why did she ask you to kill me?”

“Because you said ‘no’,” Bijoux said. Then she chuckled, kicked a metal barrel. She moved through the machinery, the crates, the boxes of tools like a low hanging fog. “I see your blood, False Daughter. Come out. You’re behind the crate.”

Morgan swore to herself. She needed to keep Bijoux talking, distracted. It was not about her momentum; Morgan knew that Bijoux was going to strike like a viper. But Morgan knew she could redirect the energy. It was not a large advantage, but if navigating the various echelons of the Globe stratosphere taught Morgan anything, conversations were just as potent of weapons as any blade, as any bullet. Half of Morgan’s assignments were silent wars in the Uppers, the Middles.

She shouted to Bijoux, “I said ‘no’ to the throne. I could have ruled. But you didn’t answer my question. Why did she ask you to kill me and not take over yourself? What threat am I to you?”

“You’re a threat of ideology,” said Bijoux, stamping out the Steeple. “You’re an insult to the Globe.”

“And yet she asked you to kill me, not to rule,” Morgan said, “what purpose are you other than that of an assassin?”

Clinking of machinery as Bijoux retrieved her rifle. The familiar and tightening snap of the safety.

“Do you know why the Queen Bee sent you to kill me?”

“Humor me,” Bijoux said.

Morgan positioned herself into a crouch, ready to spring. She now had an idea where Bijoux was perched, somewhere to her upper right, the “three” position on a clock.

“Because,” Morgan said, feeling a course of adrenaline shield the sting of her arm, “she’s afraid of me. And do you know why she sent you to kill me and not to rule?”

Bijoux was silent.

“Because I’m better than you, Bijoux.”

The answer manifested in a comet striking the crate. This informed Morgan that Bijoux knew exactly where she was hiding. The bullet pierced the corrugated tin and threatened to push the block over, but Morgan propped it up. She was fortunate that whatever was in the crate was able to cushion the rifle. In that second Morgan popped from her cover, took aim, and scanned the construction site for the smoking rifle, Bijoux’s characteristic beehive hair.

“You are not,” said Bijoux appearing to Morgan’s right, and sharp knuckled slammed into Morgan’s brow, bathing her vision in white. “You are not. You are not!”

Bijoux tackled Morgan to the ground and pinned her arms down with her knees. Bijoux loomed over Morgan’s body, orange eyes turned ferocious, no longer the calm and collected hunter on the docks but the psychopath in the Dredges, all decorum seen the Requiem dissolved into a molten vat of anger. Bijoux raised her fist and slammed on Morgan’s nose, then her cheek bone, then her brow. Morgan felt a tooth dislodge in her jaw, the coppery slime of a fresh wound. Her head whipped left and right, her fingers attempting to claw, her arms, pinned by Bijoux’s knees, feeling now like deflated tires, the bones cracking. She thought of the last time she had lost consciousness, had flirted with death. The orphaned Daughters, the genetic rejects saved her by cannibalizing themselves. They were Morgan’s true Sisters, and she would never be able to repay them back. In a brief flash of delirious clarity, she thought of crying.

Bijoux held her fist above Morgan, her knuckles split and dripping with Morgan’s blood. “You are not, False Sister. You are not better than me.”

Morgan’s fingers found something cold and metallic. It could be a beer can, a wrench. Her broken fingernails clung to the splintery boardwalk and she found her grip.

Bijoux said, “I am smarter than you. I am faster than you. I am stronger than you. I am prettier than you.”

Morgan raised her knee and struck Bijoux’s spine, forcing her to tumble, her balance offset. Morgan rocked and was able to withdraw her arm, popping it back in its socket after being dislocated, and, grabbing her metal object, swung at Bijoux’s brow, leaving an arc of blood. Morgan gathered to her feet, dropped what was a rusty tool box, and found a metal pipe. She took it, wincing, and raised it above her head, ready to strike, her left leg now trailing behind her. She stood over Bijoux, wheezing, eyes swollen.

Bijoux’s eyes remained engaged, even as half of her face was lacerated. She eyed Morgan’s metal rod. “Do it,” she said.

Morgan poised to strike and felt a surge of electricity course through her. She felt pain through her entire body, her arm bathed in fire from the skim of the rifle. And she wanted to bring the pipe down on Bijoux’s skull like an executioner’s ax. How many lives had Bijoux taken to hunt Morgan? She fired blindly in the Fete Markets, had taken the lives of her Sisters that had given their own lives for her. If Bijoux died, then Robert and his crew would not have to worry about her, Morgan herself would not have to worry about being hunted by this force of nature. Of course, there would always be another Daughter, always a corner to look over, but Morgan had never experienced someone as ruthless as Bijoux, as blindly evangelical to the Globe. Still, daughters were trained to kill, but they were only the extension of the Queen Bee’s wrath and psychosis. Bijoux was not the enemy before her, as strange as the rationalization sounded to Morgan’s psyche.

And what would that make Morgan to the very Sisters she was trying to save?

“Do it,” Bijoux said again, and spat to her side.

Morgan shook her head, could not stop a tear from blossoming in the corner of her good eye.

“You are right. You are all of those things better than me,” Morgan said, “but what makes me better than you, my sad Sister, is that I’m not you. The Queen Bee wanted me to take over her legacy as the true Daughter of the Globe because I care.”

Bijoux growled. “You don’t care about the Globe.”

“I care about the Globe too much,” Morgan said.

“Ironic, False Daughter.”

“What’s ironic is that I’m spouting peace, all the while doing what I’m going to do.”

Before Bijoux could respond Morgan took the metal pipe, raised it over her head again, and smashed on both of Bijoux’s knee caps, sending an echo of snapped bone disk throughout the site. The rusted pipe cut into Morgan’s hand. Bijoux howled, swore into the air, spoke in tongues. Morgan found that she took no pleasure in this, and tossed the pipe several feet away. It was like putting down a feral animal.

“I’m sorry, Sister, but I can’t trust you won’t follow me,” Morgan said, limping and bending to Bijoux’s writhing body.

A puddle of blood drenched her lower half, her hair was a galaxy of boardwalk splinters, screws, coagulate. Bijoux spoke through clenched teeth, “The Queen will find you. There will be another Daughter.”

“You said it yourself,” Morgan said, reaching into Bijoux’s pocket, swatting away her weakened claw that was a tertiary attempt of resistance. She pulled out the packet of Steeples and the matches. “You’re the best of us.”

She lit one of the Steeples, positioned it in between Bijoux’s lips, and pocketed the rest. She felt slightly cruel for taking one of the only anchors of peace for a Daughter, but Morgan’s cache of Steeples was dependent on contraband and needed to be consumed with intention. And the Auditors would supply her more, anyway, or at least until the deficit from the psycho-oysters affected production. Morgan did feel a slight jubilance at this fact, knowing that the plan had more or less worked, even though Morgan felt her body was breaking at the seams.

“This isn’t over!” Bijoux yelled as Morgan continued on her way. “You should have killed me.”

That was the first time she had actively fought another Sister as she was. Tilyou’s Daughters do not fight amongst one another, even if they are assigned to different assignments that require a physical altercation, but this was spectacle, intentional, an aspect of the mission. Even in Litmus, she had donned the mask of another persona. But here, she was Morgan, and she defended herself armed with the flag of a different ideology. She was a threat to the Queen Bee, to the Daughters. Within her boiled the flint of a pre-revolution, and she raised a hand against the Globe in order to ultimately save it, or at least, she hoped.

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Morgan found herself waking aimlessly for what felt like hours. She held herself with forearms that threatened to snap from the imprint of Bijoux’s knee. Her eyes were swollen and her nose, still wounded from her tussle with her Sisters in the *Electrostasis*, was definitely broken, bubbling snot and blood over a split upper lip. Half of her hair was matted and sticky. She rambled through the alleys, her mind pushed into a fragile state; she was jumping at everything, the men who hung out of the bars, smelling of hops, the beggars reaching up to her, ignorant of her own plights. Most importantly she avoided women, unsure who was a Daughter, not trusting her own psychic sense to parse them out on her own. She looked horrible, too. There was no doubt that Bijoux had logged into the terminal and had updated the happenstances on Pine Docks, blood trailing behind her like a slime trail. It would only take some cross referencing to triangulate the events that had conspired there, and if an Auditor got to Bijoux before Morgan could successfully flee, then the entire neighborhood was nothing more than a Venus fly trap, ready to snap and swallow her.

The light blue neon of one of the elevators became her beacon, and she crawled in the shadows, amongst the detritus of trash and hovels that looked better belonged to the Lowers. Each strata of the Globe was well defined in its caste, but the outskirts sometimes blended with the worlds below it, escalating people on the periphery. After ten minutes Morgan made it to the elevator’s base, and she realized that she could not ascend in her state. Not even mentioning Middles workers who were traveling to carry to the Globe on their backs during the time when the Uppers were still sleeping, but the thought of being contained in a pill box made Morgan feel claustrophobic. She would be a fool to step into those neon lifts. She swore to herself, found a ride on the back of a cart traveling across the Middles to other vertical pneumatic subway stops, all while hiding herself with a scratchy and mite infested cloak she had grabbed off of a sleeping begging Daughter. Morgan was too tired, too wounded to allow for her own emotions. The girl would be fine tomorrow.

Huddled like a beggar herself, she watched the fake clouds turn from as dark as Koch Lake to a morning blue. The Middles paid her no mind, grumbling with their cheap coffee, yawning because they worked during the sunrise. The Middles paid less attention to their neighbors than any other strata, and Morgan hypothesized that it was some semblance of privacy earned in pursuit of stringent beliefs from the American Dream. As the cart rattled through the twisting streets she thought of Robert and Frederique and the Warehouse Boys deep in the sewers. They had gotten away, Morgan had ensured this. Within days the Queen Bee would recognize not only Bijoux’s defeat, but the loss of her source of power, and this proved to be Morgan’s armor against her current predicament. Would her allies search for her, would they make a point to find the False Daughter?

The streets rolled by. Clusters of people moved back and forth, selling goods, opening up shop, moving to other parts of the Globe. Morgan did indeed love this city, more than Bijoux or her other Sisters were led to believe. There was a feeling through the air, and Morgan knew some part of it was determined by the adrenaline creasing in her veins, her wounds settling in. But the city seemed undisturbed, ignorant to the changes happening to its very DNA.

The tram stopped. People huddled in and out. Morgan pulled the scratchy blanket over her shoulders, her blood matted hair. Amongst the sounds of feet, the grunts of waking, she heard the faint sonic pulses of gramophone in a neighboring shop. It was a sound that was familiar, one that immediately set her mind to ease. Alfred Snow’s anthem played like a whisper within the glow of the store, the sounds tinny, echoey, but there. Others in the cart perked up at this, Morgan saw some of them smile, tapping their feet, giving them a little inner warmth before they hefted the Globe upon their back for another day.

“Mr. Snow,” she said, smiling to herself.

The trolley continued on its path, stopping for new passengers, rocking back with the resettled weight. Finally it came upon Thunderbolt Alley, and Morgan stepped off, threatened to buckle when her body was put to action, and grabbed the blanket tighter around her at the vehicle sped off. She scanned the area, looking for Daughters, for the any of her Sisters as Beggars in the usual spots. Then she resumed her skulk in the shadows, moving along the perimeter of buildings, through the thresh of crowds, until she came upon the apartment she had commanded in her last assignment from Arno. It was a shoddy apartment building, not her favorite in the Middles but not her least favorite in the Globe. Yet, even for how familiar it should be, she could not help but notice how dilapidated it looked, held up by its neighboring buildings, the adjacent buildings holding up the other buildings. So precarious was the infrastructure of Thunderbolt Alley.

She approached the building, walking the same steps that Morgan, daughter of the Globe, had taken during her hunt for Samantha’s killer. If only she knew that it was all a test by Ophelia Tilyou, the great matriarch, that Morgan was just an elevated pawn in her great game. The idea that Ophelia still had not found an heir to the Globe, that her pride and legacy was more important than her own mortality, gave Morgan enough energy to climb the rusty fire escape, even though they shook and threatened to crumble, even though her legs felt like jelly and her left eye was swollen to the size of an orange. She was clumsy at times, but the Middles was a busy stratum, the Thunderbolt being a town of passing people from the farther neighborhoods, like those outside of the Pine Docks, in Minkton’s jurisdiction.

Then she got to the shared apartment, now looking into its cracked glass window as the False Daughter, a vagrant. She checked to see if any of her Sisters were occupying the place, and she was fortunate that either no one had been assigned to Thunderbolt Alley or whomever was not present. The room appeared untouched, perhaps not even since Morgan herself had occupied the room. She wedged her fingers underneath a loose seam, known only to the Daughters that prefer to smoke their Steeples by this particular window. She lifted, entered, and fell to her knees, the shock of the drop from the sill sending tremors up her body. Then she stood, eyes appraised, ears perked. The room looked the same, although this was not any indication of security for her. Morgan made her bed each morning, even made Robert’s chaise when she was not frustrated with him. She opened the drawers at the kitchenette and found the trinkets left by other Daughters, little preferences of crayons, left over lighters. She tried to racket her memories of the layout, found the box of matches, *Ifrit’s Kiss*, in the drawer, right in the middle where she had placed it for her Sisters who would occupy the room after her. But it appeared that no one had.

Now relaxed, Morgan collapsed on the bed, feeling out of sync with her environment, aware of the irony of her coming back to this apartment, to Thunderbolt Alley.

And then she slept, and dreamt about nothing.

*d.*

If the Globe is an egg, then you could call it an incubator. We have the carnivals, the gardens, the restaurants, the amusement parks. We have the shopping malls, the Dream, the nuclei of fashion. The Globe has it all. Look, look you fool! People come from all over to witness the greatest city in the world in action. You can’t help but feel like you are witnessing history here. And you are. Every great era of human consciousness has a city. You have Rome during the creation of the public, Venice during the creation of the arts, New York City during the creation of modernity. And now, syncing with history and production, the Globe is the city that is the lynchpin of human evolution, the great incubator of success.

And you need look no further than the ephemeral Rabbit Club, of which its very existence within the Globe should be enough to tell you that you’re where you need to be. A conglomerate of artists, all at the top of their game, all the apex predator of their prospective fields. We have Rachel Corinth, the fine artist living in Litmus, fleeing the creatively oppressive environment in Canada. We have the sculptor Alexander Noctalia, who was born from our very own Lowers and now resides in the Uppers, his fingers dusted with chalk and particles of marble. We have the modern artist Gerdie Howright, who simply appeared and the fame followed. Does their shoulders hurt with the future artists who will stand upon them? Does their spirit break knowing the pressures upon them, molding them like a diamond? Surely they must be aware of their artistic prowess that could only be described as a force of nature, a model of triumph. They are of the Globe’s own ribs, and proud to showcase in their special way the essence of the spectacle. They are galleries in and of themselves.

The Rabbit Club is on a need-to-know basis, and you don’t need to know. Not really. Even those most accomplished artists who comes from outside to make their way in the Globe could go years without even meeting anyone tangentially related. The Rabbit Club finds you, and when they do, then you can say you’ve made it in the Globe, that the Globe approves. People say there is no central leadership, that the organization functions like a technicolor tornado of genius and madness, of paint and marble and clay and dye. There are rumors that they sometimes meet for binges of the human spirit, and if you don’t know what that means, why are you even asking about the Rabbit Club at all?

Their reputation precedes them. There are hints of lavish parties in old warehouses, in secret penthouses, in underground clubs. There are whispers of Bacchanalian orgies and dances with lunatics. There are suggestions of paint swathes and hedonism and seances and plays and tears and cocktails made of blood.

But these are all talk. Best not concern yourself with what might be. Leave that the Rabbit Club to determine the lens in which we view ourselves.

6.

Morgan awoke with her body aflame. The wounds of last night had set in, her broken nose had reopened over her pillow. She groaned and then remembered that she was not in the Empress, that the security of Robert’s presence had been stripped from her. She sat up, held her ribs, grabbed the loaded pistol, checked her surroundings. In her mind she felt that Bijoux might have found a way to this apartment. She knew where it was, anyway, since all the Daughters did. But her knees had been shattered, and Morgan could still hear the terrible crack of her bones underneath the steel pipe. At this moment Morgan felt incredibly foolish for having gone here to rest, yet incredibly lucky that she was able to do so. She had a rudimentary shower, but only managed to get the blood out of her hair and off her face; it was too perilous to stand, the water too painful on her bones. And she knew that if she lay in the shower then there was a chance she would never get up.

*I need to make it back to the Empress*, Morgan thought, opening the closet that contained an array of wigs, outfits, adornments. Several personalities lay like well-worn boots, a mismatch of personas. Every apartment was stocked like this, to some degree. Usually the Auditor’s provide the persona, but sometimes plans pivot, require flexibility. She lit a Steeple, one of Bijoux’s, and sat with the cylinder dangling over the ashtray of cindered Steeples from her past life. There was a time when she had a steady supply, did not need to rely on scavenging them off of beaten women who very well need them themselves. Her organs pulsed with new life, giving her a needed boost of energy, and she was reminded of how she had come to have the organs and no longer felt bad for Bijoux misfortune, only for her circumstance of ignorance.

Then she returned to the closet, Steeple cradled in her fingers, and felt that she was invading someone else’s apartment. She moved through the personas with ease, finding a dark wig with bangs to cover her wound and shadow her split lip and broken nose. Then she applied makeup to further obscure the bruises, creating contours to divert attention from the swelling. She wore a dress of an Uppers office worker, a secretary that might as well work at Tectonic Biotechnics. Morgan smirked to herself, proud of her cleverness, that she still had some grasp of what it was like to be a Daughter of the Globe and not the monster her Sisters have been made to believe. Tectonic Biotechnics was an Uppers corporation located in the Middles. It would be perfect cover.

Morgan, feeling equipped as best as she could, left the apartment from the front door. She no longer possessed the key, lost in the skirmishes between now and then, and instead walked with the unlocked door at her back. And then, slightly limping, she disappeared into the threshes, the clog of people in the alley, passing a begging Sister who had taken Rhea’s place, turning away at a bartender who had just begun to open shop for those coming in from a night shift, her eyes scanning. Morgan wondered how many Daughters were acutely aware of the False Daughter, if any of their assignments had been affected. More than six months ago, she would have felt that psychic comradeship with them, now they were sentries, enemies, watchtowers. Morgan was extra particular in avoiding alleys or buildings with Terminals, in case there was more of a Daughter’s presence there.

Two hours later she had made it to Sealion Plaza. Tectonic Biotechnics loomed over her and the rest of the Middles like a nefarious spire, a beast. Opalescent shimmers like the glass of an aquarium radiated from its art deco facades. The building emitted its own aura of light, like a nightlight in the darkness, a lighthouse of safety for the Uppers, a giant totem that it was not like the Middles, the Lowers, or, Queen Bee forbid, the Dredges. But Morgan knew the truth. Gene Division was located there, behind its future-focused and glinted visage, was black vats and incubated fetuses that looked like Morgan and like Ophelia herself and like Samantha and even Bijoux. Black vats of tar and goo and ether that coursed through Morgan’s own veins now. It made her want a Steeple just thinking about it. It made her wonder how Bijoux could have learned the truth of the Daughter’s shared origin and not have turned back at the monstrosity of it all.

Several scientists walked past and paid her no mind, one man even glancing at her with intrigue. She ignored them. She spotted several Auditors whom she only knew by face; Auditors are stationed with several Daughters, but never the other way around. She did not even know who else was under Arno’s watch, and the thought that Arno himself might be punished by the Queen Bee for even starting this mess delighted her. After all, it was his decision to tap Morgan above the other Daughters.

She pivoted at the same steps in which she collided with him, turned right and entered the elevator, her heart racing. Outside of the pneumatic tubes she could retreat to shadows, run on her brushed ankles, even fight. But in the elevator she was submitting to the mercy of luck; that there was no Daughter, no Auditor, no scientist from the Gene Division who had seen Morgan’s face, even though she now looked entirely different. In order to make it back to the Empress, she needed to commit to a free fall of fate, hoping for a smooth, turbulence free transit. She calmed herself, thumbed her pistol for emotional anchoring, regretted not smoking another Steeple before heading up.

The doors opened, and Morgan shuffled in. The lift ascended, the smells of the elevator invaded by the scents of aristocrat’s wives, the musk of scientists traveling upwards, remnants of Middles working class men and woman feeling slightly out of place. There were several women in glittery outfits that Morgan recognized as courtesans, but she did not get the psychic alert of any of them looking for her. She kept to herself. With luck, the elevator stopped at the Uppers, opened to the platform to connecting strata-transport trolleys. She hung back, waiting for anyone to pop out and attack her, even haunts of Bijoux, seemingly cured and rife with personal ire, coming to hunt her. When none arrived, she had not allowed herself to relax. She had made it to the Uppers, but not the Empress.

The glistening arcades accentuated the gold tinted skin of the Uppers. Rich tourists continued to gawk the astounding architecture, the spectacle of the Globe as a concept, so unaware of what had occurred just this morning. Mannequins posed outside of department stores wearing beads and chiffons. The crystalline shake of cocktail production. Even the fountains were more pristine here, placed on golden cobblestones reminiscent of Oz. Since hearing Snow’s anthem, she had kept her eyes perked for moments of change, but she did not expect to find any of the Snow’s sonic unifier here. Instead, she heard police officers engaging with the barking Cult of Atlas members who had ascended from their base in the Junction. Her eyes passed posters featuring the opening of a secret exhibit, a picture of a porcelain rabbit alone underneath a spotlight, thinking of Alexander Noctalia all the while.

She walked along golden cobbled stones, past ice beds of oysters, fountains with coins in them. She would not dare take a trolley; her look was one of the uppers, but it was as willowy and aesthetic as the rest of her. Besides, men in the Uppers were different. Already twice two men attempted to approach Morgan, an unaccompanied woman, but she shied away, covered her bruised face with her wig. They were bold in a way that their lower neighbors were not; willing to spend on extravagant dinners, gift glittering cocktails in bejeweled chalices. Courtship was different for the Uppers, and the women were expected to play the part and offer a gloved hand for the men to tuck away their canes and bow. Sometimes, Uppers men would bring Middles woman to the rooftop bars and the oyster lounges, and they would appear as obvious as a wilted flower in a bouquet. This rejection of this dance of manners would arouse more suspicion, and she hoped she would not deject an Auditor, who carried themselves with particular swagger, as if the Globe was their playground, which, in a way, the Queen Bee afforded to them.

Two hours later Morgan’s feet began to hurt in her heels. Her rest in Thunderbolt Alley, while much needed, was not enough. Her wounds had bothered her since she had woken up, and her upper lip had split when she yawned. She rounded the hotel district, which was located in the central of the Uppers. Great spires with building size windows reflected off one another, creating a canyon of metropolitan fun house mirrors. The light purple hued walls of the Empress, nestled in its own plot of land with its extravagant fountains and blessing of Demeter carved in opal. Morgan considered this implication; she felt like she had trekked across the world, but had only really travelled a couple of miles. The room that Robert and Lea Arnoux had spent many Steeples and cigarettes over had achieved what the Thunderbolt could not, a sense of home, of safety. Her muscles relaxing in preparation, she began to walk up the steps and into the violet aura of the Empress. She looked up at the balcony, ready to see Robert, even Frederique, and confer with one another about the success of the mission. Robert was there, even now, his silhouette pressed against the closed balcony doors and smoking a cigarette, although his shape was decidedly more robust, larger, a balloon.

A frog.

The depths of Morgan’s supply of adrenaline coursed through her veins, sharpening her wits. She hid behind a marble statue of Demeter raising a torch above her head, one that she had originally thought was a Globalized version of the Statue of Liberty. Ducking down, she spotted the bay doors opening, the draft of the curtains sweeping in, her old Auditor’s rotund figure appearing in the box of yellow. He was smoking his pipe, looking out, at first scanning the direction of Seagate, then the commercial district, then Pelton Park. His features were difficult to see from this angle, but she could imagine his bullish face souring at the site of the city, knowing that Morgan was not there, where he had expected her to be. He glanced towards the Empress lawn and Morgan recoiled, folding into herself, wincing at the sudden shifts of movement. She wondered if Arno would be able to recognize her through her disguises; he had always assigned her personas, yes, but he had been made privy to them even before Morgan could internalize her role. Yet she did not want to take the chances, as surely any man who looks hard enough should be able to see a bruised and battered woman before him, and if anyone would be familiar with the incident last night at Pine Docks, it would be him. As in out of spite, as if he knew Morgan was lurking outside, he lit a Steeple, perhaps one of her own, or from a pack Robert had yet to give her, and placed it on the cast iron balcony rail as if scenting via incense.

“Oh no,” she said, her heart punching out of her chest, “Robert.”

“I thought it was ‘Mr. Forrest’,” to you. Or is only when you get mad at me?” His voice said from near the fountain.

Morgan rounded the pedestal of the statue, feeling the grumpy gaze of her former Auditor like the coniferous eyes of a watchtower. She found the voice sitting with one leg crossed over the other, a brief case next to suede shoes, hidden behind an ink-and-parchment wall of the *Global Voice.*

“Mr. Forrest, get out of there!” Morgan whispered. “Don’t you see Arno in the window, you fool?”

The papers ruffled. “I don’t know any ‘Arno’, but if you’re referring to the rotund monster in what was me and Lea Arnoux’s honeymoon sweet, then I have an idea.”

“You’re out in the open!”

The paper flipped over itself, crooked on the axis of his thumb. He eyed Morgan hiding behind the statue and then returned behind his ink laden wall. “He doesn’t know what I look like.”

“You are so vulnerable,” Morgan said, “you arrogant idiot. Get to safety. I’ll find you at the Dredges.”

“He doesn’t know what I look like,” Robert repeated again, “I’m just like anyone else here. In fact, I probably fit the bill of someone who would support the Queen Bee. Besides. I was waiting for you.”

“Me?”

“We got separated. I saw that you drew Minkton’s men away from us. I figured you would have no way to contact us. It’s not like you had any coins for a payphone, or even a number to call. So I waited.”

Morgan adjusted herself, tightening amidst the stiffness in her thighs. “The Queen Bee has discovered us.”

“Ophelia has discovered snake skin,” Robert said, pulling down the newspaper again and then popping it back up. “What happened to you?”

“Bijoux happened to me.”

Morgan thought she saw Robert stiffen.

She added, “She won’t be a problem. For now, at least.”

“For now,” Robert said. “There is a sewer at the back of the Empress. It leads to a warehouse in the Lowers.”

Morgan sighed, felt a cut on her chest reopen. *More traveling*, she thought, taking inventory of herself, determining that she possessed little flame to ignite her body once more. The operation at the Pine Docks seemed like a nightmare, a different version of herself.

“Did you get the psycho-oysters?” Morgan asked.

“Yes we did,” Robert said, “and sooner rather than later, my great ancestor will feel the pressure points of this act.”

Morgan glanced back at the balcony, at Arno smoking his pipe, puffing his gelatinous chins, eyes scouring underneath his bowler hat. The briny, piney smell of the Steeple permeated the air, no doubt an incense to her Sisters. And there were figures behind him, those that Morgan recognized as her Sisters. Arno had released the hunt, used Bijoux to draw blood like a piranha. Everything in that suite might as well be cinders, to cancelled was their use to her and Robert now. Her fake passport, her clothes from Macy’s, the mascara…Morgan was surprised at how infiltrated she felt on Lea Arnoux’s behalf, afraid at how much she cared. And for the revolution, yes, Morgan thought, the Revolution, all the dossiers, the documents, the intel gathered from Frederique and Aldous and the Warehouse Boys. Everything, gone.

But not the psycho-oysters. Not the spirit of those who carried the globe upon its shoulders.

“I can’t leave without Arno or my Sisters seeing me,” Morgan said, “and you can’t round the Empress without blowing your cover.”

“Good thing we have a cover,” Robert said. He pulled out a cigarette, raised it to his mouth. He folded the newspaper in half, put it on his lap. “Did you know that Middles City Councilmen Gregory Stout was indicting for supplying funds to the Upper planning committee? Or that for the past issues of the *Global Voice* there was no mention of the Dredges? Or that every murder has been localized in the Lowers, and according to the papers, by ‘vagrants’? How is that last fact mathematically possible? The Globe has millions of people.”

“Robert, we need to-”

Robert stood, dropped the newspaper to his feet, and picked up his briefcase. He turned like a sundial, positioning himself towards Arno, and Morgan could see out of the corner of her eye that her former Auditor was staring down from his purple perch.

Robert said, “I refuse to watch the Globe and do nothing about it.”

He dropped the cigarette on the newspaper, and a comet tail of fire rocketed across the cobblestoned path in front of the Empress, zipping like some molten scar over the manicured lawn, up the purple bricks, and into the ashtray that Arno had positioned on the balcony. The cinders crackled and popped, crawling like an infernal centipede into their suite. The flames kissed on Arno’s shirt, reaching up to his elbow before he noticed, and then he proceeded to flap and scramble on the balcony, his pipe falling from his lips, swearing underneath his swollen, blubber lips. The ornate curtains that Morgan had allowed herself to appreciate tore to ribbons in swathes of black tongues.

“You’re going to set the place on fire!” Morgan said.

“It’s rather controlled, and weak enough that it might ruin that fat man’s suit. Remember,” Robert tapped on his temple, “it’s about the spectacle.”

And Robert was off, running towards Morgan, pulling her up as the screams of alarm from her Sisters manifested into the rafters at the top of the Globe. She felt weightless as he gripped her arms and brought her to her feet, and they scampered across the orange and red-pepper lawn. Morgan saw that the fire was surprisingly well contained, as Robert said, as if it submitted to physics of its own, as if it were hunting. In Arno’s floundering he twisted and caught eyes with Morgan as she spirited across the lawn.

“You,” he said, his voice a whisper. But Morgan heard it.

Morgan stood, paralyzed, her spine frozen against his leer. She felt as if she had failed some unnamable assignment, had created more work for her handler. Past versions of herself sat humbled and ashamed and super imposed upon one another. She felt that she had failed the Queen Bee.

“Morgan, let’s go!” Robert yelled.

Morgan stood, her arm threatening to dislocate from Robert’s anxious tugging.

“*You...you…you…”* Arno said, the flames roiling around him, his suit blackened and patchy and smoldering.

Morgan’s nails dug into her palm. Her wounds felt as if threatening to cauterize near the flame, her face lit by the orange will-o-wisps. She stared at Arno with mirrored daggers. She was no weapon, nobody’s heir. She was not the puppet that the Queen Bee demanded.

“Yes,” Morgan said, “me.”

And as they spirited across the lawn, ducked into a drain pipe, and slid through Uppers excrement, Morgan could not feel as if they had made any better of a decision.

Part 4.

Morgan sipped her whiskey in the corner, engulfed by the springy lounge chair. She picked at the cauliflower of exposed fluff, felt the uncomfortable pressure of the springs at her back. An array of color and scents was before her. She saw: swatches of blue and red as the dancers ebbed and flowed like a tide, taut strings of plucked basses and golden shimmers of rattling high hats. She smelled; the oak of whiskey, botanicals of gin, the saccharine fog of spilled ale. She heard: several barkeeps juggling orders, Lowers men flirting with women, the unaccompanied women clustered together, speaking of their fancied men, the tap of dancing shoes, the soul of the moment manifested from a saxophone. She watched Frederique dance in the center. She was alone but not alone, moving as if her entire person was accompanied by the spirit of the pub, the Rival Clam. She wore a dress the color of ox-blood, sequins lining her figure, feathers adorning the shoulders. No one looked her way, and if they did, she ignored them.

Morgan was fine without the attention, and found the lack thereof a blanket of security. She had spent the last six months under the gaze of the Globe’s eye. She could not turn a corner in any of the strata without clutching the pistol she kept strapped to her thigh. She knew that Arno was looking for her, had seen her outside of the Empress. Within the trifecta Bijoux’s failure, Arno’s witnessing, and Robert’s revolutionary momentum, Morgan felt under particular duress, unable to smoke a Steeple even twenty feet from someone else, consigning herself to an abandoned closet deep in the recesses of the sewers that travelled throughout the Globe like the blood system of a great body.

Between the abandoned subway channels in Manhattan and the sewers here, Morgan could not help but wonder if she was becoming increasingly subterranean. Before setting the honeymoon suite aflame Robert had stashed the dossiers in his briefcase, and one of them detailed an ad-hoc scientist who believed in carcinization, which was the evolutionary inevitability that the human genome would eventually coalesce and transform into crabs. Morgan determined this a funny concept, but her subterranean visits, increasingly common and increasingly a source of needed solitude, made her consider if she was at risk of becoming an oyster instead. In fact, that very woman with her odd theories was currently making her way through the sewers right now with the Warehouse Boys in tow, their sculpted and tattooed arms holding wrenches and bats, the occasional pistol if they could pilfer it from the city watch.

The Rival Clam was a tiny, vibrant place. One that glittered much like the psycho-oysters locked in the back behind several steel doors. There was a time when this place used to be a bank, back when the Globe was meant to be tinier, an attraction on the Steeplechase boardwalk, still apart of America. Evidence of the ornamental and spectacular were like old scars in the bowels behind the Rival Clam, where the scabs of the Lowers which surrounded it encroached upon it, oxidizing its once copper exterior, turning the vaults the color of light-green and blue, reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty. The Rival Clam was a façade over a façade, yet it functioned much like the Last Drop or the pub which Morgan had dormed in Manhattan. It was a place for the poor, the tired. Tourists who preferred the botanical gardens and the cocktail bars would be hard pressed to have anything in common here.

People were beginning to pair up, such was the nature of the Rival Clam. Shadowed corners featured intertwined guys and gals, sometimes several of them. Even Frederique had allowed herself to be wooed, but only after testing the man to his sense of rhythm on the dance floor, under the gaze of the band and the other dancers. Some men and women even partitioned Morgan, somehow cutting through her armored and sullen exterior, her tired and slightly nervous look, the fingers tapping on an invisible piano located on the springy arm rest as she fought the need for a Steeple. It was not a habit she could cull, but with hope it would be one she could train herself to fight, at least a little better than her Sisters who’s only respite from their citywide hunt were such chemical infusions. Still, even with this roiling in Morgan’s head, Morgan spent every evening rejecting at least some suitors. That was different in the Lowers, expected. People try and try again. They were not as bold or stubborn in the Middles, and especially in the Uppers. Dating was different there, and the courtship mannerisms between the Lowers and the Uppers might as well be traditions in a different country.

With her rebuffed advances, she made her way through the back, spat herself out into the adjoining alley, and checked for any Daughters that might be lurking in the area. While Morgan was quite aware of the Queen Bee’s now focused endeavor to capture her, she also knew that, to maintain control, she still needed to contribute her resources on her typical woes; the Auditors needed to provide assignments, the Daughters still navigated in the Lowers, the Dredges, working to keep the engine of the Globe churning. It was these Sisters that Morgan needed to watch out for. She was too aware of the ones looking to find her.

Then she walked in a crack between two buildings, squeezing herself through an alley that someone the size of Aldous would be unable to navigate. Smells of brine and moss pushed against her with a damp chill. The Lowers were already colder, no large windows provided insight to the world outside, and she drew her cloak around herself, finding a flash of happiness that her body no longer screamed with any sudden motion. The process of healing from her encounter at the docks was grueling and time consuming, but once her nose reset and the starburst across her arm had healed into a star akin to a comet tail, she knew she had well recovered.

A storm door led to another storm door led to another storm door, and soon Morgan was in the labyrinthine sewers connecting the Globe within itself, her path lit by feeble lanterns. Large caverns moved vertically, horizontally, diagonally. No one ventured here, save the unfortunate Lowers boys who egg one another on as a rite of passage, and even then they do not venture far out unless they wish to die young. If not for the Dredges, Morgan suspected that the sewers would have been home to them, and in a way they already were. There were rumors of that the Crocodile Man from the Hippodrome came to the Globe via the sewers, and that he snacked on Lilliputians that he kept locked in a special pantry of his, but Morgan knew the power of rumors, knew the might of their influence. Instead, she listened for the sounds of footsteps along the cobblestones, the expected complaints of the sewage smell from the Warehouse Boys.

She encountered them at a crossroads. Black ichor wafted below the cobblestoned pathways and cast-iron railings. The haunting glow of gaslights, strung up to only offer minimal guidance in case any Daughters or Globe police ventured within bathed her person. The Warehouse Boys stopped as they approached her, surrounding the frail, cat like woman as she pinched her nose and held her brief case close to her chest. The Warehouse Boys still had a difficult time around Morgan. Some of them were intimidated by the presence of the False Daughter, who they had only heard about from their colleagues at Pine Dock six months ago. Others had been made privy to the *Global Voice*, which claimed a woman terrorist (the Queen Bee would not do well to illuminate the presence of her Daughters) was amok, and if these men were not already psychologically and morally prepared by Robert’s legwork they might have believed the tabloids. And some of the Warehouse Boys could not speak to Morgan because when they did it was in awkward, school boyish flirts. This action was most interesting to Morgan because, with their burley arms, calloused hands, they seem hyper-masculine, almost to the point of satire, and bedding the False Daughter must seem like a conquest, but they were afraid of her, unable to carry a conversation on the times she had attempted to humor them.

“Any trouble?” Morgan asked, referring to their task at fetching the shaking scientist from her modest home in the Middles.

“None that we could see,” he said, “although there were some girls hanging around. Beggars we hadn’t seen before.”

Morgan wondered if her own paranoia and their reinforced ideologies were making the Warehouse Boys cautious towards female strangers.

“Thank you,” she said, and then looked over his shoulder, “Dr. Cadeu, would you follow me?”

The woman pushed forward, biting her lip. Up close she seemed to glow behind her bottle lens, great emerald eyes sparked with curiosity. Her hair looked like a crow’s nest, strands pointing in all directions like a barb. Streaks of grey polarized against what Morgan had determined to be a moderately youthful face.

“My name is Morgan.”

“I know who you are,” Dr. Cadeu said, her words quick, as if running from a lit fuse. “The False Daughter.”

Morgan kept her eyes locked on the strange bird. She disliked that moniker, hearing Bijoux’s voice every time, but Robert told her that it had adopted an almost mythical moniker. It was an idea. Still, Morgan kept silent.

Dr. Cadeu said, uncomfortable, “These men tell me that people were watching me. Maybe trying to kill me.”

“It depends.” Morgan said, then she gestured the Warehouse Men away, their jobs done, and began walking down a path away from the center with Dr. Cadeu in tow, “Were you practicing any chemistry?”

Dr. Cadeu did not answer; she responded by biting her lip.

“A woman scientist from the middles, not quite a scientist, not by trade. You were a secretary in Tectonic Biotechnics, yes?”

Dr. Cadeu looked away. The thought seemed to embarrass her. “Yes.”

“But you found a friend in Dr. Yves Moratz?”

“Yes.”

“And according to my sources, you know about the Gene Division. You know more than one typically would.”

Dr. Cadeu closed her eyes, her nest of silver hair seeming to shroud her brows as if by reflex. “The vats. It’s inhumane. I thought I could help them, change the process. But I was a secretary. Women cannot be scientists. Not in the Globe. I even presented to Yves my findings of my own independent research, and he concluded that we could harvest those psycho-oysters to create a better life for everyone. Imagine the Globe where those in the Lowers could generate their houses with a touch, or the Middles could light their cigarettes with a flame summoned by their thumb. And those…fetuses…they wouldn’t need the psycho-oysters to course through their veins, would not need to be dependent on them. But then he disappeared. And my secretarial job was taken by a young girl that fancied all the attention the scientists were giving her, did not question the comings and goings of the Gene Division, did not ask questions about the black goo that sometimes clung to their arctic lab coats like grammatical marks made of tar.”

“So you understand,” Morgan said. They rounded a corner, then another. Small lanterns guided them, hanging the darkness above the still runoff of Global excrement like fireflies. She continued, “The Globe didn’t find you a threat because of your knowledge. They found you a threat because of your propensity for change.”

They stopped in front of the door. The odor of the sewer had dissipated, replaced with faint brine. Dr. Cadeu looked at Morgan deep and hard, brows furrowed, lines of cartography stretching from crow’s feet, evidence of the imprint of laughter no longer evident.

“You are one of the fetuses in those vats. Were, I mean.”

Morgan nodded. “They are called Tilyou’s Daughters. For the Queen Bee, Ophelia Tilyou.”

“She’s not real,” Dr. Cadeu said, “a myth.”

“So was the False Daughter,” Morgan said, “so was your reality until two hours ago.”

“Let me ask you a question, Morgan,” Dr. Cadeu said, “I don’t think you’re the only one of your ilk who knows the truth. If I may inquire, why have you seen the light while the others have not?”

Morgan thought of Bijoux, how her face obtained flashes of serenity when talking about her actualization. “People find purpose in different ways,” she said.

“Indeed,” Dr. Cadeu said, more to herself. “Call me Rosemary. I’m not a doctor.”

“You are in our book,” Morgan said.

She opened the steel door before them and walked Dr. Cadeu into a wide atrium. Morgan herself had not spent much time in here; the room was so close to Morgan’s roots that it unnerved her for reasons she determined to be completely her own. Still, what Robert and the Warehouse Boys and the contractors he had spirited from Manhattan had accomplished instilled Morgan with a sense of awe. Before them was a small room, no larger than twice the honeymoon suite at the Empress. It was equipped with several salt water bays that glimmered with the stolen psycho-oysters, the tanks themselves embedded deep into the sewer infrastructure, the psycho-oysters themselves barnacled together as a black nucleus amidst a kaleidoscopic aura. Various beakers, test tubes and burners lay on stainless steel tables. Morgan picked up one of the blades that the Warehouse Boys had deposited when procuring and shipping and moving these instruments and pressed upon it for mere curiosity of its exactness. A bead of glittery ox-blood emitted from her finger, trailing down the blade. Morgan sucked on her thumb and placed the knife down, amazed at the quality of instrument that Robert had procured.

Dr. Cadeu walked into the center, looked at the pools, turned away. Morgan was not testing her knowledge, but the fact that she looked away from the hypnotizing light-show the psycho-oysters emitted reinforced Morgan’s confidence in her.

She turned to Morgan, “What is this?”

“A place for your research, Rosemary,” Morgan said, “we don’t know how they do it, but the psycho-oysters are heavily involved with the creation of Tilyou’s Daughters, much like myself. Somehow they can be harvested. They run through my veins,” Morgan reached into her pocket, pulled out a Steeple, “and they are in here, too. These aren’t cigarettes. They are…well, if me or any of my Sisters don’t smoke these, our organs will fail. The Queen Bee needs these psycho-oysters. It’s one of the ways she maintains power of us and the Globe.”

Dr. Cadeu’s eyes illuminated behind her bottled lenses. She stared at the rafters, the tables, the beakers, the shimmering aura of the psycho-oyster clusters like a visitor in a new city. She stared at her lab like people do when they come to the Globe.

Morgan said, “I’m sure Mr. Forrest explained to you the gravity of the situation in which we face. It is not a matter of principle between him and the Queen Bee, nor even me and my Sisters and my plight against Ophelia Tilyou. Her grasp on the Globe is iron wrought, her monopoly of narrative and spectacle is her super power which divides us. The Globe was built as a utopia for those who looked upon America and the rest of the world with disappointment. The Globe was built on a dream and an understanding. Perhaps this was true at one point, but now, Ophelia Tilyou is an insult to that promise.”

Dr. Cadeu put on a pair of dark goggles, slipped her sweater over the back of a swiveling chair, slid herself into one of the starched lab coats. She looked over the kaleidoscopic pools, hands on her hips, the ephemera of the psycho-oysters painting mosaics on her face from underneath. Her nest of hair looked wild, tentacle like. Her lips receded, ready to be absently gnawed in thought, and even underneath the goggles her greying brows furrowed, primed to engage. It was interesting to see, Morgan thought, the way the body readies itself. At once the timid and shaking Dr. Rosemary Cadeu transformed into the scientist that had been denied from her, forced to blossom from within the fires of her soul. In a more intimate way, Morgan figured this is what attracted Samantha to Yves.

“Will you help us, Rosemary?” Morgan asked.

“Yes, I think I will,” she said, and grabbed a hook to pull a psycho-oyster from its barnacle, Morgan no longer a presence in her laboratory.

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As if leaning into some meta-reference, Robert Forrest was bobbing his head along to Alfred Snow’s anthem, which, according to whispers throughout the streets, had taken the name of “In the Palm of my Hand”. The orchestrations sounded tinny in the exhausted gramophone, but the war room was the only place that he could listen to the arrangement at a sonic level higher than a theater whisper. Morgan wondered if he was listening to it because he needed to be reminded of the movement, or if he listened to it to give him courage. Perhaps he listened to it to validate the music itself.

Tendrils of smoke lashed into an air vent, but the room was congested enough that a faint, acrid fog occupied from wall to wall. It reminded Morgan of Mitch, the attendant from the Dredges, and his de-facto box office. Feeling left out, Morgan lit her own Steeple and watched Robert peruse over the maps of the Globe for half a minute. He looked like a man solving a puzzle, rubbing his chin, brows furrowed underneath his lock of brown hair. There were five maps, one for each strata of the Globe, another for the entire city structure itself, the four socles included. Morgan herself was amused by the maps, and especially by how Robert had acquired them. The Uppers had an opulent map, was sent to him in a gilded case, the writing ornate, the dimensions of each street measured out with perfect geometry. The street grid of the Uppers was a not terribly uncommon tourist take away. The Middles and Lowers had standard fare; mass produced not for their opulence but for utility, the needs of the working class. The only difference between these two strata was a slight discrepancy of quality, hardly noticeable. The Dredges themselves had a map that was conceived on sheets of dirtied paper that had gone starchy with the brine and humidity. There was power in governmental infrastructure.

Within the cloud entered Charlie Macintosh, a unionizer and representative of the Warehouse Boys. He was as large as Arno, taking up the breadth of two seats, and smoked fat cigars that seemed to be his only cross-class vice. At first Morgan was suspicious of the man, as any leader of those rowdy men would be, but he proved his worth to Robert and the revolution by hiding the Warehouse Boys that had come under scrutiny of their previous champion Jason Albrecht, who had long reared his greedy head in the direction of the Queen Bee by way of a Daughter who had molded herself to be fallen in love with. It also helped that Charlie, unlike Jason, had come from the Lowers, had even spent his youth and much of his young-twenties plucking splinters from the same shipping crates tossed around today. This home-brewed experience gave him anecdotal knowledge of the Lowers ordinance, and the confidence to try the patience of the Global Police whom he knew had better things to do than sift through old property papers dated two hundred years ago. It was because of Charlie Macintosh that a warehouse in the Lowers, situated in the middle of other forgotten warehouses with equally broken toothed windows and rust scabbed doors became their base of operations. Charlie’s knowledge of ordinance and his near limbic connection to the Lowers had effectively cloaked their headquarters in invisibility. Morgan was surprised that the shift in amenities, so different than the Empress in addition to being almost perpetually cold, would have caused Robert discomfort, but he and even Frederique appeared non-plussed by the change in venue.

The three of them, a cigarette, a cigar, a Steeple, all huddled over the map of the Globe. Robert placed several American dimes on the map. The Globe, when viewed from this angle, looked a little like a giant teapot.

Charlie shook his head, jiggling several chins, “My boys have taken the psycho-oysters like you asked six months ago, and six months later I have them hiding so I don’t have fatherless Lowers families on my conscious. Tell me, Mr. Forrest, when can we expect things to start changing around here?”

Robert said, “We’ll make a dent soon.”

“The more of the union I commit to the cause, the more suspicion we are going to rise from Mr. Albrecht. He’s gunning for us. He knows that we were on Pine Docks that night. Milton Security answers to him, too, now.”

Snow’s “In the Palm of my Hand” ceased, the record spinning listlessly underneath the raised gramophone needle. He stepped away from the clutter of papers, reset it. The opening strings shot from the brass conch shell.

“Mr. Forrest, I need an answer. I have a lot on the line, here. I can’t fund this revolution.”

“I’m not asking you too, Mr. Macintosh, but if I know anything about you, it’s that you cannot turn your away from the greater good. A little struggle now and we’ll stabilize.”

Charlie shot Robert a look and puffed on his cigar, one brow raised in amusement. It was often a way that Charlie looked at Robert, Morgan perceived.

Robert said, “Must I remind you that we have the psycho-oysters? That we succeeded?”

“Remind me? No doubt in small part to the Warehouse Boys. But I must ask…it’s been six months. Surely the Queen Bee would have felt the impact of the loss of her treasured mollusks?”

Robert said, “She probably has a smaller colony located elsewhere. And perhaps a reserve of whatever ichor comes out of them.”

“But six months, Mr. Forrest.”

“It’s making an impact,” Morgan piped, her body half a silhouetted by smoke. She put out her Steeple, crunched the butt next to its smashed brethren. Charlie Macintosh reared his sweaty head to her. “My Sisters are clawing at one another. There is less presence of them. I don’t smell Steeple as much.”

Charlie shook his head. “Clones,” he whispered to himself, “what a world.”

Morgan eyed him. She only tolerated the man because of what he represented to the Lowers, that his men follow him, and that he was important to Robert. She did not find the bullish lawyer untrustworthy, but unlikeable he very much was. He was always cautious around Morgan, and over these past few weeks she learned that her lineage both confused and offended him.

Yet Morgan ignored him. She continued, looking at Robert, “The Daughters are fiending. There are less of them hunting me. The lack of Steeple production is causing a lot of issues for the Queen Bee’s reign. Soon, Mr. Macintosh, my Sisters will be starving.”

Charlie furrowed his brows and sucked on his cigar and within the miasma of ichor he appeared to Morgan a little bit like Arno. “And you, False Daughter? Will you be starving?”

Morgan considered this. Charlie Macintosh would be correct if Dr. Cadeu could not harvest the psycho-oysters, but she was confident that she could. Yet it pained Morgan to answer this slug, whose predilections towards her pedigree was beginning to scratch under her skin. She glanced at Robert and he shrugged. Morgan gritted her teeth.

“Yes, Mr. Macintosh, I too would be pained by this.”

This appeared to appease Charlie, who stood from the table with a labored hobble. He turned back to Robert. “The Warehouse Boys believe in this cause. But you must understand, this union has reached critical mass. Any farther and it will cause disruptions in the bloodstream of the Globe itself, and we cannot withstand the might of Jason Albrecht and his goons.”

“I understand, Mr. Macintosh, and I understand that Mr. Albrecht’s turn coating has made this personal,” Robert said, “all I ask is a little patience. We’ve cracked the glass.”

“But haven’t shattered it,” Charlie said, and then he was off to hobble through the sewers and into the warehouse and through the alleys of the Lowers, where his reputation protected him, gave him confidence. It gave Morgan a level of satisfaction knowing that by the time he reached outside his knees would begin to scream underneath the weight of his body.

When the door closed Morgan said, “I don’t like that man.”

Robert said, “He’s a good man for his people. If anyone is going to unite the Lowers and the Middles, it’s him.”

“He doesn’t trust me.”

“The man was raised on common sense, Morgan. Could you not give him a break?”

“Common sense? Do tell, Mr. Forrest.”

“Must I explain it?”

Snow’s music sung in the background, reaching its great crescendo.

“You must, I want to hear.”

Robert shook his head, sighed, reached for a cigarette from the inside of his breast pocket, decided against it. “He’s a man who had lived in the reality crafted by the Queen Bee his entire life. His biggest opponent was Minkton and the occasional union buster. Now he’s learned that there are psycho-oysters, Tilyou’s Daughters, and the Queen Bee herself that is over one hundred years old. Oh, and also Jason Albrecht had promised him that he would fight for the Warehouse Boys. The man feels betrayed on a personal level.”

“I had to deal with it,” Morgan said, “I’ve had to struggle with the shattering of my reality,”

“And you were just as spiky,” Robert said, “and you were on the inside of it all. Why do you think I was particular about the dossiers you tracked? We are changing not just people’s way of life, but their reality themselves. You cannot blame them for their suspicion.”

Morgan thought of the recent months, the slander towards the False Daughter, who had very much become the manifestation of the city’s woes. She was not in print, of course, but the *Global Voice* referred to her in other words.

As if to dissuade her from considering this further, Robert gestured for her to look over the maps. While she and Charlie were talking he had placed several red buttons along various routes.

“Look here,” he said, “these are the linked to the dossiers.”

“The dossiers are six months old,” Morgan said.

“These aren’t *all* the dossiers. Only the ones that matter now. They could be duds.”

Morgan noticed a number on a button and triangulated it to the appropriately numbered files next to the maps. He was impressed with Robert’s clerical coordination. She leafed through the dossiers, each one staler than the last. Months ago, before the incident at Pine Dock, these were powerful leads. It was this same cluster of dossiers that saved Alfred Snow’s life, fetched Dr. Cadeu and Charlie Macintosh. They had acquired some allys throughout these months, but this was primarily word of mouth, and on the occasion Morgan had ventured to investigate a lead (she had gone twice, during the transition from the Empress to their setting up in the warehouse, once to investigate a deli clerk in the Uppers who hinted at his dissent but was revealed to just be common sympathy for the Globe’s inhabitants in general, and another was to investigate the increased gathering of the Cult of Atlas, now holding court in the Dredges, and both Morgan and Robert agreed their mania and frothed proselytizing would only benefit a cause of their own). Still, it was a lead, especially since Morgan was beginning to get antsy. She would not want to hint her agreeance of Charlie’s impatience, but she was beginning to feel helpless, a figurehead.

Robert pointed to a button on the Globe map, placed in the Uppers, the he traced his finger to the layout of the Uppers itself, flecks of cigarette ash landing on its ornamental frame. “A printing press.”

“The *Vox* *Sonic*,” Morgan said, “I’m familiar. They are a failing paper, which by now I reckon are probably well ground to dust. I had an assignment to track the head editors once, a couple years ago. Turns out that the publishers are a pair of twins that listen to tea leaves and play solitaire with tarot cards. Kooks. Not unlike that Cult of Atlas mission you sent me on.”

“Well,” Robert said, “I’d much prefer to speak with them.”

“They are a failing printing press, their readership essentially boiled down to the two of them. The Queen Bee views them as frothing maniacs,” Morgan said.

“Precisely why they are perfect for us. A fringe paper, reputed for anarchic conventions,” Robert raised his hands, traced an invisible frame on the wall. “’The False Daughter’.”

“I’m not a celebrity,” Morgan said, “I refuse to be made one.”

“It’s about spectacle. The mere mention of your name has helped gain us allies. Tell me that it did not help to sway Dr. Cadeu.”

Morgan shook her head, “But why now, Robert? Why didn’t we contact them before?”

“Because there was no scoop then, and now I would think twice about silencing such a voice of dissent.”

“I don’t follow,” Morgan said, and she disliked admitting as much.

Robert smiled, “The pot wasn’t boiling. Now it’s at a simmer. If the *Vox Sonic* plays along, it will bring everything to a boil, expose the Queen Bee. Between our taking of the psycho-oysters, our revealing of the Daughters, our validation of the False Daughter and thus the movement, the Queen Bee will be forced to confront us.”

Morgan put out her Steeple, resisting a smile. “And if she silences the *Vox Sonic*, then it will galvanize the movement for the better.”

“Exactly,” Robert said.

*a.*

Call it what it is. No man is so stoic as to yearn for the warmth of a bedmate. What are you looking for? A quick tug? A night for a price? What can you afford? Who can you afford?

Get your mind from the sewers and consider the manners of flirtation in the Globe. Of course, prostitution is legal here. Everything is, because everything should. We have districts in the Middles where they gather, high end brothels in the Uppers, some with companies you can call like hailing a cab. And this isn’t talking about the independent girls. There is flavor for everyone. Even, if you’d rather, a place where some men linger, although they are not for women. But once you’d had your fun, surely you’d care to navigate the tunnel of love with someone special? Dating is different in the Globe. It’s championed here. They call Paris the city of Love but it’s nothing more than snails and that rancid river. Here, in the Globe, you can find puzzle pieces that fit the jigsaw of your life. But look at the girls! They are sublime in appearance. We have our burlesque shows, our sex shows, our escorts. But beauty is not confined to the occupations. Head to a bar, a cocktail lounge. You’ll find someone, it’s a Globe guarantee.

But fret only accordingly, for every girl is different. Uppers women have expensive tastes, with each dollar spent another turn into the clockwork that opens up their thighs. If you see a woman of your fancy in a high-end bar, you best be advised to send a drink to all her friends, different drinks, to see what she likes. You best bring her to the highest of the rooftop bars, the most expensive of the clubs. Dinner must cost week’s wages of her salary, whatever it is. They like expensive dresses, and, if they are the cultured type, frequent plays at the Dream. They say your wallet must *hurt* a little bit when wooing an Uppers lady. How else must she make room for you?

But Middles are different. Working class men breed working class women, and just as proud, too. They know they aren’t cut from the same glittering cloth as their Uppers neighbors. Their skin does not glisten in that golden sheen in the same way, but they adorn themselves with their sweat stains and their can-do attitude and the occasional smog on their dresses. They like beers and whiskey and a nice burger at the diner. It’s easy to entertain them. Middles women like action films and you don’t have to worry about them outsmarting you. They don’t read much. And, it’s important to note, rumor has it that Middles women go down on you, too. Even Uppers escorts won’t do that! In a way, the Middles women champion their sexual liberty. Just another example of their class identity steering the ship, I’d say.

And if the Middles are different and pride themselves on their easy going whimsey, you’d be hard pressed to have a difficult time bringing a Lowers girl to bed. They don’t even need a drink or too, unless they need a lot. Just worry about bed bugs, both on their clothes and within them. Sometimes the reward is not worth the ease of challenge. There is a reason why things are cheap sometimes. They say Lowers girls let you use their mouths too, but they are also prone to biting with them.

There are other rumors of girls from the down-bellow, but they are only for fetishes, and if you’re lucky you can trick a Lilliputian into blinking their weasel eyes underneath the fake clouds of the Lowers before bedding them. They have competition with the children though.

The Globe has everything, offers everything.

Sells everything.

2.

It was a wonder for Morgan how the *Vox* *Sonic* had managed to pay its rent in the Uppers while maintaining its derelict atmosphere. It looked like a burned victim next to its shining neighbors, the buildings themselves separated by an alley as if afraid of contracting whatever the disease the *Vox Sonic* itself carried. The Uppers buildings were typically tight packed to accommodate the scarcity of real estate, opting to build higher rather than wider. Yet through embarrassment of the Uppers planners, their inability to reclaim the land, or some generational lease, the building remained untouched, ruined by its own design, flanked by two alleys that the glittering cobble stoned streets itself did not even venture into.

Morgan was dressed in a black bob that she hated and knew that Frederique knew she hated. She thought it made her look boyish and gaunt, and the lack of the sunlight through the mile-wide windows on the Globe gave both her and Robert a slightly pale tint to their skin, like vampires. That was always a clear sign of the Lowers, and the Dredges even more so, whose daily errands would be hard-pressed to cross pollinate with the other strata. The Uppers had skin that shimmered in crystal and gold, the pigments of their flesh itself infused with some technology from Tectonic Biotechnics. It required monthly upkeep and was very expensive, but of course they could afford the trends. Morgan knew that this temporarily jeweled skin tone helped the Daughters chameleon in and out of the Upper crust society. Just the same, Morgan’s pale tint needed a bit of makeup from Frederique as well to adopt some semblance of a Middles women, and even the color palette of the Uppers still revealed evidence of a pale tint if you look hard enough.

They looked up the building, Robert holding his brief case, positioned himself in such a way to conceal Morgan’s face from the more open areas of the street without making it too obvious. Although Morgan had assured Robert that the thieving of the psycho-oysters would impact the Daughters in ways undetectable to those not of their ilk, he still had caution. They were hunted sorts, the two of them, and Morgan could tell that while Robert championed these moments of momentum, perhaps he was slightly unprepared for the reality of becoming a validated challenge to the Queen Bee.

“You must be very sure of yourself to contact these two kooks,” Morgan said.

“I think they’ll be very thankful to have this knowledge dropped on their lap,” Robert said.

They ventured into the building, which was horribly ill-equipped as opposed to the other printing presses that Morgan had ventured into. As a young Daughter, she had spent a few months interning at the *Global Voice*, and while the direction of the press has changed ownership since then, it still functioned as well-oiled machine. Here, at the *Vox Sonic*, the building appeared no more than a derelict tenement house; a central, creaking staircase spiraling to the floors above. Cracked linoleum floors threatened to cave into a pitfall from the overstuffed filing cabinets, some with their contents threatening to burst completely. The faint smell of mold. Above was the smell of west paper, the acid of fresh ink, the coughing, metallic groans of a dying horse that was their printing press above the arrhythmic sounds of a leaky faucet. Morgan recalled seeing popular headlines and front pages of historical moments during her time at the *Global Voice*. Here, however, the building sagged and in place of memories was evidence of water rot that manifested as tiny pockets of air threatening, one day, to suffocate the building itself like a punctured lung. This ancillary press was printing for an audience of itself, cannibalistically.

Seeing this gave Morgan her doubts. She feared that even Robert’s charm and confidence would not be able to mend the potential combustion if this meeting went awry. There was power in a fringe printing press, but it was like throwing your gas lantern into your fireplace to light it. The hallways were covered with a combination of makeshift wallpaper consisting of damp and sticky facades of their own old issues. Clung on the wall in shabby, unevenly hung frames were what Morgan assumed were the *Vox Sonic’*s journalistic highlights.

It also caught Robert’s attention and he read them out loud. “*The Alligator-Man claims heresay on the Hippodrome’s bag of frozen Lilliputians.* I thought I heard something about that. *Famous Artist Alexander Noctalia Goes Missing After Art Show. Coincidence?”*

“That was surprisingly on the nose,” Morgan agreed, feeling a little better about the situation.

“Oh, look at this one. *Rumored ‘Rabbit Club’ rejectee tells all.* That’s hardly journalism, right? Oh, look here, Jane, *Owner of the Oslo is not actually named Oslo*. Is that news?”

Morgan shrugged, “Technically.”

They approached the receptionist who looked up from her rickety desk. She eyed Morgan and for a second, she wondered if this girl was a Sister, that, because of the lack of Steeples in production, they had somehow lost their psychic sense of one another. Then she looked at Robert and Morgan then got the sense that she was eying to see if the two of them were together. Smacking bubblegum, she asked why they were here to see.

“Lewis and Louisa Welch,” Robert said. He looked at Morgan and gave her a look that suggested, *who else*?

“I’ll see if they are busy,” she said, and with a sudden, shrill like howl she craned her head and up and shouted to the tops of the cast iron banisters with such force that it made both Morgan and Robert flinch. “Mr. and Ms. Welch, are you busy?”

None of the wraith like workers appeared plussed, going about their tasks in this sunken building like automata.

Finally, as if in unison, two croaking voices yelled from the top floor. “Not at all. Send them up.”

The girl returned her gaze to Morgan and Robert. “They will see you now.”

The steps were plastered with old newspapers that stuck to the cast iron frames, as if a twister had a paraded down the steps flinging spittle. Tiny pools of running ink made the steps look like a crying madam, each creek a display of pain from the crumbling building. There were dedicated pools, forever adding one mineral infused droplet at a time, and faintly the smell of laundry amidst the steam coming from the cantankerous printing presses. She passed a girl looking over a collage of news articles, leaning over as if lording over the words, eyeing placement. She looked at Robert and Morgan looked away.

“One of them?” He whispered, taking off his hat, wiping a bead of sweat from his blond brows.

“Yes,” Morgan said, “I think. It’s getting harder every day.”

“I feel bad about this, you know,” Robert said, “I know you need those Steeples. I know your sisters need them too.”

Morgan nodded. Already there were some Daughters that were crumbling in their assignments, making sloppy work. It was an invisible hand, but evident to a trained eye. Once the Steeples were in such abundance that it was a sorority badge in passing, now the one unifying aspect of their plight, their moments of solitude, not to mention their biological dependance, was the lack of resources from the Auditors. Morgan figured this could go two ways; the Daughters would see the chains which had bound them, or the Queen Bee would sic the Daughters on the “False Daughter”, making her the top priority, and in a way Morgan was excited to see the hidden machinations of the Queen Bee in the Global ecosystem upend itself by sheer lack of resources, of which case was the Daughters themselves.

“Dr. Cadeu will find a way,” Morgan said, and she believed it.

Two silhouettes paced behind the frosted glass that read in gold inscription: *Chief Editors of Vox Sonic*, of which the *s* had been etched in an incongruent fashion. They knocked but of the silhouettes sprang towards the door and opened it for them. What appeared before Robert and Morgan was a mirrored version of a bird’s nest personified. Louisa’s hair was grey and bleached to the point of starch sheets, her hair brittle and pulled up into a nest of hair of which ruby colored glasses lay over her brows. Her brother sat at one end of the desk, picking at grapes, long sideburns and a mustache the size of a kitten covering what Morgan could only assume was an incredibly rotund Walrus-esque upper lip. A steamy humidity occupied the room, remaining in the office even though the windows were cracked and the glass partitions into the upper floor had several gaps the size of bullet holes.

“Come in, come in,” Louisa ushered, and then shut the door. She scampered behind their desk, stepping over stacks of unbound newspapers, spindles of twine, passing a rust scabbed bike turned upside down for surgery, the lopsided ruined corpse of a printing machine. “We’ve been waiting for you.”

“Waiting for us?” Morgan could not help but physically point to her and Robert.

“Someone like you,” Lewis said, clasping fingers over his ballooned stomach. The twin editors of the *Vox Sonic* were not twins by glance, but the resemblance was evident by sheer aura. It was, Morgan noted immediately, in the way they navigated the world, so profusely reliant on their others buoy of safety in the chaos of their joint occupation. “You’re the False Girl, I presume?”

“False Daughter,” Louisa corrected, holding up a bony finger.

“Yes, yes,” Lewis said.

“You know of us, of the Queen Bee?” Robert said, pulling out a cigarette and offering some to the crowd. He offered Morgan first, because he had hidden a Steeple in there, and then Lewis rejected in favor of opening a metallic odor bomb of tuna fish but Louisa accepted, pulling one curtain skirted leg over the other, looking statuesque in what Morgan initially thought was a practiced pose. She knew Robert did not need a cigarette; it was to cloud the Steeple.

“Always suspected,” said Lewis, pulling out a loaf of bread, eyeing each slice for mold, and determining two were satisfactory.

Morgan took a puff and exhaled, eyeing the editor’s silhouette for any hesitation. The Steeple was faint amidst the unventilated room, but it was identifiable for those looking for it. With every day her Sisters were navigating closer to the mortal coil, a thought which panged her, which gave the timeline of the revolution the identity of a fuse. She eyed Robert puffing away at his own cigarette, obediently killing his own body while Morgan was rejuvenating hers. She wondered how far he was willing to go to maintain the Steeple production. She hoped Rosemary would omit this potential conversation.

“How do you know of the Queen Bee?” Morgan asked, her attention refocused, genuinely curious. She knew of the *Vox Sonic,* of how they were so miniscule in journalistic might that they could be an ant underneath the bark of the great Global ecology that it might as well be a benign lump. Whenever a Daughter returned from their assignment and contributed notes, it was always written with a degree of brevity, a sense of optimism that one of her Sisters quoted, “there is still humor in the world”.

Lewis munched on the tuna fish; a clay goop visible as he spoke. “It’s obvious, isn’t it? Power is hierarchal, but there is no head. The Community Boards and the Borough Presidents answer to *someone*. But there isn’t a mayor, a governor, a president. The Uppers are fine with this absence of a face because it’s the Uppers. Everyone below doesn’t even have the withal to challenge, nor the resources to know there even is one.”

“And nothing goes *wrong* in the Globe,” Louisa said. Morgan decided that she looked like an old tree.

“That’s quite the statement,” Morgan said.

“Is it, False Daughter?” Louisa said, raising an eye brow. “There have been no revolutions since it seceded from New York City and the rest of America. There have been no uprisings, no political upheavals, no champions of any social class. The strata of the Globe are just limbs on a marionette, and there is someone or something pulling those strings. Things go wrong, sure, but how often do any of those fires become enough to raze the land?”

Morgan and Robert looked at one another. He said, “There was one fire.”

“The Empress,” said Lewis, “we know.”

Louisa said, “So you’ve come to us, our crackpot *Sonic*, ignored by the powers at be, a publication held at the fringes. Why?”

“It’s simple,” Robert said, “to disseminate information.”

“No one listens to us,” Lewis said, looking out of the cracked panel. “We aren’t even a threat enough to be squandered.”

“Then it’s time for people to listen,” Robert said, puffing his chest in a way that Morgan knew was adopting the politician. He had used this with Charlie Macintosh, with Frederique, with Albert Snow. And then he explained the process, leaning to Morgan when he needed to, comfortable with the *Vox Sonic* chiefs in audience. He regaled the machinations of the Queen Bee, the Daughters as an apparatus, the cloning and the biological chains instilled in her progeny. Morgan kept an eye on the twins for flashes of incredulity, of their natural journalistic carve. She had expected a raised eye brow when Robert told them they had helped sculpted a Lowers and Middles identity via the phonogram of Albert Snow’s ear, how they had the support of the Macintosh’s Warehouse Boys, how they had stolen, yes, stolen, the largest psycho-oyster farms off Koch Lake and were holding, to the Queen Bee’s terrible disadvantage, the base product of her hold on her Daughters. The twins nodded along, flashing glances to one another, communicating telepathically in the way that those that shared a womb did. Morgan felt a pang of sadness watching this intimate display; she had once fostered this with her Sisters, too.

“And you, False Daughter, first champion of the Globe, rejector of the throne to the hive?” Lewis asked. “How fares your morality knowing that your sisters will soon experience the same organ failures?”

“Incredibly uncomfortable,” Morgan said, making sure to eye Robert, to maintain her stance. “But it is necessary for them to understand, perhaps by force, the chains which are placed upon their neck. When I was a Daughter, I had not once questioned by role in the machinations of the Globe, but once I realized I needed the Globe then my service became servitude.”

“In another life,” Louisa said, “you would have made a good journalist.”

Lewis raised a hand, “And then? What do you expect to happen, our sudden revolutionaries?”

“Something will break,” Robert said, “either the Queen Bee or the Daughters. We had taken the psycho-oysters and have replaced the barge with a loaded gunpowder keg.”

“And how long until things start to crumble and the Queen Bee takes action against her insolent progeny? When the Steeple production runs out? You don’t think any commander worth their briny salt won’t have a stockpile of Steeples? The more time you give the Queen Bee, the more time she’ll have to drown that powder keg and find you, or have those loyal to her become even more convinced of the calamity she had convinced of them?”

Morgan said, “Well, isn’t that what the news is for? To shorten that fuse, to ensure that it’s lit?”

The twins glanced at one another, both mirroring their expression of a whiskery eye brow cocked at half-mast. “There is quite a bit of danger to this proposal,” Lewis said to his sister.

“And even having the False Daughter here means we’re already ankle deep in it,” Louisa added.

Lewis looked around, dotted his lips with a napkin, and tossed the crumbs into a wastebasket. He eyed each corner of the room. “This place could use a little danger.”

Morgan stepped forward, “While that’s all good to hear and all, you need to understand the gravity of what we’re asking you. You both would be risking everything. Not just your reputation-”

“Already shot,” Louisa said, smirking.

“And the *Vox Sonic-*”

“Already shit,” Lewis said, grimacing.

“And your lives-”

“We’re middle aged and we share an apartment with one another-”

“And the lives of your staff-”

“They will follow,” Lewis said.

“They will?” Robert pulled the cigarette from his mouth. “Do you believe that?”

“We do,” added Louisa, “good journalists believe in the truth. That’s what the *Vox Sonic* endeavors. We sure as hell aren’t paying them enough to even insinuate they chase money. We’re all crackpots here.”

“You might need to go underground, eventually,” Morgan said.

“A matter of perspective,” Louisa said, “now enough talk. I’m getting bored.”

Ten minutes later they had all shaken hands with the agreement to expect several Warehouse Boys to act as news couriers to further divide the *Vox Sonic*’s sources and protect the staff. If the *Sonic* delivered, it would be inevitable that the Queen Bee would rear her head, and Morgan promised those same couriers to act as surveillance, and Morgan intended to keep a watch on them too. They passed the girl balancing the pages and she did not look up at the visitors. Robert nudged her with his elbow once they reached the top of the landing, snapping Morgan from her focus. He stood straighter, reached into his pocket, and went over to the girl. From afar they conversed, and Morgan could see Robert at work with his charm. The girl, previously dour and serious, had seemingly melted in Robert’s undivided attention, had allowed to pluck a cigarette from the case and lean into the newborn match cupped between his soft palms, looking upwards like a puppy. Before leaving she ensured that the girl had taken a whiff of the cigarette; Daughters cannot smoke non-Steeples but can indulge if necessary. After a second, Morgan felt voyeuristic and, feeling strangely content with the matter, allowed Robert to have his flirt.

On the way down the winding steps she was stopped by the slightly skipping Lewis and Louisa. “Excuse me,” they said in unison.

“Yes?”

“Before you go,” Lewis asked.

“We have one question,” Louisa added.

“And it relies on honesty,” Lewis continued.

“In order for our arrangement to work,” Louisa perked.

Morgan was silent, her eyes rattled from the display of tennis she had been forced to watch. Four bulbous eyes, one face carrying the stench of canned tuna fish, the other of ashen cigarettes and clove perfume glanced at her with intense orbital discretion.

Lewis said, “Did we have any Daughters on our staff? Now or previously?”

Morgan’s memory took the form of a shuffling deck, her mind’s eye nearing towards her Sisters true names like Darcy, Maribeth, Belle, as if she were looking for an ace in the chaotic order. She said, “Yes, there was a dossier. No Daughters currently. I’ve checked.”

Lewis and Louisa both sighed, stared at one another with a hint of mutual congratulations. “How big?” Louisa asked, “How much of a thorn were we?”

“To be honest,” Morgan said, the drips from the leaking pipes arrhythmically pouting, the steamy printing machines coughing, the secretary shouting nonsense through the halls. “When we were giving an assignment for you, we often saw it as a sort of vacation.”

She left them halfway up the steps, dumbfounded, not privy to their potential offense or relief, but from the brief glance at their four slackened shoulders, moving like some Siamese Twin, she had fear that it was the former. But it was the truth, and they had asked for it, and if the *Vox Sonic* had been willing to forsake credulity and prosperity in the name of ideals, Morgan could think of no better exchange to cement their newfound working relationship. She stepped down the steps, drew up her coat and her collar, and left the *Vox Sonic* in her wake.

3.

The fuse was drawing closer, and Morgan was doing her best at fighting her impatience. The scaffolding of the revolution had begun to manifest; even in Morgan’s prowling of their underground facility and the streets of the Lowers she could hear Snow’s unifying music from the gramophones in the alleys, the brothels, the saloons. It was unapologetic at times, a great chorus that armored Morgan against her anxieties. The scales were being tipped, the great cog had garnered enough inert energy and had begun to move on its own. There was evidence of the *Vox Sonic* throughout the Globe, making its way slowly, methodically, to the other castes from their waterlogged and wart like publishing headquarters. It was, surprisingly, Frederique’s suggestion to temper the *Vox Sonic*’s whistleblowing endeavors from mass insemination into the consciousness. The Middles and the Lowers would be more apt to follow the *Vox Sonic*’s claims, themselves a class built on unification by capital exile, but it would be too suspicious if strategically “misplaced” copies of the publication covered the streets of each stratosphere like discarded checkerboard pieces, waiting to be picked up. Morgan feared that eventually the Queen Bee would order a decimation of the *Vox Sonic*’s headquarters, and she had already issued the Warehouse Boys to take several printing machines underground. This itself was a tactical plan, one which Macintosh had noted – if the *Vox Sonic* had become loud enough to break from its crackpot reputation, then surely its sudden disappearance could be used as a martyr, and if it continued, then the common sense of the Globe public just might prevail. Until then, Morgan was thankful for the *Vox Sonic’*s obscure reputation to armor them from the initial flames of attention.

She was also fearful of her Sisters, and it was precisely this which had kept Morgan up at night, laying awake and staring at the ceiling, listening for hurried footsteps or the unwelcome investigations of danger amidst the leaking cobblestones, the rustling of the sewer water that carved the operation’s infrastructure like Venice canals. Robert said it was a war of attrition, that every day the Queen Bee was losing time until the Globe imploded around her. But Morgan wished that vile witch would simply start *something*, for each day that passed her Sisters become more a victim of scarcity for a resource that they neither knew they needed nor knew had a finite value.

Sitting up in bed, a glass of gin that she had taken as a habit near her night stand, and the divot of ashes in her ashtray, she could not help but feel like a dragon sitting upon a hoard of gold. The bubble shall pop, and the demand for Steeples shall spike in secret, and Tilyou’s Daughters shall go mad with the truth of their genetic bondage but would not have the withal to fight due to organ failure. And then it was simple resource management. When Morgan did find sleep, it was fitful and erratic, plagued by nightmares of her Sisters tearing at one another, turning against their cohorts. Robert knew that this makes Morgan uncomfortable, and she knew that she would not be able to save them from these demons, that an entire family tree would collectively begin to suffer, and there would be no aborted Sisters to save them. Even Bijoux, who’s existence was still out there, and, knowing her, would eventually rear her beehived head Morgan’s way again, might not get the chance. Of that, she was grateful, in a morbid sort of way that reset any lull to sleep that she had just started to descend.

She could not stop prowling the waterways, even though the Warehouse Boys kept the entrances secure. She passed Robert’s personal quarters and saw a beam of light underneath the heavy door, of which the fluttering solo of a horn carved through a hectic conversation of an upright base and piano from the gramophone behind. She thought of bothering him, fully aware that she was calmed by his presence, but she knew the exchange in her mind. He would assure her to be patient, and that would return the egg timer in her head until she asked again.

Passing by, she found a couple of Warehouse Boys smoking cigarettes near a wall, the cloud of tobacco preceding them. They shuffled clear out of the way, giving her wide berth, as if the False Daughter emitted an aura of her own. She did not like this treatment and at first she suspected that their sentiments had been impressed upon by their patriarch, but in time she learned that they were all stubborn in their own ways, which made Morgan strangely trust the lot of them more. They seemed both intimidated and in awe by her, and they had not made a pass at her, even though, as a Daughter, she had acted as their girlfriends, their neighbors, their one-night stands after a long and sweaty day at the docks. Even though they sometimes lingered their eyes on Morgan as they passed, not a single word was spoken to her in such a way. She got the impression that she was more of an idea to them than a concept, much was the way that their learning of the Daughter’s existence probably made them recollect every feminine encounter outside of their own mother’s. *This* did amuse Morgan. Outside Frederique’s door there was no light save the dull illumination of a candle flame and a rhythmic and airy volley of contained moans. *Good for her*, Morgan thought, *she needs it*.

But it was Dr. Cadeu’s laboratory that had become a beacon to Morgan, a dull yellow underneath the steal door of which all sorts of kaleidoscopic wonders lay in briny salt solution baths beset in refurnished porcelain underneath the cathedral enclaves of the waterway’s reclaimed infrastructure. Morgan knocked lightly and, after no response to allow her entry but the sure sign that the doctor was toiling away in the night, she had decided, against the chilly darkness at her back, to allow herself in.

Rosemary Cadeu had become an automaton, her lab coat swirling and damp and shimmering in random sun splatters, her crinkly hair tied up with strands hanging loose as if an octopus had beset on her scalp and over her furrowed brows. A pair of goggles likened her to an insectile mien with her lanky arms and tall frame, but her features were accented with a feminine adornment of a bandana that both evoked the American symbol of Rosie the Riveter and functioned a band in which her hold her cephalopodic hairdo. A half-eaten sandwich lay on a plate along with a cup of stale tea. Both long forgotten. Morgan knew in this moment that she was invisible, no more than a fly on the wall, and that Rosemary was so engrossed in her element that she felt at once immediately disruptive. Still, the feat was mesmerizing to Morgan, who had never once experienced such a display of inert, effortless psychological flow that she was currently witnessing: how she moved about the table on the wheels of her stool with purpose and intelligence, a conductor of a different kind. Morgan had only dreamed of achieving this within herself, had never had time to truly master anything beyond the length of her role aside from the markedly pointed ability to get herself into trouble and fight herself out. It was then that Rosemary had spun, tapping a vial full of oily goo and inspecting its viscosity in its transparent chamber that she noticed Morgan standing in the doorway and nearly dropped her container.

“Morgan, goodness,” Rosemary said, holding the vial to her stomach like some treasured coconut.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Doctor,” Morgan said, realizing this was a stupid thing to say.

“Rosemary,” she corrected, then she softened, her terse lips growing full, her cheeks flushing. She elevated the glass-bottles of her goggles like a mechanic’s visor. “To what pleasure does the False Daughter aim to visit this fishy closet in the sewer in the middle of the night?”

“If this lab is too cramped for your productivity, we can-”

“I was joking,” she said, pulling up a chair. “Come, sit. I could use a break.”

Morgan considered this, had known her whole life that she had not much room for friendship, and in this threshold between the infinite blackness of their operation’s den and the shimmering aura emanating from the laboratory, Morgan felt particularly in a flux. Would old Morgan have slipped away, kept her emotional credit for more important use such as the mistress of an executive, a street busker, a member of a bohemian enclave, such as which was the nature of her assignments? Daughters did not have friends because they did not last, their identities were shred the second the Auditors determined so, the closest breech of intimacy being the scattered and only occasional co-assignments of the fellow Daughters, a hidden sorority functioned more by psychic familiarity than anything else. But this was not the old Morgan, and she had learned by watching Robert since the very beginning in the back of the Manhattan pub. Important people need friends, and Morgan, whether she had truly intended so or not, had become a decidedly important person. But Morgan knew the truth. She liked Rosemary, and had sought her company because her light was on, a safe harbor in which to weather the storms of her own self-doubt.

She stopped at one of the psycho-oyster baths, looking at the shimmer just underneath the meniscus. A metropolis of shells lay in the pools, only visible by the rigid geometries of the clusters and the slightly darker shimmers amongst the rainbows, and that was only because Morgan herself had a keen eye.

Rosemary broke her concentration, “If you’re going to get wobbly again, I’m going to kick you out. And if you continue to stand, I’m going to kick you out.”

Morgan shook, pulled away from the mesmerizing baths. She could not explain why they captured her so. The pools in the old subway line had done the same, and even, from the incredible difference, they had a magnetic, subconscious pull on her from her shipping container perch at Koch Lake. Morgan peeled herself from the enticing baths and settled on the chair at the far end of the lab table, where the stainless-steel platform was occupied by a miniature crystal fairgrounds of Bunsen burners, beakers, petri dishes, and a tossed deck of cards that were an assortment of Rosemary Cadeu’s notes written in an unexpectantly childlike and un-secretarial script.

“You look like you’d bathe in it,” Rosemary said.

“Just as well,” Morgan said, “those things are in my blood.”

“Not entirely,” Rosemary, “but a compound created from their mucus.”

“Gross,” Morgan said.

“Typical oysters are, I believe. Like cold living beings of snot. But they are fascinating, and the psycho-oysters, believe it or not, actually drool in technicolor.”

“Still gross,” Morgan said. Then she paused, “Do those psycho-oysters and I share DNA?”

“Probably, yes,” Rosemary said, amused at herself. Then she shot from her chair, left to a dark corner of the lab, and returned with an opalescent jewel in a silk box. She presented it to Morgan.

It was a pearl, perfectly weathered by the slimy, muscled tongue of the oyster from which it had been born by a single grain of sand. It was pinkish in color, as most pearls were, but it refracted light in a way that informed Morgan that it was of psycho-oyster genesis. She raised it to the light and watched it shine like a miniature sun, sending out rays of technicolor that hued the damp stone rooftop, crystallizing with each leaking drop from above.

“Very rare, those things,” Rosemary said.

“Most pearls are.”

“Have you ever seen one?”

Morgan fingered the necklace that Robert had given her, back during their exodus from Ellis Island. “Indeed, I have.”

“Believe it or not, that’s the second one I found myself,”

“Someone should take you to a casino,” Morgan said, shifting the prism as it was balanced in between three fingers.

“And I crushed it into powder,” Rosemary said.

“What?”

“I tell you why, or you can ask me what I discovered.”

“Only one?”

“Only one.”

“Go ahead.”

Rosemary leaned forward, taking the pearl from Morgan’s fingers, balancing it delicately in her palm, moving it around with her opposite finger. “It has the same make up as the psycho-oyster mucus, but it’s more potent with its mineral infusions. So much that it actually purifies the mucus, turns it normal. The pearls are essentially cancerous.” She twisted the stool and frantically pulled out two petri dishes clamped and preserved with plexiglass. Two sun splatters flattened against the surface, one shimmering in the way that oil did, refracting and projecting light, the other looking very much like boring old snot. Rosemary continued, “The icky one is the healthy one. The cells don’t emit the aphrodisiac, the nicotine, or the electricity from the Steeples. It’s boring old snotty oyster muck. And look,” Rosemary said, smirking as she turned around, and Morgan could not help but feel that she was going to feel alarmed by whatever Rosemary was planning on revealing, which, as she turned and revealed three vials of blood, it was. She placed them in a holder, waved them like some gameshow host. The first vial contained a scarlet viscous fluid, the second and third contained a slightly darker make, slightly tinged green, tiny flecks like little stars glittered throughout.

Rosemary said, “It’s your blood, well, the second and third are. The first is mine.”

“How did you get my blood?” Morgan said, suddenly alarmed, surprised at the adrenaline that had burst through her veins as if ignited by dynamite. She herself was taken aback by her defensiveness, knowing that her subconscious trust of Rosemary, or want of, superimposed upon Biotechnic Tectonics, the mast vats, the floating, malformed fetuses, traveling further into her gauze wrapped psyche of Faux-Ophelia’s deformed body and eventually, to Ophelia Tilyou herself.

Rosemary raised a hand, revealing a mustard yellow sweater underneath her lab coat. “You cut your hand on one of my knifes, remember?”

Morgan flushed, “And you kept it?”

“It would be a waste,” Rosemary said. “Can you just listen? I’m trying to educate you.”

Morgan crossed her arms, watched the vials of blood in front of her.

Rosemary then proceeded to take the pearl-fused vial of psycho-oyster mucous and pour it into one of Morgan’s samples. At once, like some magician’s trick, the vial lightened and dissolved the stars within its hemoglobin chamber, turning lighter, stopping at the shade to the first sample. Rosemary said, “Can’t you see?”

“Explain,” Morgan said, leaning forward, feeling like she already knew, her eyes alight. “Tell me, Doctor.”

Rosemary smiled, “The first two vials are non-Steeple impacted blood. The third vial, the one untouched, is yours. As is the second, obviously.”

Morgan leaned back, rested a chin on interlaced fingers as if she were gazing upon art. Her shoulders slackened. “I don’t believe you.”

“You don’t have a choice, Morgan. The science doesn’t lie. Here,” she offered the pearl to Morgan, floating the orb atop her palm like some rite in front of a statue. “Eat this. You won’t need those silly Steeples anymore.”

The kaleidoscopic sphere loomed in Morgan’s scope, bobbing slightly in Dr. Cadeu’s palm, shimmering underneath the exposed overhead lights. She believed Rosemary not because she wanted to but because she needed to. What was presented before Morgan was the very acid that would dissolve the final, intimate, violating chains upon her soul, a chance to free herself from the reigns of the Queen Bee, to clear the scars of her genetic past. She had a stash of Steeples, and was secure in her statement that she obtains full capacity to them to further divorce the idea of Robert as a surrogate Auditor. But also so she could take the Steeples and distribute them among her Sisters and take the pearl and take the reverse route out of the Globe, to live as Samantha or Ophelia or Carmen or whomever, even, perhaps, at Morgan herself. She could start her life, untethered to Globe, washed free of its briny sins. She lifted a finger and dropped it, searching for safety in the warmth of her bobbing knees.

Rosemary frowned. “Morgan, I don’t think you understand.”

“I understand, and I’m saying no,” Morgan said, “take it away from me.”

“Then I don’t understand. Why don’t you want to eat the pearl? It’s not like I could recreate it. I don’t have the resources and I think we both have the common sense to know that finding two pearls was the end of my luck. No casinos for me,” Rosemary said, pressing against the pearl with her thumb, rolling it around.

Morgan shook her head, sighing, unable to identify with any confidence the words spouting from her mouth. “If I took that, I would be above the very Sisters I would be trying to save.”

“You wouldn’t,” Rosemary said, “you being freed from this genetic bondage does nothing but help you.”

“Can you synthesize an artificial pearl?” Morgan asked, looking up, feeling the opalescent presence of the gem’s opalescence.

Rosemary shook her head. “Not without Biotechnic Tectonics.”

“The things you could do with that lab, doctor.”

Morgan stood, the stool screeching behind her. A great weight had impressed upon her shoulders; she felt has if she were biting on aluminum foil. “It’s the Steeples we need. Robert is right. How is that going?”

Rosemary sighed and placed the pearl in the box, pocketing it as if she were prepared to conjure it again. “What do you think you’ve been smoking the past two weeks?”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“Rosemary,” she said, eye brow raised.

“Right, yes,” Morgan said, and then she left the laboratory, hearing the acute sound of the straps of the doctor’s goggles return over her visage, feeling her own sudden sensitivity to the wind as the doctor turned her back on Morgan, already engrossed into her Steeple production before closing the door.

4.

It had taken two weeks into the steady vomiting of the *Vox Sonic*’s editorials that Morgan had noticed the fuse beginning to spark. The original publications lifted a grimy rock and revealed the bugs of the Globe underneath: the existence of the Daughters, proof of their machinations throughout the stratosphere of their ecology, those strange cigarettes named after the original owner of the land of which their great city was built. The Welch’s both fought Robert on announcing the existence of the Queen Bee, fearing that too much truth would disavow their credibility, that the public only needed the initial kick. Robert, surprisingly, relented, and together he and Morgan watched the great tide of ink and thick plied paper drain from the golden toilets of the Uppers to disseminate, in the way of stymies from flowers, into the lower echelons of the Globe.

People were taking to it, Charlie announcing that their words were now screaming in disbelief over Snow’s uniting music within the pubs and brothels. Frederique illustrated an exchange in an Uppers salon between two housewives and a cluster of men looking for hats in a department store. Although they were not particularly convinced in the way that Charlie’s observation was, they were talking about it as if the plots in their own lives moved forward. And her lover, a Warehouse Boy whose name seemed to consist of the singularly syllabled Mank said that the ports and the port towns they head into for lunch are rife with talk, each head covered behind a *Vox Sonic* branded wall as they ate in their dining booths and luncheon counters. And if the *Vox Sonic*’s facts dwindled downwards with a glacial, chilling intensity beset with change, they were met with the fiery excitement for those who saw the shrug of the great powers at be which had held them at bay for so long, the Middles, the Lowers, even the Dredges perkier now, no longer aimless, the Cult of Atlas no longer preaching their own values but now the sins enacted against them by their financial betters.

This fire and ice created a sickly, noxious draft that manifested, to Morgan’s pulled heart strings, in the queasy look of her failing Sisters. No longer did she need to require her sixth sense to identify them; they looked forlorn and green, attempting their Assignments with slightly bowed heads, bags underneath their eyes. The look actually worked for those in the less glamorous roles, but for the escorts and courtesans and mistresses of the Uppers the disconnect would have been hilarious if not for the terrible nature of their own efforts to succeed. It was easy to pick with them out even from afar: a beautiful woman, bred for peak physical and intellectual conditioning and emotional malleability, had turned into a wavering deflated shadow of her former self, attempting to inflate upon their own fumes. What struck Morgan as particularly terrible was the sick puppy dogs that had become of some of them. Dressed in their pearls or their bohemian cloaks, some of them wandered the streets unaware of the true nature of their affliction, or perhaps unbelieving it. Some of them, smart enough to recognize a connection between Steeples and their weakness, even sought to complete their Assignments with haste in which to obtain more Steeples from the Auditors, not even aware of great hives inability to produce more.

“It’s obvious, if you look hard enough,” said Charlie Macintosh in an alley across the street from the *Vox Sonic*, watching the Warehouse Boys trail in and out with a modicum of discreetness the few higher quality printing presses and documents special to the Welch’s. The twins had predicted that the heat generated from their news would have a boiling quality, that of which would amount to some opposing power, in what form it took, to eliminate either the staff, the chief editors, or the building itself in some symbolic grievance. The *Vox Sonic* was preparing to travel underground, and the Welch’s had not even attempted to see the misfortune as anything but validating.

His wide berth, frog like in a way that would rival Arno, chomped on a cigar that was cradled in two sausage fingers. His bowler hat was tilted at an angle in which to shield his walrus brows from the lights. The streets of the Uppers were naturally glinted in the way that its residents were, but the *Vox Sonic*’s maladroit presence caused such an eyesore as to counteract the smooth and streamlined contours of light present within the district that surrounded it. He discreetly pointed with a clubby finger to a woman who was walking as if on a boat, one hand holding herself, the other constricted around her date or her lover as if he were a secure mast in a storm. He continued, “She’s a little green.”

“She’s dying, Mr. Macintosh,” Morgan said, feeling irate at the man next to her. She thought of the pearl that Rosemary had presented, glinting like a sun in the middle of the night. She had refused the pearl, of course, and refused doubly to regret her decision, but it was times like this that she wanted to pry her drained Sister from whatever Assignment had bound her and shove the pearl into her mouth. If she only had more than one.

Macintosh took a puff and appeared to swallow it. “All those pretty girls. If people just noticed that the *pretty* girls are shriveling like raisins, then they would see it. Is this what it was like for you, to pick them out of the crowd? Mr. Forrest told me of your sixth sense with them, your sorority bond. Was that the case?”

“People recognize their ilk. It’s inherent, Mr. Macintosh,” Morgan said.

“You’ve damned them, you know,” Macintosh said, eyeing two men attempt to belay a press from the top of the *Vox Sonic* to a neighboring rooftop. The entrance to their underground headquarters was several blocks away, and they needed to travel their machinery in secret, even though it looked funny and was terribly inefficient.

“I know that,” Morgan said, “which is why I’ve got to end this as soon as possible.”

She pulled out her own Steeple and a box of matches, eying Macintosh to see if he was going to perform some semblance of chivalry so she could deny him. Instead, she produced the flame herself, took a drag, and, begrudgingly, stood in the aura of Macintosh’s leathery cigar smoke.

“Not what I’m referring to. You’ve outed, them.”

“The Globe needed to know. And it was a political move. You of all people should know that.”

Macintosh tossed Morgan a sideways glance, one which suggested his hand on the burner of whatever temperature of conversation this could be steered. Instead, he said, “Sure, of course. But you’ve used the clones as kindling in the great fire of this war you’re waging. Not only are you taking away their cigarettes, which is wild by concept, but now the public is aware of them. The Queen Bee ain’t got her power as much, but your sisters, your clones.” Macintosh shook his head, “They only know how to exist in secrecy.”

“They are more than clones, Mr. Macintosh. I implore you to remember that.”

The assembly line of Warehouse Boys worked in a series of grunts, one of them holding onto another to get the levitating metal carcass of an alley, two holding onto the anchoring man. It looked like the beginning of a Chaplin film.

Macintosh said, “You’re right. They’re more.”

“Glad you understand.”

“They are wives, lovers, mistresses. They are barmaids and nurses. They are everything.” Macintosh was silent for a second, then he pointed with a chubby stub of a finger to one of the men straining to bring the printing machine the final inches where the makeshift rig had failed. “Do you see that man? That’s Tiny Freddy.”

“He doesn’t look tiny.”

“Well, physically, no. But ever since Chloe he’s had a tiny heart and not much room for anything else but work and ale. Chloe was his girlfriend.”

“We’ve all lost something,” Morgan said, and then realizing her callousness, said, “but I’m sorry to hear this regardless.”

“Chloe had made him a man, he said. They were together for only a couple months, maybe half a year. He proposed to her and then the next day she was gone. He’s been fine, of course. More or less. He doesn’t talk about it anymore. But you see, he picked up the reveal from the *Vox Sonic* just two weeks ago, showing the existence of the Daughters, and you see, Tiny Freddy begins pulling out his hair, people finding him drunk in parks after closing. Not a good look for him, and I’m in charge of keeping these fools in shape. So it goes up to me. I can’t have some drunkard on my crew. I mean, we’re all drunkards, but everyone is reliable and Tiny Freddy just stopped caring about work. So you know what he does? He barges into my office, stinking of whiskey, and slams the article on my desk as if I had nothing better to do than wait for him. ‘She smoked those funny cigarettes’, he said. And then, because I knew he’d do it anyway if I said no, I allowed him to find that girl he had fallen in love with, take a couple days off, clear his head. And guess what? He found her. She was in the Uppers, looking as green as the rest, a deflated balloon hanging onto the marbled bar at the Oslo, of all places. This whole time, this beer swinging, sea-shanty singing, raucous girl was making martinis for men who own department stores! Can you believe that?”

Morgan knew better than to give into Charlie’s aggravations, in part because she knew he was not entirely wrong. She had never needed to give thought to the men and women whose lives she had destroyed in homage to the Queen Bee. They were abstract, their individual charms and worries and essence of their humanity swept underneath the rug of them simply being the mark of the Daughter. Morgan had not given any consideration to the foreign architect that had fallen in love with her only for her to crush him. Morgan clenched her fist until she could feel the whites of her own knuckles.

He continued, “And what of the sons of the Globe? Some of my boys and even my girls are worried that their mommy is a Daughter. I’m worried that even mine is. Did I suck a tit that had been duplicated one hundred times over? Did I suck a wax simulacrum of *Ophelia Tilyou’s tit*?”

Morgan said, calmly, through her gritted teeth, “Tilyou’s Daughters cannot bear children. Rest assured, your infantile lips sucked on the correct breast, of which of you seem still to have a knack for.”

Charlie Macintosh coughed, collected himself, and grunted. “You know the difference between you and me? Aside from the obvious?”

“Enlighten me, Mr. Macintosh.”

“You’ve never been responsible for other people,” he said, eyes on the procession on the rooftop. There was enough room for three printing presses if everyone on the *Sonic* agreed to trade sweat and ink rags elbow to elbow, which the Welch’s seemed strangely excited about. They were on the third of three, and by now even Morgan had to admit their ant-like conveyer belt had become more efficient with repeated trials. Charlie Macintosh bit on his cigar and eyed them.

“I believe it was Robert and I who brought you in. If not me, your boys would have been drowned at Koch Lake.”

“Not the same,” Charlie said. “Your Sisters, those Daughters of Tilyou or whatever, you’ve outed them. Strategically of course, but you’ve outed them. They hate you because you’re taking something from them. They don’t know what they have to gain. When this is all over, how in the world will they reintegrate into society? Not all of them will have your merry troupe of idealists. They will not come home to a Mr. Forrest or that pretty *Francoise* Frederique. In your effort to give them freedom, you’ve given them a choice between their own lives and the Queen Bee. Hey. Hey! Why are you mucking the third time, you idiots!”

With a terribly asynchronous swiftness, Charlie Macintosh, union leader with the publicized rivalry against a wealthy lawyer, seemed to lope in the direction of the *Vox Sonic* and the adjacent building, yelling just enough for his men to hear at an octave that only they could.

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Morgan knew that she all but cornered Robert during his game of chess as she was doing it. She disliked bothering him, not out of fear but of respect. Robert Forrest had learned to leave her in her moods, to let her stew in her anxiety. The man did not take much breaks, but when he did Morgan often found him passively present; an island separated by imposed distraction of books or closed eyes near a phonogram, a set of cards for a singular game or the even rarer sketch pad. Surrounded by the smells of whiskey, beer, the slight medicine smell of Frederique’s gin martini, and the sound of a decently playing fiddle, Morgan approached Robert nestled in between steel kegs of ale and crates containing whatever smuggled mystery from before Charlie had leased the warehouse to the cause. He used to play chess with the Warehouse Boys, had actually seemed to take enjoyment at it, but after obtaining a near-100% win streak against the collective intellectual egos of Macintosh’s briny and calloused cavalcade, he had found his challengers falling by the wayside, of which he had managed, without any display of disappointment, to find a repeat challenger in himself.

“Mr. Forrest,” Morgan said, sliding across from him, the Black Queen positioned maximally in the center of the board. She saw him protest and added, “Robert.”

Robert, ever amused, leaned away from the board, gave Morgan his full attention. A glass of whiskey lay with speckles of cigarette ash and Robert pulled another from his pocket. He offered a Steeple from his own cache and Morgan declined, having her own. She could not quite understand why he kept a Steeple in his company.

“Something bothered you today,” Robert said, eyes slanted, brows furrowed. “Is it impatience again? What do they say? A watched pot never boils? We’re waiting for the next move. Eventually the Queen Bee will target the *Vox Sonic* in some shape or form. You know, you can’t rush public opinion.”

Morgan shook her head. “We need to. The Daughters. They are dying.”

“And Dr. Cadeu can manufacture Steeples on her own,” he said, “when there is demand, we’ll supply them. I won’t let your Sisters falter.”

Morgan said, “Not quite, Robert. We took their Steeples and revealed their bondage. The Queen Bee could use this as leverage.”

“We’re giving her task force a nap,” he said, “that’s all.”

“Robert,” Morgan said, leaning forward, “I don’t think you understand. My Sisters aren’t horrible people.”

“I know, Morgan,”

“They are misguided,” she said, “I’m going to give them Steeples.”

At this Robert sat up, sprung to attention as if Morgan had committed some hex. “You’d reveal yourself. It’s too early. The Queen Bee needs to understand what is happening, and the *Vox Sonic*’s editorials are lighting that fire for us.”

“You don’t understand,” Morgan said, now reaching into her pocket and pulling a Steeple herself. Robert supplied matches; he had quickly learned that Morgan much preferred to light her own flames. “They are dying, and they know this. It’s impossible for them not to believe the *Vox Sonic*. We see them bickering and salvaging all the time. It’s not biological bondage, it’s emotional. We’ve outed them. There is no future for them if we win.”

“That’s not true,” Robert said, “it’s freedom. Unlimited Steeples. No more assignments. They could be…themselves, not just instruments.”

“But they don’t see that!” Morgan said, “They don’t understand that. All they see now is the chains that bind them, and the Ophelia has no choice but to use this as leverage.”

Robert chewed on this. “Forced bondage versus death?”

“Isn’t that always the case? And instead of quelling them, perhaps we can get my Sisters to join us, perhaps-”

Robert toked on the cigarette and blew the plume on the chess board, where the Fog of War dispersed and revealed the checkered war before them. He smirked, “You’ve got me to rights. While I do not understand the experience of you or your Sisters, I can empathize.”

“What do I do, Robert?” Morgan asked.

“Make them think there is something more,” he said, shrugging, “make them understand that there is a life waiting for them. But I’ll be honest, I don’t know how to do that.”

“I think I do,” Morgan said, smoking her own Steeple. She picked up the Queen and positioned it in a better position. “Check.”

Robert smiled, asked no more questions, and set about to move his pieces. Together, hurled over the board, they smoked and sipped and listened to music, and time warped around them.

5.

The *Vox Sonic*’s influence had grown rapidly and with the propensity of slime mold, curtailing through every alley possible, weaving in every salon and brothel. Only the Uppers, of which the warty presence and collectively benign lump of the outlet’s headquarters had begun to slip, with intense fervency, into the caviar and martini coated mouths of the Upper’s glistening lips, attempted to floss and brush away the decay that was forever encroaching. The Dredges had remained the Dredges, as always impervious to the politics of those which crested upon its shoulders as thankless scaffolds. If Faux-Ophelia had been alive, perhaps things would have been different. But the other echelons of Globe society had become a wound Tesla coil; evidence of riots in the Lowers, barred entry for the Uppers attempting to coopt a space, Alfred Snow’s anthem singing openly, brazenly, threateningly, from every illuminated window. The *Vox Sonic* had evoked a spirit of the Middles, galvanizing the Cult of the Atlas, making their less fanatical and zealot influenced working men aware of the chains which had bound them. And now, with the ever-green tinged skin of the Daughters, their weakness a siren in itself of manifestation of the now obvious and insulting social control of the Queen Bee, they had seceded from the public visage after a series of, to Morgan’s disappointment, targeted attacks that left several Daughters, themselves bred for Global preservation and thus self-preservation, in the sorry state of actively killing their assailants. And now, the Queen Bee’s aged palm against the chains were beginning to decay with rust.

It was within the Uppers, sitting on a rooftop across from the now vacated *Vox Sonic*, that Morgan lit a cigarette and placed it on an elevated cradle like an incense before lighting a Steeple of her own. The lower strata of the Globe were restless with change but the Uppers, aware of the manipulation themselves of a different ilk (the Uppers, Morgan forced herself to recall, required a more intimate, and thus more severe approach to manipulation. The Uppers Assignments required months, sometimes years, to complete) skulked about their oyster bars with martinis and glasses of expensive wine in hand, thinking of how, if ever, they had been duped, reminded into humility of what power they had never possessed.

The pot was boiling, and Morgan watched the decrepit street outside of the abandoned *Vox Sonic*, the lights of the waterlogged building still with the printing presses as a timer to assume the illusion of a truth heralding body at work deep into the night. The effect of eliminating the outlet was a clumsy gambit, even for the Queen Bee, and this itself showed a weakening hand. Robert had tried to convince Morgan suggested just yesterday that they could probably storm Biotechnic Tectonics, what with the current state of affairs and the increasingly public support for the False Daughter in appearance of graffiti, open vocalization, and to Morgan’s prickly amusement, Middles peddled scarves marked with *FD* sold throughout the train stations and trolley junctions. But it was not entirely won. The Queen Bee would lose, yes, but she had created the hive as a hydra. Someone would fill the vacuum and continue her legacy, just as she intended, and Morgan could not find solace knowing that, even on the eve of decapitation, those most ardent to their bondage would rather chaw their own legs off like a caught fox. And they all assumed the face of Bijoux in Morgan’s dreams.

Morgan fingered her necklace, stripped of the false pearls and containing only the drilled psycho-oyster pearl that Robert had given her since the beginning of their return to the Globe. Things would be easier for everyone if Rosemary could recreate these pearls instead of the Steeples, of which she now contained an entire pack in her breast pocket. Yet she smoked and watched the pyre burn to her finger tips as she eyed the *Vox Sonic*, not energized by the Steeple itself, but energized because she had returned her organs to equilibrium.

Ten minutes later she had encountered what she had expected. A Daughter, limping, holding her stomach, *suffering* like sagging rags of flesh, approached the *Vox Sonic*’s hangnail exterior with terrible tact that would, under favorable circumstances, be cause for concern for the gripping powers of the Hive. Morgan watched from the rooftop, eyeing her like a falcon. She was the same Daughter from several weeks prior, the one that had crossed their paths as she was in the company of Charlie Macintosh. She was obvious, especially operating under the guise of night. Even though their Daughter’s innate sense of one another had been muted, Morgan could still sense them like the idly plucked string of some distance harp, of this, she knew, was in no small impact by the Steeples that she kept on her person and kept her senses sharp.

Her Sister skulked through the same alley where the Warehouse Boys had lifted a printing machine over the alleyway. Morgan watched her float towards a window that Morgan herself had kept ajar and force herself in with a visible strain of effort to lift the pane. Their efforts to complete their assignments were stronger than their efforts for preservation, and Morgan wondered as her Sister folded herself into the vacant arena of the *Vox Sonic*, if she had been one of the many sisters who had, in their efforts of self-preservation, counter-assaulted those who had lifted a finger against her. Morgan grimaced, watching the struggles of her Sister; the Daughters of Tilyou had experienced a terrible, catastrophic couple of weeks.

Morgan followed suit, jumping from the awning, careful not to wake the owners of the balcony across from the *Vox Sonic*. She slipped in just as her Sister had turned into the abandoned but illuminated foyer of the building. Creeping behind the familiar pillars of old periodicals, hiding behind corners of desks and cabinets, Morgan watched over the Napoleonic battlefield of the *Vox Sonic*’s linoleum divots and undusted frames of departed printing machines and ancient typewriters for her relative. Morgan followed her up the creaking steps, shying as her weakening kin stopped to hold onto the banister, her organs reminding her of her failure in such intensity as to not notice Morgan at all. In some symbolic gesture, the Daughter shambled into the joint Welch office, her silhouette crumbling by the strain of escalation, the frosted windows showing a saddened, ruined figure that Morgan instinctively forced herself to withhold a Steeple.

Then, in some mystery granted by shadow, her silhouette reached into the confines of her coat and pulled out some strange, square object, and it was now that Morgan had decided to burst into the office, sobered in some unconscious sense by the lack of machinery and desk (the Welch’s only agreed upon relic of their pre-underground existence), suddenly aware of the scuff marks from the Warehouse Boys, the discarded cigarette buds, the somehow evasive tin of tuna fish from Lewis’s misaimed throw. The Daughter stirred, hands caught in stasis, the bottle of Luna Rum with its oil drenched tail in one hand, a plastic carton of gasoline in the other. It was actually this that Morgan noticed first; gasoline had become tariffed, sanctioned by the city watch and the barons in the Uppers in favor of the Queen Bee. The poor girl held a political catastrophe in the palm of her hand. Proximity allowed Morgan to confirm the girl as the one she had seen prior. A short nose, slightly feline curve of the mouth, green eyes that could rival an emerald. She looked, Morgan noticed, like she pictured Samantha outside the guise of a murdered body. Morgan raised her pistol.

“You would be wise to steady your hand,” Morgan said, her pistol withdrawn. “I have no intention to shoot you if you have no intention to light that instrument of yours.”

The girl tightened. She stammered; her voice slurred as if taken by alcohol. “You’re the one, The False…the False Daughter. Miranda.”

“Morgan,” she corrected, “and that shall be my name until I die.”

Samantha’s brows furrowed, the adrenaline of the events catching up to her and forcing her to attention. Morgan had expected this but disliked the display all the same. She said, “You’re the one. The cancer.”

“Am I?” Morgan said, rounding her, keep her back towards the windows, strafing through her iron sight where the Welch’s dusty desk once sat. “I’m not taking the Steeples from you.”

“I hardly believe that,” Samantha said, her eyes darting, the lighting still an arm’s length away from the explosive. “I don’t believe for a second that we’ve been drugged the whole time. The Queen Bee would never do that.”

Morgan shook her head, “Think, my sister, why you feel like you’re dying. Yes, I am responsible for the embargo of Steeples, but I did not introduce you to them. I was there as a street rat, going through my initiation, a ten-year-old reaching across from a special cigarette because I felt strange. Yes, I took the Steeples from you, but all I did was rattle the existing chains.”

Samantha shook her head, “You’re a liar. They call you the False Daughter because you are not of us. You seek to destroy who we are.”

“And what is that?” Morgan said, “what master do you serve?”

“The Queen Bee,” Samantha said, “and you’ve failed her.”

“But I haven’t failed myself,” Morgan said, “I did, once. But not now. I trust you are all clones, that we are all just copies of Ophelia herself?”

Samantha nodded, “We are legion.”

“You’ve best to put down that bottle of rum. I don’t want to shoot you.”

“You act like you’re the righteous one,” she said, eyeing Morgan, her own athletics clearly dwindled but trying to maintain the composure that her organs were not failing. Morgan felt a pang of sadness for her misguided Sister; she had evoked this deadly failure in both their biology’s, even if this flirtation with the mortal coil was meant to function as a warbler in a mine. Samantha continued, her eyes now pearling with tears, “You act like *you’re* not the terrorist!”

“Terrorist?” Morgan yelled louder than she had expected, “Don’t you see? It’s you who is in chains. I’m trying to free you. I’m trying to free this city.”

“For whom?” Samantha said, “Was not the state of things adequate for you? Is there a lost chromosome in our genes that inhibits your ability to be content?”

Morgan smirked. “Admittedly, that was a good insult, but alas you are incorrect. I’ve been to Biotechnic Tectonics. I’ve seen where we come from. I’ve seen the horrors that Ophelia has committed.”

“But is not that a malnourished display of your own morals? Us Daughters are born with purpose.”

“But not your own.”

“It doesn’t need to be,” Samantha said, several tears draping down her cheeks, smudging the makeup in black tendrils. Sweat clung to her dark hair, making her look subterranean in addition to her green skin, tinged in faintly as that American Lady Liberty from the golden spray tan reminiscent of her last Assignment in the Uppers.

“You ask who I’m trying to free the city for?” Morgan said, “I’m freeing it from Ophelia.”

“Queen Bee, great mother,” Samantha said.

“She is not a god. She is a woman, and old one.”

“She’s the original. The press revealed who we are.”

“The first iteration,” Morgan said, “living off of our lab bred organs, using our bodies as puppets to maintain the only truth about her – that she only desires power. She doesn’t care about you.”

Samantha wavered. Her hands unconsciously shook and she, delicately, idiotically, attempted to light match with one hand. It was impossible, and Morgan kept her iron sights locked. She said, “You’re nothing but a puppet, my sister. And those strings are Steeples. You must at least accept that.”

“The Auditors give us enough Steeples to live. Or they used to. They gave us life.”

“Because Ophelia programed us for dependency. You are not what they made you to be. Do the calculus yourself.”

Samantha blinked away the sting of tears. “If I don’t blow this building, I won’t get those Steeples.”

Morgan took one hand from her gun and slowly reaching into her pocket, withdrawing two Steeples. Samantha held back a jump, her body returning from a burst of lionesque poise to her shrunken self. Brows creased with disdain. “I knew it! It was all true. The False Daughter has her own stash because it was stolen from us! The selfish one at the cost of many.”

“We have seized the Steeple production, yes,” Morgan said, “But only to wrestle it from Ophelia. We have an unlimited supply and we won’t charge you or make you complete assignments for them. Without those Steeples, she has no hold on you and the Auditors are reduced to simply being men. Morgan watched Samantha’s eyes dart between the two cylinders. The building creaked. Morgan said, “I understand you have an assignment, and I understand in totality what would happen if you failed it, especially in these times, but you have a choice. If you don’t want to come with me, at least hear me out and let get out of here. You can take my pack and hide it from your Auditor. It’s yours. But right now, put the bottle down and have a smoke with me. I fear we both aren’t thinking clearly in our mutual self-destruction.”

“I will not listen to a terrorist,” Samantha said.

“There is little difference between blowing up a third-rate printing press in five minutes as opposed to ten. And besides, do you think your legs can carry you out of this flame and into the arms of the Auditor? You can hardly hold the bottle, and I watched you skulk up the stairs. Your Auditor will not know the difference.”

“Yes he will,” Samantha said, “He will be here in fifteen minutes.”

Morgan tilted her head. “We both know the Auditors don’t hover of the Daughters. You are running out of farces.”

“Things have changed upon your reckoning, False Daughter,” Samantha said. “If I don’t complete my Assignment fast enough, then the Steeple that I am meant to pluck from his fat fingers will go to another Sister. You’ve pit us against one another, and my Auditor is particularly unforgiving.”

“It sounds quite convincing that the Auditor does not care if you live or die, only if you complete the assignment. You’re expendable. Would you gamble on completing the assignment to live in your weakened state another day, or spare a terrorist such as myself two minutes to give you something that you need and that the Auditor will never understand?”

Samantha wavered. She gulped, closed her eyes as if about to drift into slumber. Her fingers drummed weakly on the bottle.

Morgan offered the Steeple. “Put the explosive down. It can go off in a couple of minutes.”

Samantha eyed the cylinder in Morgan’s outstretched hand, returned to Morgan’s eyes, nodded, and placed the bottle and matches on a dusty table apparently not important enough to the Welch’s to be transferred to their new subterranean digs. She said, “I don’t have enough strength to light it.”

“So the matches were a farce,” Morgan said.

“I would have found the strength,” she said. Then she added, “Could you maybe light it for me?”

“Step away from the bottle, come closer,” Morgan said, and as Samantha crossed the room littered with empty beer cans and printer cartridges and tumbleweeds of damp and moldy newspaper pages that had developed a briny, mottled quality, she placed one Steeple in her lips and returned her pistol.

Samantha’s hands cupped the flame around the struck match, themselves three petals holding a miniature fire that illuminated the contours of Morgan’s hurdled face.

“Thank you,” Samantha said.

Morgan succeeded in lighting the Steeple, offered it to Samantha who took it with a drag as if she were a fish gasping for air. Then recovering, Morgan drew one for herself and entered the electric aura, fumbling the match to strike her own flame. She could imagine what organic relief her Sister was feeling, the toxin from the psycho-oysters supplying much needed aminos or proteins or whatever. By now, with even one toke, her muscles must feel rejuvenated, reenergized with some briny, kaleidoscopic mana. It was a true pleasure for Morgan to bring this to her Sister, even if the reprieve was temporary. This fire was more than an exchange of pleasantries, it was the return of the great unspoken Steeple exchange amongst Tilyou’s Daughters, the gesture of unity, one which Morgan, in her admitting campaign of reckoning for the Globe, had forgotten how much she craved.

Morgan finally got the match to light, and as she raised the tiny pyre to her own Steeple, she felt a hammer fall upon her brows, knocking her backwards and stumbling like a newborn faun into a bookcase that just two weeks prior had been taken by dutiful Warehouse Boys and returned as redundant furniture. Splinters entered the back of her neck and arms like porcupine needles, and her vision had become starbursts of light followed by thick fog. The electric aura of the Steeple approached her like an olfactory phantom, one which gained shape firstly as two super imposed, nausea summoning images and then joining into one.

“You are a cancer,” Samantha said, crossing the room, placing a shoe on the hand Morgan would have used to reach for her dropped pistol. She smoked the Steeple with one hand and put a hand on her hip with the other, lording over her. As much as Morgan had wanted to feel empathy for her distressed kin, she could not help but see, underneath the pouting lips, the forlorn eyes so full of misguided rage, that this was an uglier version of Samantha, or perhaps the Samantha that Frederique had never had the chance to see. Samantha’s bottom lip quivered. She hissed, “You are quite charming, you know that? Is this it? An assignment given to you by someone else?”

Morgan tried speaking but Samantha dug her heels into the top of Morgan’s palm, the pressure crushing each tendon and vein.

Samantha continued, “Do you not understand, False Daughter? Every single terminal has you listed as their prime mark. When in the Globe’s history have you ever experienced an assignment so important that the Queen Bee authorized us to compromise our current assignments on sight of you? At first we thought that Bijoux’s task of hunting you was egregious, but now, in her failure, it’s become upon the shoulders of the family that you abandoned. You can spin it anyway you want, but we *hate* you.”

Morgan croaked, “Because you don’t understand.”

“We understand well enough,” Samantha said, smoking the last of her Steeple, each puff taking a third of its body. “And I personally understand how much grace I’m going to get by the Queen Bee for taking you in. Can you imagine what will happen when the Auditor arrives and sees me with you in my hands to deliver right to our first mother? Perhaps,” Samantha said, looking up, eyes temporarily rolling back. “Perhaps she’d teach me to sit the throne.” She flicked the butt of the Steeple onto Morgan’s face and reached down, hands poised to pluck the one which had fallen from Morgan’s mouth and now lay near her torso. Morgan mumbled and Samantha cocked her head. “Hm?”

Morgan’s fingers clenched into a fist and she slammed Samantha over her right eye brow, splitting it, Morgan’s own knuckles retracting a tendril of blood and hair. Samantha fell backwards, falling where the Welch’s desk had once sat, the lack of dust and imprint on its once perceived permanent home. Morgan collected herself, getting onto her knees, scrambling to her pistol. A purple welt erupted from the back of Morgan’s hand where Samantha had dug her heel in, looking like a swollen eye. Morgan vaulted and Samantha kicked at her, fighting now like a cornered animal, no poise, her legs a treading an invisible bicycle.

“Stop this!” Morgan yelled, her head rolling back as a heel slammed into her jaw.

Her eyes rattled and refocused on the split image of Samantha initially veering for Morgan’s dropped pistol and then, after Morgan kicked it away, pivoting mid-lunge to the table at the end of the room where her alcohol-based explosive lay, waiting to be lit. Samantha crawled on her elbows, groaning, the invigoration from the quickly consumed Steeple perhaps ingested too swiftly as to be a shock of health to her body. Morgan grabbed her ankles and pulled her back as she was inches away from the explosive. Morgan kept her face away, blocking Samantha’s return to the flurry of kicks, at her expose nails. It was like wrestling a bobcat.

“I said stop!” Morgan yelled, flipped Samantha over and pinning her sister’s arms with her knees. Morgan slapped her across the face and, briefly, the girl sobered.

“You may be right,” Samantha said, a hand printed welt on the side of her face, face flushed and slimy with tears, “But you are still the reason why my Sisters are dying.”

“*Our* Sisters,” Morgan said, and she tried to add to her words but Samantha had torqued herself from Morgan’s grip and managed to strike a knee into her spine, forcing her to double over. Samantha wrestled an arm free and grabbed at Morgan’s face, her fingers clawing on the threaded pearl which hung at her throat. Morgan croaked, “Wait, no!”

“Materialism is not an axiom of the Daughters,” Samantha said, “you’d know that if you cared enough.”

“No, wait!” Morgan said, but it was too late. Samantha had pulled the pearl downwards, forcing the string to snap, the single psycho-oyster orb plunging into the cavern of Samantha’s throat. Samantha looked bewildered at the invasion, her throat bobbing as the pearl was swallowed. “You don’t know what you just did.”

Samantha growled, “Your priorities are wayward. Now kill me or don’t.”

“Dear Sister,” Morgan said, wiping a swath of blood from her nose. “You just swallowed a psycho-oyster pearl.”

If Samantha had made to reply, it was stuck in her subconscious, as within seconds her body locked, turned rigid as if preparing to transform into a corpse. Her eyes rolled backwards, showing the miniature ruby rivers along the arctic of her iris. Her tongue hung loose and she gasped for air as she muscles relaxed and no longer attempted to push against Morgan. Morgan slid off of her, found her Sister unmoving, and immediately checked for a pulse only to find that it had slowed to a point of near invisibility.

“Oh no,” Morgan said, her hands working on auto-pilot, juggling between feeling the temperature of Samantha’s brows, the beat of her jugular, her faint breath, all knowing that this was for naught.

If she had time, perhaps she could bring Samantha to Rosemary’s lab, Robert’s opinion on the matter be damned, but Morgan knew she would not have enough time. Instead, the faces of all her extinguished Sisters superimposed upon Samantha’s slightly green and very slack face. She thought of the rejected clones in the dredge, Faux-Ophelia’s aged face, and finally Yves’s betrothed, seeing now a terrific similarity between the Sister whose death had galvanized this venture and the one faltering before her. Several tears dropped over the flaking sun splatters of blood on her cheek, but only until they hit the split of her upper lip did she begin to cry for killing her Sister. Theoretically, and Morgan believed in Rosemary’s confidence, the psycho-oyster pearl should not have killed Samantha, but Rosemary had only tested the shavings of the pearl, had not tested an instant consumption like this, and probably never would. Perhaps the panacea was too strong a shock for her body, much as how too much tobacco kills the non-addicted man. Perhaps the shock of health was too intense for her organs to filter, and Morgan feared for Samantha as much for herself that her silly opalescent jewel had kickstarted a powerful and biological invasion happening beneath her Sister’s skin, one that would not only destroy whatever sense of righteousness that had blossomed within her own psyche but radicalize her Sisters against her, becoming the monster that Ophelia Tilyou had carved Morgan herself to be.

“Samantha,” a gruff voice boomed through the corner. Morgan perked, lifted her head over her cradled hands. The voice continued, “Little Bee, did you not promise to carry out your Assignment? Upon arriving at this wart of a building, I see it is still standing. Upon entering into this decrepit nest, I see no flames.”

Morgan’s mouth pursed, her eyes turning into slants. She stood over Samantha’s body, wiped her bloodied nose with her fist, and lit a fresh Steeple. If Morgan had any doubts as to the urban calculus which had forced the asteroid existence of the Globe citizens to orbit one another, it had not dawned on her in totality, instead instilling her with equal parts amazement and shock. She knew the voice, but it was the rotund frame of his bulbous figure rounding the staircase, the fedora tilted slightly to the side as if trying to sneak away from a cinderblock head, the aural presence of a cigar and the smell of pickles and cocktail onions, of baseball mitt hands with stubby, simian finger tips attached to knuckles landscaped with cracked skin. His face bathed in the pendulum light of the exposed bulb, revealing stubble over his many chins, eyes swollen with energy expended on credit.

They stood like two statues in the abandoned office, Arno’s size a bulwark in the threshold surrounded by two frosted glass panels that had cracked decades ago, become splotched with scars of briny moss, and Morgan feeling, suddenly, terribly, aware that the circumstances of which she now resided was horribly wrong.

“You,” he said, “the favorite Little Bee.”

“Frog.”

Arno’s face twisted, his jowls rumbling as if he had experienced something sour on his tastebuds. “I’d be lying to both of us if I tried to convince you that Samantha was a decoy.”

“I knew her plans. She told me. Which means that public is taking our endeavors seriously since the *Vox Sonic* was an Assignment.”

“’Assignment’,” Arno said, cocking a greasy eyebrow. “Was not that long ago when you started to take them. When you were one of us.”

“Not one of you,” Morgan said, “never one of you. A Daughter, a Sister. But not one of you.”

Arno glanced towards Samantha’s twisted body. “I always thought she looked like the girl that I had sent you to investigate the murder of.”

“Considering that we are clones, I’d say that’s accurate.”

Arno chuckled to himself, smacked his lips. “You killed her.”

Morgan nodded, “Yes. Unfortunately. But I was just a result. It was you that killed her. She told me, before she died, that the Auditors were rationing the Steeples, that the Daughters were made to compete with one another to extend their lifespans. That you hold, in the depths of your pockets, their lifeline.”

Arno stomped on the ground, forcing the floorboards to creak and snap, the forgotten picture frames rattling on rusty nails. “Do not put this on me, Morgan. It was you who defected, you who had stolen the psycho-oysters, you who had revealed Daughters to not only the public, but *themselves*. You made them realize how unnatural their existence was! How arrogant!”

“We forge the chains that bind us,” Morgan said, “I did not realize we were in servitude of the Globe until I saw the horrors in Tectonic Biotechnics. We are not slaves.”

“Enough with the poetry,” Arno said, “Ophelia Tilyou offered you her throne, the seat to the Globe, the option to ascend from an instrument to a god, and you declined and ruined it for everyone else! Who are you if not a simulacrum of what we *made you*.”

Morgan shook her head, “You don’t understand, Frog.”

“I tolerated your calling me that as a sign of respect, Little Bee. Because you were one of the best. Perhaps *the* best. That’s why you were picked to rule. Have you ever considered your Assignments? Have you ever wondered if there was a pattern to the ones I gave you? You were conditioned to rule the Globe from the very beginning. You should be honored.”

“Honored to be set on a path that was not my own? That was the machinations of the same women who biologically hacked us to make us subservient? Who, upon failure becomes nothing but an organ to sustain her already expired life? Why would I to continue this hegemony? And the Globe I would inherent would be the same, unchanged, all the better for the Uppers who have no idea they are intentionally ascended and all the better for fat Auditors like you to continue to live in the shadows of the Globe, pretending that you’re working for your own, clogged arteries.”

“Enough!” Arno yelled, throwing his cigar on the ground. He marched forward, sausage fingers clenched.

Morgan’s spine locked. She had always been so swift with her mind and body; able to make a decision to flee without thought, to pull a trigger with confidence that it was the right choice, to maintain a presence of mind when the world around her was incinerating. She also knew, when she had first traversed across the bay with Robert, that there might be a time when Arno stood in front of her sights, and Morgan was prepared to take action. But now, as he lumbered like some awoken tyrannosaurus, Morgan felt the latent marionette strings pull on her fingers, her shoulders, preventing her from firing. She wanted to pull the trigger, could feel the metal from the steel now warmed by her fingers needing only the willpower of her heart to imprint the tiny amount of pressure. Arno raised the back of his hand and smacked her across the jaw, a tooth already loose from Samantha’s sucker punch forcing a bony asteroid to launch across her tongue with a torrent of copper. Morgan stammered, fell into the wall.

“Ophelia would not mind you alive,” Arno said, boxing her exit. He stepped over Samantha’s body, raised a fist, “she said nothing about conscious. And, Little Bee, it’s time you got your just desserts for the embarrassment you had caused.”

“I hate when you call me that,” Morgan said, watching his cracked knuckles, his ogre sized yellow finger nails arc back like a coiled spring. There was a breeze somewhere and Morgan could no longer hear the outside world and Arno’s arm began to steadily slow as if travelling through molasses, and Morgan stabbed the pistol into Arno’s ballooned stomach and fired, sending a hellfire forward, himself tripping backwards over Samantha’s calloused corpus. Morgan stood over him, “You will never lay a hand on me ever again.”

Arno’s eyes widened, and Morgan had seen enough men with bitten ears to understand when they had been confronted with a force more unstoppable than the regard in which they held themselves. It was a mix of insult and arrogance, of acceptance and defeat. Arno’s pudgy eyes and swollen bags turned into slits, defeated, cowed. Then he grunted and, seeming to ignore the bullet wound lodged into his stomach, kicked Morgan in the shin with a tree stumped leg and allowed the bullet she had fired to graze upon his shoulder, forcing him to groan something monstrous, and with this inhuman will he managed to pull Morgan to the splintered and tumble weeded floorboards as if she were victim to a rip current. With his massive weight and bloodshot eyes, he clamped down on her with as much might as a stirred bear, insulted to be attacked by a previous ward, victim to such a display against the natural order of things. His spittle tasted like cocktail onions as he frothed and placed two mitts around Morgan’s neck, and as she felt the pressure of his palms on her trachea she knew that this was not the Globe speaking through him, nor the revolution speaking through her. As the world turned into black swirls it became a cosmos consisting of just the two of them, Morgan and her Auditor, Arno and his ward.

“I put my neck out for you, you ungrateful bitch,” he yelled, hunching his shoulders, putting his grotesque density upon her throat. “Ophelia made the Auditors submit who they thought was best, and Jameson wanted that psychopath Bijoux, but I picked you, and it took convincing. Do you know what hell has befallen me because of you? I’ve lost everything underneath the graces of the Queen Bee, made myself a thorn in my fraternal Auditor’s sides, been demoted to dealing with the bottom of you biological insults, you sacks of flesh, you soulless creatures! You’ve put a noose on me, Morgan, and because of that, you are coming with me. Now die, damn you! Let me see your last--”

A wire skated over Arno’s multiforeheaded scalp and brushed over his nose, trailing down his full, wormy lips and into the blubber of his neck. Two cracked knuckles tightened the cord and out popped Arno’s reptilian tongue, his eyes bulging. A force pushed against his spine and he bent at an odd angle, the fingers around Morgan’s neck relenting. Samantha, a third his frame, continued to pull and strangle Arno, forcing his weight backwards, prying his body away from Morgan who now sat gaping like a suffocating fish, a fireball ballooning in her lungs. Arno croaked and fought the wire but it was inset into his neck and lacerating above his Adam’s apple. His body twisted into a misshaping question mark, his neck too far away, spine pushed forward to a point of snapping. Samantha shifted her weight and reversed the weight she had accumulated, bringing Arno down like a game hunter, her knee almost ballerina-esque in poise, eyes infinite in focus. Morgan caught glimpses of this, knew this to be a look that she herself must possess. Within thirty seconds, Arno’s attempts at delaying his own calamity wavered, his hands now feeble pawing, his tongue flapping loosely as if trying to lap cotton candy.

“Samantha,” Morgan said, her voice cracking, knives slicing down her throat. She up righted herself, crawled on the floor to place a hand on Samantha’s taut wrists. “Don’t do this.”

“He deserves it,” Samantha said, her voice no longer flush, her skin replenished to its Uppers golden sheen. Tears were dropping from her eyes. “He deserves it. They all do. Let them burn. I am not a monster.”

“We are only what we appear to others,” Morgan said, rubbing her throat. “You do not change the Globe with death. You change it with influence.”

“He deserves it!” Samantha cried, tightening her grasp, “He plays with our Sisters, killing us when we aren’t useful. They dangle Steeples in front of us like they are carrots. Some of them…some of them even *use* us. This is not the life I want.”

“Then make the life you want,” Morgan said, “Don’t you understand? He’s defeated. He, along with anyone else, can no longer control you.”

“You have more pearls? My Sisters, our Sisters, need them.”

Morgan shook her head, “I think so. I don’t know. But you can’t kill him. Let him die as he is. Broken, beaten.”

Samantha looked down at the increasingly limp blob underneath her. Under different circumstances, it would have been a comical sight, the sheer discrepancy of size between her and Arno, her felled beast. She sighed, sniffled, the ends of the wires dropping to Arno’s ears. He croaked and coughed, eyes bulging, a growing pool of blood seeping out from him like a punctured ale cask. Morgan tried getting up but found her strength waning. Samantha attempted to stand but had expended all her energy. They leaned on one another, a clumsy, four-legged dance, and they stood over Arno’s body together. Wordlessly, they flipped him over, his weight deft like a felled tree.

“The pearl worked,” Morgan said, “I thought I killed you.”

“I did too,” she said, “thank you, Sister.”

Morgan dislodged the hanging tooth and spat it out, intentionally shooting in Arno’s direction. She reached into her pockets, inflated the crumpled Steeple pack, straightened one of them, and ignited a match, eyeing Samantha as she cupped a hand over her flame. Then she handed the entire squashed pack to Samantha.

“I don’t need them. Not anymore.”

“For our Sisters,” Morgan said.

“I’m coming with you, wherever you are.”

“No, you’re not,” Morgan said, “you’re going to burn down this building and head wherever you’re stationed.”

Samantha’s brows furrowed. She no longer possessed the sickly gleam, her health having rebounded with such velocity that even Morgan herself was surprised at the gravity of the Rosemary’s psycho-oyster pearl discovery. The remnants of herself had reclaimed, she was no longer the weakened, discarded girl limping up the steps, nor was she the mistress or the girlfriend or the wife to the man she had leaned upon to scope this place out two weeks ago. Before Morgan was her Sister.

“I know you want to fight the Queen Bee,” Morgan said, “but you would be stirring the pot. Take these Steeples.”

“They don’t look like Steeples,” Samantha said, eyeing them. She was right. Rosemary did not smoke and they did not have a cigarette roller handy in their headquarters, leaving the creation usually meant for automatons into the deft hands of idle Warehouse Boys, whose own clubby fingers adjust for no tact of what they claimed the psycho-oyster mucus to be more difficult to encapsulate. Thus, the revolution’s brand of Steeples were no more than hastily rolled crumples that looked dropped and picked up and dropped again, which they probably were. They looked like contraband.

Morgan smiled, “They aren’t Steeples. They are Lunas.”

“I see,” she said.

“And see to it that your Sisters get them when your Auditors are depriving them. Let them know there are other ways to live, but don’t compromise yourself. You’d do no good becoming a False Daughter as well. And let them know that the Lunas will eventually contain the pearls, in some shape or form. You can attest to that yourself.”

“A spokeswoman,” Samantha said, “doesn’t seem like it will help.”

“Well I tried to convince you and you tried to kill me,” Morgan said. “We can’t have that every time.”

Samantha eyed Arno’s shriveled body. His breathing was slow and labored but consistent. “What do we do about him?”

Morgan sighed and leaned down, puffing smoke into his face. “Wake up, Frog.”

“I’m awake,” he mumbled, “you bitches fucking killed me.”

“Not if you get out of here fast enough,” Morgan said. “We’re still blowing up this building.”

“You said that,” Samantha said, “but that appears counter-intuitive.”

Morgan smiled, ignored the bloodied gap in her lips. “It’s the spectacle. You encountered the False Daughter, Arno saved your life, and you still managed to complete your mission. Win-win. Then you’ll go back and distribute the Lunas, and wait for the ocean to rise. Can you do that, Sister?”

“I can,” she said.

Morgan returned her attention to Arno, “And you best be hopping, Frog. Your wounds are serious but not grave. You can bounce back. But I will know if you make it back to Ophelia. Because you apparently did have high hopes for me, I suggest you leave the Globe as soon as possible and seek other masters for you to suckle.”

Arno shook his head and rocked himself in an attempt to stand. He winced as blood seeped from underneath his bulbous frame. “I have nothing. The Queen will kill me.”

“Why?” Morgan said, “The fire is still happening, and Samantha coming home with you.”

Samantha put a hand on Morgan’s shoulder. “Let’s let him decided his fate, Morgan. I’ll keep an eye to make sure he goes the right path.”

Morgan nodded and toked on her Steeple. Then she took the bottle of alcohol, took out the old newspaper that had drowned in the combustion mixture, and poured it all over the floor, watching it seep through the pores in the wood, dampening the running ink newsprints. She walked until she well enough away from Arno’s slumped, defeated figure. Morgan and Samantha neared towards the window, their backs against the darkened holographic sky of the Uppers, the neon dots that were supposed to represent stars. She straddled the sill, one foot on the rickety, ancient fire escape.

“I know you can still stand, Frog. The fire won’t kill you unless you let it. Heed my advice, though. There is another fire coming, and it’s burning. You best be out of its wake.”

“Why,” Arno grumbled, “why are you both humiliating me like this? Why are you taking everything?”

“Because you knew,” Morgan said, “you knew our secret. You saw the chains which bound us, and you allowed it to happen. And now, we’re allowing you passage. Do not forget the charity of the False Daughter.”

Morgan flicked the last of her Steeple towards the acidic pile, and at once it blossomed into a blue aura of plasma that spread along the corner of the Welch’s office, crawling like some orange-red demon towards the cornices, gobbling the crumbled newspaper and unworthy chairs until half of the room started to melt. The top levels of the *Vox Sonic*’s old headquarters had turned into a colossal candle flame, smells of incinerated wood, of mold, of old ink. The last thing Morgan saw was Arno’s body, still slumped in the threshold, fumbling weakly for his dropped cigar.

They landed in the alley and before Morgan could say goodbye Samantha had wrapped her arms around her, digging her nose deep into the recesses of her neck. She wept, “I’m so sorry, Morgan. You are not the False Daughter. I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m sorry everyone is trying to hurt you. If only they *knew*.”

“They will soon,” Morgan said, holding her back.

“Sorry I punched you in the face,” she said.

“Sorry I punched you back.”

They separated and Samantha kissed Morgan on the cheek. “A new day is coming, Morgan. I believe that now. If I could be convinced, others could too.”

“Hopefully without destruction to public property,” Morgan said.

“Consider it an ignition,” she said. They she stepped into the shadows. “Until then, Morgan. You have a Sister, don’t forget.”

“I won’t,” Morgan said, and she waited amidst the musty cobblestones until Samantha had disappeared, engulfed into the chaos of the Uppers. A cloud of flame burst from the top of the *Vox Sonic* and Morgan scaled the neighboring building, watching the collapse of the once dejected newspaper cave into itself like some destroyed idol, the heat creating a scaled candelabra in the city, drawing in the curious Uppers, even drawing the attention of the Middles who were serving tables or drinks or cotton candy. Morgan could hear them talk; everyone knew that the *Vox Sonic* was being destroyed for heresy, cut like some beautiful weed to prevent fertilization into the minds of the masses, but Morgan could not help that this was a misstep from the Queen Bee, who had re-rentered collective consciousness, the flames transcending her from Globe mythology to folklore and finally, crazily, unbelievably to something physical. The *Vox Sonic* building was destroyed, but its absence spoke louder than even the newspaper it had put out in the last couple of weeks.

And Arno had not left the building.

6.

Morgan and Robert stood over the cartons of Lunas, ready to be packed in various shipping crates and sent throughout the Globe, others to be handed to Warehouse Boys sympathetic to the ailing Daughters and trained to identify them beyond their sickly appearance. They would exchange hands behind bars, over handshakes, tossed into guitarists open cases along with several coins. They were to be found hidden underneath a napkin at a restaurant, tucked just underneath crystal champagne glasses. It only took one Luna to revive a Daughter, and while the pearl that had been consumed by Samantha had permanently cured her, Rosemary theorized that repeated ingestion of Lunas would eventually free the Daughters from their biological deficit. Morgan herself kept to the Steeples, aware of how righteous it appeared to others, but they did not understand. Morgan feared that if she were to cure herself she would lose one of the sensitive muscles that still throbbed between them, that she could not champion their cause because she would no longer feel their plight. Besides, she had Samantha to be the model of health, a representative of their collective futures. Samantha showed the others that it was possible.

Robert, at first aghast that the heir loomed pearl he had given Morgan was not only brought to a burning building but actually *consumed,* forgave her in lieu of the discovery and advance they had made for the cause. He smoked his own cigarette, one hand in the depths of his dungarees, tie pressed as if prepared to public speak, as he always was.

He said, “More Daughters are coming to our side. But some aren’t.”

“Expected,” Morgan said.

“Have you read the news? Some of the Daughters have been found dead, some by organ failure, which means our Lunas are not getting to them in time. Others by murder, although it can’t be said for sure if it’s the Globe attacking what now feels to be cancerous cells as if the masses were an immune system.”

“Or the Daughters themselves that that refuse to listen to ‘heresy’.” Morgan said, hating the truth of this. She tongued the open spot in her jaw, loosened by Samantha, dislodged by Arno. “We’ve given them refuge and yet they still die.”

“Some people like things the way they are, Morgan.”

“Even if it’s bondage?”

“It takes much more than logic to free a person from their chains,” Robert said.

They walked along the ravine, passed the Rosemary’s laboratory, which was now exuding an odd, rubbery smell that floated into the atmosphere in waves. They had been lucky to find two other pearls, but they were obviously incredibly rare, and Rosemary could only make so many Lunas with just one, with little margin for error. The poor doctor was running herself ragged. Frederique and her Warehouse Boy lover had stolen time together on his break, and now walked over the briny bridges, meeting with Morgan and Robert. Her partner was as burly as the rest of his ilk: large, gorilla hands, thick neck. At first glance he appeared no different than the other Warehouse Boys, although admittedly Morgan did have a difficult time telling them apart. But upon closer inspection his face was softer, still young, or at least resilient to age. Doughy. It actually pleased Morgan to know that even with a routine nighttime tryst, Frederique’s personality had not softened. She was still just as difficult before and after releasing the sexual energy. Because Frederique was naturally attuned to the Uppers lifestyle, and had actually visited the Globe on several occasions to spend time with Yves, she knew the beats enough, allowed herself to enjoy the Globe as a tourist when she felt safe enough.

“News from the top?” Robert said, using the ‘top’ to refer to anywhere not in the sewers.

“The Queen Bee is getting nervous,” Frederique said, “and this is making her unravel.”

“The Middles and the Lowers are actively supporting the False Daughter,” said her partner, “ain’t afraid.”

Morgan hypothesized this would happen. Last night her and Robert looked over the map of the Globe and, using Samantha as a proxy to the heart beat of the Daughters, found that the Daughters were no longer existing with as much velocity in the strata of the Middles, Lowers, or even the Dredges. Some Daughters, equipped with Lunas, had actively abandoned their Assignments, making the terminals backlogged. The Auditors, forever fortified by the Uppers, have drawn back their influence, only the Daughters most stubborn to the Queen Bee’s rule now holding their line.

“All this is good news,” Robert said, “we’ve got her.”

“Frederique,” Morgan said, “one of my Sisters, her name is Samantha-”

“Does she look like Samantha?”

“Yes,” Morgan said, then continued as she ignored the subtle shift in Frederique’s posture. “The Daughters privy to our cause need assistance. They are trying to acclimate to their new lives, and they don’t know how. Some don’t even know how to eat without an Assignment. Samantha is doing her best in relocating them to shelters and empty apartments, but would you assist them in this matter? I told her to expect you.”

Frederique nodded, which Morgan had not expected her to accept as easy. “But wouldn’t you be a better fit for this, Morgan? The Daughters trust you, and you’ve been free longer than they have. They’d follow you.”

“In time, but I need to finish this before we heal. They’ve lost everything. Their grieving. You’re familiar with that.”

Frederique stared at Morgan and said nothing. Then she nodded and left with her lover without another word. Robert and Morgan carried on, traveling to the war room, the industrial lights flickering on. Robert lit a candle to conquer the musty smell that had accumulated behind the storm door. The chairs surrounding the table were ajar, the room never quite able to return to equilibrium after a planning session.

“She likes you, you know,” Robert said.

“Don’t confuse partiality with respect,” Morgan said.

“And here I was thinking it was me who was the politician.”

Robert went into the cabinet, pulled out the rolled map, a bottle of whiskey, and two glasses. He poured the brown ichor as Morgan unfurled the parchment and placed whatever objects were within her reach to weigh it; a bottle cap, a nickel, a rock, the fourth corner being tampered with Morgan’s sweating glass of rye. Robert took a gulp and checked his watch.

“They aren’t due here for another ten minutes,” he said, “anything you want to say to me and no one else?”

“Democracies are not built on secrets,” Morgan said.

“That, my dear, is a terrible, naïve lie.”

“I think we’ve won, more or less, but I’m not concerned with the present. I know the Queen Bee is in our grasp. I know we’ve smoked out the hive. But I’m concerned with what happens after. The Globe does not have any idea how to exist without Ophelia Tilyou or the Daughters, even if only until four months ago they were just myth. How can my Sisters learn to cope with this new order? How can the localities manage differently when they have been doing the same thing for over two hundred years?”

“That’s for the people to decide,” Robert said, “that’s the point. You’ve done your job. Well, you’re *doing* your job.”

“And what of you, Mr. Forrest? What will happen when we oust the Queen?” Morgan said, the corner of the map curling slightly as she picked up her glass.

Robert smiled and then looked past Morgan. Then he closed his eyes, watched a cinema underneath his eyelids, and said simply, “I’m going back home.”

“To Manhattan? To look for another revolution?”

“To run for mayor, perhaps. But that will be a long time from here. So, to answer your question, when this is all done I’m going to have a cold beer and then take swing dancing lessons.”

“Swing dancing?”

Robert shrugged. “Never had the opportunity.”

“I can teach you,” Morgan said, “I was a swing dance instructor in the Uppers for several months, and a mistress to a Middles union man who had a soft spot for those dresses.”

“I would like that,” Robert said.

“But you have no intention to stay in the Globe? Even with the vacant seat?”

“It’s not my city,” Robert said.

“It is though. It’s your birthright.”

“When we first met, I would have argued the same, but now, as I’ve spent the year here with you and your fight, it’s no longer my fight. I’m in it for justice, and to clear my own familial name. Yes, the Globe is my ancestral home, but it’s not my home. I have no right to rule.”

“You best remember that I rejected the throne, in case you were getting any ideas.”

“I remember. But the throne would be different now. I hardly doubt you would even have a throne.”

Morgan was silent. She had not considered that Robert would leave the Globe when this over, had not given herself time to consider who would overtake the Queen Bee if not the infamous usurper herself. Her thoughts were broken when the door at the other end of the room opened and Charlie Macintosh, Rosemary Cadeu and the Welches entered. Macintosh took the seat that he deemed to be in the center of the action, Rosemary waited until the Welches picked whichever of the two seats were adjacent to one another, and then sidled into the chair next to Morgan, where she sipped a thermos of black tea and slid a box of newly created Lunas over the table.

“I’ll get into it, folks,” Robert said, “tides are changing the Globe, and we’ve put it off its axis. We’ve got the Daughters converted, or nearly so. The Middles, Lowers, and Dredges are sick of the Uppers, and the Uppers don’t feel much better.”

“This would be a class war if not for the fact that the Uppers also got screwed,” Charlie said.

“That was where Ophelia went wrong. She played everyone,” Robert said, pouring himself more whiskey as well as a glass for Charlie and Louisa.

“The bombing of the *Vox Sonic* could not have gone any better,” Lewis said, “although I’m quite sad I didn’t see it turn into the burning effigy I had always thought it would be.”

“But remember, my brother,” Louisa said, “the truth is not a place. It’s an idea.” She turned to the group, “We’ve got your Warehouse Boys sending out the new issues as we speak, the one detailing the political implications of the *Vox Sonic*’s destruction, framing it, truthfully, as another notch in the efforts of the Queen Bee to silence her dissidents.”

“And it’s going quite smoothly in the Uppers,” Lewis added, pleased with himself, “they’ve always been so hard to convince of anything.”

“Because they were on the positive end of the Queen Bee’s control,” Morgan said, “for the most part.”

“So now what?” Charlie said, “Eventually something is going to give. The Globe is unified, and those who aren’t will find themselves on one side of the fence or another. The Daughters are incapacitated, and even better, some are putting down their arms.”

“The ones with the Lunas, at least,” Rosemary said. “I’m making them as fast as I can. We need more pearls.”

“That’s up to the psycho-oysters,” Morgan said, sighing. “Until then, keep pumping out Steeples. We need to maintain control or we lose the Daughters.”

“Eventually,” Lewis said, “people might connect that your monopoly on the Steeples is not entirely unlike how the Queen Bee held them over like a carrot.”

“Watch yourself, Mr. Welch,” Robert said, “we’re curing them.”

“But this info,” Lewis said, leaning over the map, “this is all second hand. It’s all in the newspapers. Yes, people can see the Daughters trying to acclimate to their new lives, but it’s still just an idea. Eventually they will need to see that the False Daughter is taking an active stand to free them. No more using proxies like that one Daughter you met when you burned down the *Vox Sonic*.”

“Eventually,” Robert said, “but that might need to wait until Ophelia is ousted.”

“That’s the step,” Morgan said, her lips over her whiskey glass. She said this to herself as she looked over the Globe. It had changed incredibly since they had embarked on this revolution. She only noticed everyone staring at her when Robert subtly coughed. Morgan stirred, “It’s all in place. All the pieces. It’s time.”

“There is no ‘on switch’ to a coup,” Charlie said.

“And it’s that line of thinking that keeps you from thinking big, Mr. Macintosh,” Robert said, smiling. “What do you propose, Morgan?”

Morgan considered this, ignoring the awkwardness of them waiting for an answer. She had not considered getting this far with an off-hand thought, but now, as she considered the factors, ran the calculations of victory, played this nebulous game as Robert would, the path before them al became clear.

“Simple,” she said, “we take control of Tectonic Biotechnics.”

Charlie laughed, “That easy, huh? Just grab the reins of great engine of the Globe’s future? You don’t have the secrecy anymore, Morgan. The Global watch, the loyal Daughters, the Auditors. You pushed them into the Uppers, and now you’ve pushed them into survival mode. Everyone that wants to kill you will be there.”

Dr. Cadeu added, “I’m sorry, Morgan, but that’s easier said than done. That place is heavily guarded. When I was a secretary, I could hardly get to the washroom without a showing my credentials to the 24-hour guards.”

“There are snipers stations on top of the building,” Louisa added, and Lewis sighed in agreement.

“That’s not true,” Rosemary said, wagging a finger. “Hyperbole if I’ve ever seen one.”

“It’s true, we had sources. They also have a secret department within the Gene Department. They don’t just make the Steeples there.”

Rosemary shook her head, “No offense, but I’ve worked there for eight years. I would know.”

“Even the lead designers there didn’t know,” Louisa said in a tone that Morgan found to be slightly acidic.

“And, Dr. Cadeu,” Lewis added, “I hardly doubt that you would have been privy to the knowledge anyhow. No offense.”

“And how did you get this knowledge?” Rosemary asked.

The Welch twins exchanged a glare the summoned whatever childhood connection they had used to share, their eyes alighting with the excitement of having kept a terrific secret for so long. “A scientist from the Gene Division,” Louisa said, “a defector, if you can believe it.”

“As you should,” Lewis said, “as the *Vox Sonic* prides itself on the truth.”

Morgan and Robert exchanged glances over the table. Robert took the bottle of whiskey and poured more in his glass, tipped some into Morgan’s. He said, “Did this scientist have a name?”

Louisa shrugged, her crow’s nest of hair remaining improbably yet structurally sound. “No harm in sharing sources amongst you all, I suppose. His name was Yeev or Eve.”

Lewis twisted his face, the walrus mustache vibrating over his hidden lips. “I thought it was Yanno.”

“You two are horrible journalists if you give your sources this quickly,” Charlie said.

Robert smirked and Morgan elbowed him. Then she said, “Dr. Cadeu, I’m afraid that the Welches were right on that call, but I shall not reveal the name. But let’s get back to hand. In a week it will be time to make the push. I will lead the initiative and go alone if I need to. I’m not afraid of the Auditors, and the Global Police are easier to avoid than incite a riot over.”

“And the Daughters?” Robert asked.

“I plan on showing the Globe Ophelia’s mottled face, and I believe they will be well pleased to see it.”

“Well,” Robert said, “I suppose that’s that. Shall we drink?” He raised his glass, the brown ichor swishing, meniscus bobbing.

“Not yet,” Charlie Macintosh said, “I’ve got another matter. An insurgent.”

Robert frowned. The letters *Bijoux* manifested in Morgan’s eyes.

“Bring him in!” Charlie shouted, his cigar bobbing like a lever.

The doors opened and two Warehouse Boys entered the room, carrying a man with straw colored hair, a sharp nose, and a smile that knew it’s worth and had gotten its owner far. He looked bashfully from the floor and at the crowd. He said, “Hello all.”

“Mr. Snow?” Morgan said, putting down her glass. “I thought I told you to stay at the Last Drop!”

“You know this dolt?” Charlie said.

“This is the man whose music you’ve been listening to,” Morgan said. She raised her voice to the Warehouse Boys. “Unhand him, the two of you.”

The Warehouse Boys eyed Morgan then Charlie Macintosh.

Morgan said again, “Unhand Mr. Snow.”

They dropped him and Alfred fleetingly became victim to gravity, tangling like a discarded marionette, and then collected himself with as much grace as a man accustomed to falling. Charlie tried keeping Morgan’s gaze, and he held it long enough for others to notice. Eventually he took a puff of his cigar, exhumed the acrid smoke over the table, dismissed them.

Morgan recentered, “Explain yourself, Mr. Snow. I told you to stay put.”

“You did,” Alfred said, his young face present but now carpeted with a thin blond bristle. The fire behind his eyes was still burning, but whatever nights had transpired between when Morgan had last seen him and now had done no wonders to his once youthful appearance. “But then the bar was truly down to the last drop.”

Rosemary chuckled and caught herself, shielding her mouth with the rim of her steaming black tea.

“You’ve endangered yourself coming here,” she said, “how did you get here anyway?”

“He knocked,” Charlie said, “apparently he trailed one of the Warehouse Boys that was whistling *In The Palm of my Hand*.”

“If that wasn’t a sign, I don’t know what is,” he said, smiling.

“It wasn’t an invitation, for starters.”

“Look, Alfred, just because I saved your life does not mean you need to engage with us. You’ve given the Globe an anthem to identify with. That was enough.”

He shrugged, “Perhaps I liked hearing my music on the gramophone. Look,” he eyed the record, “I believe it’s had much use here.”

Robert smirked, “He’s got a point.”

Alfred walked over to the whiskey, gestured to Robert, and poured himself a drink. Then, after taking a gulp, he said, “I care just as much about the Globe as you all do. I just care about it in different ways. People like me were targeted by Ophelia just as much as the lot of you. Noctalia returned, you know.”

“The artist?” Morgan said, thinking of Bijoux, the sting of that first loss having permeated more into her soul than she could have expected.

“He found him roaming the Uppers. Looked like sock after a dog got to it. The Rabbit Club put him into one of their apartments because he was rambling and speaking in tongues. Whatever they did to him, I know could have happened to me.”

“The Rabbit Club is a myth,” Rosemary said, “there are no art-commune sex cults around in the Globe.”

“It’s not a myth, and yes there are,” Lewis said.

“You’re just not looking in the right places, Doctor,” said Louisa.

Alfred said, “All I’m saying is, you owe me.”

“Excuse me?” Morgan said, “I believe I saved *your* life.”

“But what sound worm has weedled into the lives of every Middles, Lower, and Dredge neighborhood? What comes out of saloons with open abandon? What has weaved through the class consciousness if not my masterpiece?”

“Not short of confidence,” Charlie said.

“And now, because I have assisted in carving an identity, a *We*, no one else will be either,” he said. “And I come with a gift. Another masterpiece.”

“Perhaps too much confidence,” Rosemary said.

“I like it,” Robert smiled, tipped his glass to the musician. “I like him.”

Alfred flipped the chair and sat on it backwards, his arms resting on its back, scabs of brine dotting its metal frame. “When those in power topples, won’t people need a song that reminds them of victory?”

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Morgan was playing chess with Robert in his quarters when, as Morgan’s bishop was levitating atop a strategic tile of whose placement would signify the long winded, yet inevitable end to Robert’s men, they had been stirred to attention, almost knocking over the whiskey glasses that had hardly found purchase on the tiny table outfitted from the gutted *Vox Sonic* headquarters. They were beginning to get tipsy, Robert’s own tolerance far stronger than Morgan’s, and they existed in a pillbox of smoke. The meeting, for all the excitement of Alfred Snow’s vaudevillian appearance that Morgan had permitted herself to become at least slightly amused by, had ended wonderfully. The tides were changing, and Morgan was prepared to jump on the rising crest of the revolution when the time came. Soon, the Daughters would fall into line, and the Uppers were becoming just as furious that they had gotten got, even though they only showed their allegiance by not actively showing their allegiance towards the Queen Bee.

It was Charlie Macintosh, his frame occupying passage. He entered upon Robert’s greeting, as if the only social graces which prevented his bull-rushing entry in the physical world were metal barriers and other impossible physics. He smelled of barley and ham, and his bowler cap was flatted in his palm. He slurred his words when he spoke, but the message was thus:

“In this new world, do you promise a pass for my men?”

Robert furled his brows, “How do you figure, Charlie?”

He hiccupped. “Mr. Macintosh. You’re speaking to Mr. Macintosh now.”

“Mr. Macintosh.”

“This new world you’re building. When the Queen Bee is gone. Will you see my men are given safe passage? Will you see they get their rewards for helping you?”

“Of course,” Robert said, “we would not even physically be here if not for you and your Warehouse Boys.”

“Some of them are being targeted by Jason Albrecht. The lawyer.”

“I remember. That sop of mess, he is.”

“I need those charges dropped. Whatever they are.”

“What are they, specifically?” Morgan asked.

Charlie straightened, his voice deepening. “Whatever they are.”

“Sure, sure, Mr. Mactinosh,” Robert said, “I’m sure we can figure something.”

Charlie extended a meaty hand. He appeared to waver it in the air with some difficulty. Robert shook it, stared him in his sunken eyes, and, with an exchange of nods, Charlie Macintosh disappeared into the darkness.

Robert stared at the closed door with his hands on his hips, chewing on the inside of his cheek.

“What was that about?” Morgan asked. “What did you agree to, Robert?”

“I don’t know,” Robert said.

“Mr. Forrest.”

“Honest. I don’t know.”

“Then why did you shake his hand. There are not many nice things I’d say to describe Mr. Macintosh, but honorable is indeed one of them. He cares of his men.”

Robert shrugged. “It’s politics, Morgan. Anything he has to be worried about is nothing compared to what we face, and nothing to what we’ve accomplished. Besides, I wasn’t lying when I said we’ve used his good will. Even you could agree to that.”

Morgan sipped her whiskey, “Pour me another. It’s your turn.”

“One second. Talking to Charlie reminds me that I need to drink a glass of water, sober up.”

“Will you ever go on the wagon?”

“When I decide to run for Mayor of New York City,” he said, turning on the tap, sipping from the washed tin of beans. “And I’m not an alcoholic. Not that you’d be able to vote being here and all, but make sure you don’t spread those rumors.”

“They aren’t rumors,” Morgan said. “You’re a hedonist.”

“So I’m perfect for the privilege,” he said.

“I’m reconsider, Mr. Forrest,” Morgan said, her eyes to the chess board, chin cradled atop her knuckles in thought.”

“Please,” he said, “call me-”

“Robert!” Morgan leapt from the board, knocking the pieces awry. She crossed the room in two leaps and leaned over his suddenly crumpled body, cradling his head, his scalp matted with sweat. The cup had not managed to shatter in his arrest and instead leaked from underneath him, forming a puddle on his lower back and Morgan’s knees. She leaned in, found him slightly breathing, his eyes rolled up to the lightning shaped canyons of pink, coiffed hair pressed against his brows. “What happened to you?”

She shook him and his body did not resist. Morgan proceeded to pick him up, dragging his lip body, his breathing labored. “Wake up, Mr. Forrest!”

If not for any notion of grumbling, Morgan would have thought her companion dead on the spot. But the breathing was faint, and for every sluggish movement Robert now projected Morgan answered with an onslaught of relentless, lightning rod anxiety. She threw open the doors of his quarters, bathing the hallways in orange light, called out for assistance. Immediately two Warehouse Boys came to her aide and Morgan gave the fallen mannequin of her friend to their burly arms, following behind.

“What happened?” One them asked.

“I don’t know, but take him to Dr. Cadeu,” Morgan said, rushing after them. She knew Rosemary was not a medical doctor, but by sheer title (of which was not actually formally given by Globe electorate), she was the only authority. She could not allow herself to think of what would happen if Rosemary was just as clueless.

“Faster, you fools, he’s dying!” Morgan said, verbally whipping them.

She found Frederique in the halls, carrying a lantern, dressed in a nightgown. She looked like a wraith and in other circumstances Morgan would have tortured her. Her black hair was matted in dark tendrils, her face flush.

“What’s going on?” Morgan said as she watched Frederique watch Robert carry past.

“It’s an outbreak, some plague,” she said, “I was with Ben*.* He got up to use the rest room and then he fainted.”

“Is he alright?”

“I don’t know,” she said, lip trembling. “They brought him to Dr. Cadeu’s.”

“Not the infirmary?” Morgan asked because she feared that her instincts were right.

“That’s just cots, Morgan.”

Together Frederique and Morgan traversed the myriad bridges and waterways that had become their sacred home. The crowds of Warehouse Boys and *Vox Sonic* journalists and even some of Alfred Snow’s orchestra cavalcade stood outside Rosemary’s laboratory in droves, each carrying their own unconscious ward. Morgan spotted Lewis supported by two large men, Louisa looking harried. The stench of the sewers had become dominated with the sweat of men, the fat of grilled meat, the phantom of whiskey. Frederique attempted to push through the crowd but they rebuffed her, their concern making the lithe *Francoise* girl no more than a fly. Morgan watched Robert’s body shepherd through the crowd. She clenched her fist and summoned whatever clout had been assigned to her. With her chest puffed and her eyes forward, she manifested the ethos of the False Daughter and parted the gathering before her as if she were a steamboat creating wakes, with Frederique following closely behind. Two guards were stationed outside of the laboratory, ad-hoc, she reckoned some attempt of self-policing amidst the chaos. They let Morgan through without an issue, and when they attempted to bar Frederique, Morgan literally growled.

She found the laboratory in a state of disarray and transition, the lab tables cleared of their crystal chalices and paper scraps hardened by psycho-oyster mucus. The laboratory had turned into a chaotic orchestra with Rosemary the unwitting and frenzied conductor. She moved between the racks and the tables as if they were stretchers, holding one, two, three people at a time, their heads lolling to the sides as if they had already crossed the mortal coil. The overhead lights rattled in the vibrations of the room, and the low moaning of those afflicted amounted to a haunting Gregorian chant. Rosemary directed Robert to one of the tables, the Warehouse Boys placing him where they could fit him, several assistants bringing in beds from their own quarters to accommodate whatever surface was available. The psycho-oysters farms coalesced and emitted their kaleidoscopic borealis, ignorant of the happenings outside of their own shellacked utopia.

“Not him, too,” Rosemary said, her eyes bug eyed underneath the goggles. Her hair poked out in tantric ends, giving her a scarecrow mien. She placed a washcloth in a bucket of cold water and handed it to one of the volunteers.

“What’s going on?” Morgan asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, “but their bodies are heating up, and they appear to be shutting down.”

“Shutting down? Morgan asked.

“I’m not a medical doctor, Morgan. I’m entirely unequipped for this.”

Frederique tied up her hair and rolled the sleeves of her night dress. She passed by the two of them, grabbed a crusty rag, and began administrating cold clothes to the brows of the invalids.

To her left she saw Robert stir, his eyes fluttering. She rushed to him, leaned in close to learn the existence of labored breathing. “We’re so close, Robert. Don’t you die on me. I need you.”

His lips were quivering, his breath sharpening slightly, slurring. He was talking. Morgan directed her ears over his lips, her ear drums warm with his breath.

“Shut down. My organs.”

“Enough,” Morgan said, “rest. Dr. Cadeu and Frederique will take care of you.”

She turned to them, her pivot so swift that both Rosemary and Frederique handed off their duties and stood to attention. A strand of hair fell over Frederique’s forehead, falling to her upper lip, a black tendril.

“He’s unconscious now,” Morgan said, “but he said he feels like his body is shutting down.” She scanned the laboratory, seeing now some volunteers taking away bodies on the tables that had expired, grabbing their defeated corpus into the hall and into the crowd which had amassed outside of the cathedral, entering into an array of screams and shouts and uncontrolled weeping. The bodies were soon replaced. Morgan understood. “It’s something with the psycho-oysters. What these people are going through is what the Daughters experience.”

“What do you figure?” Rosemary asked, “You and your Sisters have different biologies than us.”

“I don’t know,” Morgan said, “but I think that’s what happening.”

“But how? We don’t smoke Steeples. Our bodies reject even a single puff with vomiting and stomach cramps.”

“It’s the water,” Frederique postulated, taking a towel and resting it underneath the sweat drenched head of a sweating editor from the *Vox Sonic*. “Something in the water mixed with the East Coast minerals or something.”

They turned to her.

Frederique continued, her back to them, herself moved onto another ward that she was testing the breathing of. Two more people had died around them, shuffled out, rotated in. She said, “*My amor* drank water and then collapsed. Robert did too. I can only surmise there is a pattern.”

Morgan and Rosemary stared at one another. Rosemary shuffled on her feet. “The hypothesis might be true.”

“I don’t want to test it,” Morgan said.

“You don’t need to,” Frederique said, her fingers on the pulse of a neck, “One time Yves told me he was working on some strange, gooey chemicals that, if it got out, could poison an entire city.”

“We were planning on waiting until the tides turned to ensure our victory. It would be imprudent to charge into Tectonic Biotechnics now. There must be something else.”

“It will be imprudent to waste time thinking about it,” Rosemary said, “if Frederique is correct, which I suspect she is, every minute that’s wasted here means more of the Queen Bee’s Steeple resource contaminating the water supply.”

Morgan shook her head, “I doubt that it’s localized just here. She doesn’t know where we are, and the infrastructure is too ingrained throughout the city to be isolated.”

Frederique sighed, “Which means that the entire city is drinking this water, not just us. You’ve got to do something, Morgan.”

Morgan glanced towards Robert, his body crumpled, his skin adopting a sickly green tone. An unexpected sting of tears bloomed behind her eyes. She gulped, swallowing her sorrow, and said, “Dr. Cadeu, get your assistants to tell everyone to not drink the water. We have plenty of ale and tea, then keep those still alive that way as best you can. Frederique, pry Louisa away from her brother and have them send an emergency press release warning the Globe not to drink any tap water. People will listen. Then, find Mr. Macintosh and have him direct his remaining Warehouse Boys to go through each borough and spread the word of the disease, see if they could go to every reservoir and stop any new water from coming in, and especially from coming out. We don’t want the entire East River to transform into a swamp. Have them inform the Global Police. If they comply they will see to our aide. If they don’t…well, tonight will be long for everyone. The Daughters should not stop you. You’ll know who they are if they try too, but they’ll be too weak to do anything about it.”

“And of you, Morgan?” Rosemary asked.

“I’m going to Tectonic Biotectnics, to the place where I was born. I’m going to show the people their Queen.”

Frederique said, “Take some Warehouse Boys with you.”

“I don’t need them,” Morgan said. “I have my Sisters.”

7.

Morgan paced in her quarters, catching herself occasionally staring in the broken mirror that the Warehouse Boys had accidentally dropped and, thinking no one would find it, lay it in the back of the adjoining bar which. She wore her true hair, tinged red, emerald eyes not concealed by contacts of any of the personas she had worn like a costume over the years, nor even of those she had acquired in her return from the Globe, her face not done by the Daughters assigned to apply color to her cheeks or a gold sheen to her skin but Frederique’s well ballooned stock. Yet before her was the image of herself that, for the first time in her life, even beyond the breaking of her own chains, she found herself to be proud of. At first, she found offense to the tarnish of her reputation; the *False Daughter* rang in her ears with a heavy tone of shame into her psyche, images conjuring of a warty woman with beady eyes and knobby Elvin fingers, beckoning the unsuspecting Globe populace to the loss of their innocence and dedication. But now she wore that title with honor, and it was not a mask that she needed to navigate the world. Morgan smiled, blew a Steeple laced smoke plume into the mirror, watched it dissipate, and found her and the False Daughter one of the same.

A pack of Lunas lay near her bedside, the carton casting an oblong shadow in the lantern glow. She could smoke them, ingest that cure into her bloodstream. Hell, she could smoke just one pack and leave on the next boat to Manhattan, seek refuge there. She would need to don more personas to get her footing, but it would not be a challenge compared to her ventures here. It would be so easy. But then the Globe would rise from the smokestacks and the cement obelisks in the night sky, a sun brought to Earth, mocking her, taunting her, insulting her, reminding her of her failure to become something more than just a Daughter, an instrument of change exclusive to the support of the tentacles that suffocated around the Globe entire. Or, she could even smoke a Luna, become equipped with the biological freedom, and coup Biotechnic Tectonics as a healed Daughter, prove to Ophelia that she no longer had power.

But Morgan knew better. She wanted this addiction. She planned on smoking the final Luna in production, because that would mean she would have succeeded. She would smoke it in celebration of Robert’s recovery, or over his grave.

She entered the Globe with no persona, weaving through the chaos in the underground, everyone whipped to shape by Frederique’s effective orchestrating. The situation was dire, and Morgan had to resist checking on Robert in the laboratory, but she knew the underground was in good hands. The connecting bar was empty in the morning, save for a few drunkards whose whiskey and gin stupor clouded the world outside of their bar stool, for the bar itself kept its operations to avoid suspicion as to its true purpose. There were *Vox Sonic* editors posting hastily constructed warnings to avoid the water, Warehouse Boys spreading the influence in their own, boisterous way. She opened the double doors of the saloon and stepped into the Globe.

And found it lacking of the vibrancy that she had held so true to her soul.

The streets were empty save for the close-ranged editors pasting the sheets on whatever surface available. Empty bottles rolled on invisible slopes. Several fires burned like miniature islands on the urban landscape; several store fronts now possessed the broken toothed cracks of a smashed window. The trolleys were unmanned, several people resting on the cushioned seats, heads lolling. Not resting. Morgan’s eyed widened and the world revealed itself to her. Lumps of clothing that she had once assumed, at a glance, to be discarded valises of masses in flight now took the form of fallen people, children’s socks linking to legs that had no chance to grow, women wrapped around their husbands and their husbands wrapped around them. The slight, stingy smell of urine. People hung like drying towels over the cast-iron balconies, slumped over benches. The buildings were splotched with slight gasoline sunspots that trailed in little rivets between the cobblestones.

“All dead,” a woman said behind Morgan. She was crumpled in crusty rags, a broken guitar connected with untuned strings, the guitar case with the meagre donations of busking tossed before her in a wave, the discs glinting. Her face was buried in her hands.

Morgan approached the girl. She was young, her fair starchy, her face smudged with Lowers grime. “What happened?” She asked, although she definitely knew.

“People just dropped,” she said, reddened eyes poking through two long fingers. “They just…died.”

Morgan eyed the girl. “Stay out of the way. Don’t let anyone not a Daughter drink the water.”

“What’s going on?” The girl said.

Morgan considered this. Someone a block away, their voices amplified by the sheer silence of the streets, began moaning as a last war cry before their throat clucked and returned to silence. She said, “A reckoning.”

“You’re her, aren’t you?” The girl said, revealing her face. Scabbed lips and blackened eyes gazed back at Morgan.

Morgan did not answer. Instead, she reached into her pockets and pulled out a carton of Lunas.

“I had one,” the girl said. Then she reached into her own pockets and pulled out a Steeple. She twisted her wrist to throw it into the ephemeral pool that had gathered in a nearby pot hole. “Fuck these things.”

“No,” Morgan said, reaching out her hand. “I’ll take it.”

“You’re not her,” the girl said, drawing back, coiling.

Morgan did not react, instead kept her gaze.

“You didn’t smoke one, did you? These funny cigarettes?”

“Steeples are also funny cigarettes,” Morgan said, smiling.

“Thank you,” the girl said, and she placed the Steeple into Morgan’s open palm, “for everything.”

Morgan struck the match, inhaled, exhaled, felt her organs rejuvenate. “Are the trolleys working?”

“No,” she said, “or not around here. If they were, they’d be crashed into the store fronts I bet.”

“What of the elevators? I need to get to the Uppers,” Morgan inquired. Tectonic Biotechnics was technically located in the Middles, but the great machine of the Queen’s throne had colonized this stratum. She would need to make it to the Uppers and then work her way back down, unless there was a trolley.

“I’m sorry, Sister,” the girl said, shrugging. “Let me come with you.”

Morgan shook her head, “No. You’ve just been granted freedom, don’t waste it.”

She left before her Sister could answer. On the way towards the elevator she found several Daughters in the wings, standing on balconies, alone in the carnage. The streets were beginning to reek faintly of death, but the people of the Middles were pragmatic enough, the dead were at least given dignified process, no longer face down from the chemical onslaught that had been inflicted upon them. Morgan possessed an initial fear of walking through the streets unaided, any cloak or disguise discarded. She was ripe for assassination by the Global Police or unsympathetic Daughters or even the people from the Globe itself, still wounded by the truth of the Queen Bee’s machinations and seeing the False Daughter as the incorrect figurehead. But Morgan felt no twang of fear, for as she walked she saw flashes of Lunas in between cradled fingers, butts resting in ash trays, discarded white cylinders crumbling between the cobblestones. They eyed her from the shadows, staying out of sight from whatever phantom had been inflicted upon them. There were several times when Morgan passed an alley and she heard scuffling as if she were to be attacked, but as she braced herself from the monsters in the shadows the growl was suffocated as fast as it appeared and a Sister would appear from the alley, flicking the remains of a Luna into a puddle, looking Morgan over the shoulder before returning to the darkness. Morgan made it to the elevator down on Coney Street and pulled out her pistol. She counted the bullets, her resources scarce.

“Here,” a woman said, sitting on a nearby bench, her clothing splattered with paint, a beret laying like a dead cat at her feet along with a smashed easel. Bullets jangled in her hand, fingers cradling a Luna. Morgan plucked them from her sunspotted palm. The girl said, “Let’s hope you only need to use one of them.”

“Is that what you would do?” Morgan asked, “You would kill the Queen Bee?”

“I would, but the lack of complexity in my decision illustrates why I’m not the False Daughter.”

“Anyone could have been me,” Morgan said, then added “the False Daughter could have been anyone.”

“I don’t believe that,” she said, “none of us do. It’s you, Morgan.”

“You know my name?” Morgan asked.

“How could we not? You’re the most hated woman in the Globe.”

Morgan loaded her pistol, flipped the safety off, and nodded to the girl. She smiled and returned to her shadowed world. Morgan watched her face into the blackness as she summoned the elevator, only peeling away once the pneumatic air compressed and beckoned its arrival.

Through the glass there were two more women, one of which looked better fit for the Middles, makeup non-existent, light dashes of soot on her clothes. The other was a business woman, her suit pressed, a flower in her hair. Morgan looked over her shoulder, adjusted the pistol that she hid in her pocket, and entered the elevator, keeping towards the wall. There was a distinct floral scent in the lift. Morgan nodded to the fellow travelers and the Middles women grunted, coughed, her eyes heavy with sleepless bags. The Uppers sneered her nose and looked outside. The three of them watched the Middles neighborhood descend below them through the glass barrier of the lift, the sounds of the gears turning and cranking, bringing their place higher in the Globe. They formed a triangle, backs towards the walls. Morgan’s hardened paranoia would have prevented her from taking the lift, but time was of the essence, and if any of the past two interactions had proved their worth, her campaign had matured enough to have open allies. It was an odd feeling, one which made her feel vulnerable, especially compounded with her navigating the Globe simply as herself, which she had hardly done even prior to the coup. In a way, Morgan felt slightly, if a little guiltily, invigorated.

Tectonic Biotechnics illuminated its periwinkle neon in the distance, at the far end of Globe, looking orbital and menacing. The large bay windows, only one of several in the Middles, emitted a fading morning light. Morgan wondered how long she had been awake, the days morphed from the previous. Just hours ago, she was playing chess with Robert, and now, spying a bird’s-eye view of the Middles, she saw recently blossomed wreckage and counted them: upturned trolleys, poisoned men, women, and children in the streets, broken windows as if struck by some acoustic hurricane, licks of flames from the buildings. Men dead over bar tops, their beards slumped into their spilled ale. The Middles were breaking and burning, and Morgan’s suspicions of this being a relentless and intentional attack became more apparent as the Middles unfolded before them.

The Uppers woman jittered, her hand transporting briefly into her briefcase and materializing with a knife. Her hand flicked and the blade pinwheeled in the air as Morgan was readying her own weapon. The blade stuck into the wrist of the Middle’s women to Morgan’s left, and she fell to her patched knees, the metal protruding from her bone. She was carrying a black pistol and as the butt fell on the elevator floor the seismic tap fired it, sending a bullet out of the falsely-advertised “invincible glass” that was the elevator’s barrier. The elevator rattled with the sonic boom but continued its assent, albeit slightly rickety and oblong, moving at a subtle yet sensitive janky tilt.

“Get up,” Uppers said, “hands out in the open. False Daughter, get on this side.”

Morgan was silent. She oscillated between the Upper’s frantic eyes and the Middles’s smoking gun and pool of blood accumulating underneath her wrist.

The Uppers said, “I’m on your side.”

“How I do I know,” Morgan said.

“Because you’re on ours,” Upper said, then pulled out another knife. “I’ve been trailing this one all morning.”

“She lies,” the Middles said. “Our Sister just took out my hand!”

“And what you had was a concealed pistol,” said the Uppers, her nose wrinkling, blonde curls bouncing with the upturn of her chin. “Her Assignment was to find you, just like everyone else.”

“You found out this morning?” Morgan said, “I’ve met other Sisters whom have taken up arms against the Queen, and they have all given the impression of defecting weeks prior. Why should I believe you?”

“Because the Sisters who defected most vocally were either killed or put into hiding. They don’t have access to the Terminals. I do. I did.”

“The bitch lies!” said the Middles, her face twisted in pain as she massaged her invaded hand.

With the same speed as with her knives, the Uppers pulled out a half-consumed Luna from her briefcase. “Do you need this as proof?”

Morgan shook her head, “I’ve seen enough. Thank you.”

“We could force her to smoke this. I don’t need all of it. Although I’m sure you already know that.”

The elevator fought the last few feet of its ascent, and for a second Morgan feared that they would plummet. The Middles Sister twitched, reached for her fallen pistol. Morgan kicked it away towards the feet of her ally. The Middles growled, “Keep away from me, False Daughter. And you,” she reared towards the Uppers, “you are nothing but cattle.”

“That was rude,” Uppers said.

The elevator doors opened and Morgan held the entrance by placing her hands in the empty space. She looked over her shoulder, eyeing her cringing would be Middles assassin. “What’s it like in the Middles? What can I expect?”

“Everyone is hunting for you,” she said, “but to your luck the ones that are still fighting for the Queen Bee are just as poorly fit as our sick sister here. You are among your sisters now. Don’t trust all of us, as I’m sure you know. But trust us those who’ll want to help.”

“I’ve already gotten the hint,” Morgan said, “the Sisters who aim to kill me look just as put together as that one. No offense,” she added to the Middles.

“Begone, False Daughter,” Uppers said, “I’ll take care of our Sister here. Do you want me to force her to smoke a Luna?”

“I will not take your poison,” the Middles said, “I’ve heard the rumors. They say you die.”

“It’s not a comfortable transition,” said the Uppers, “but should I force it on her? Save your failed assassin’s life?”

“No.”

“No?” The Uppers gave her a suspicious look. “It saved my life. It could save hers, too.”

“No, as in, I’m not going to make that decision for you. If it were me, I’d leave it her. She has to recognize the chains which bind her, which bound us. As for you, I’m grateful for you, but I can’t make that decision for you either. If you want to force the Luna on her, I’m not going to stop you.”

Uppers considered this. She looked at the Luna as if it were some jewel. “These are amazing, you know.”

“Indeed, they are,” Morgan said.

“Godspeed, then. No one knows happening to everyone, or why everyone is dying, but I know one thing. The Globe needs saving.”

Morgan stepped out of the elevator. As the doors closed, she said, “And, like always, the Daughters shall save it.”

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The route to Tectonic Biotechnics had been wrought with chaos, and Morgan would had felt afflicted with the delirious state of the Uppers had she not developed an impenetrable forcefield. The Uppers was a peculiar place. Like most wealthy strata throughout history, Morgan found their fiddle playing to be par for the course of what she expected. As the Middles and even rarer Lowers workforce lay dying in the street along with the rotting Uppers socialites who had harbored the misfortune of drinking the contaminated water this morning as a form of self-destructive canary in a mine-shaft. Glittering bodies lay amongst their poorer brethren, rummaged with the latest publish of the *Vox Sonic,* broken bottles worth twice the salary of a Lower, glittering trolleys with smashed jewels. And the Uppers took to partying, delirious in the madness, copulating as they poured streams of crystalline champagne on the street below, the carbonated drops landing on the brows of a pile of flies stuck on molted flesh. Whiskey passed around in little glasses, taken back with a pistol-loaded neck as their neighbors and butlers hung over cast iron banisters. And the words of the fearful were strange curiosity to Morgan. Uppers butlers wielding cleavers, protecting against an invisible enemy, men who had once had everything dying from total organ shut down on a bench near a fountain laden not with pennies but with whole silver dollars. Smells of ochre and burning flesh and expensive wine and even more expensive perfume.

It took her twenty minutes to reach the elevator to Tectonic Biotechnics, and even though she kept to the walls she could feel in her bones that there was an aura of defense, a legion of protective crows just out of her eye sight. A scuffed foot in an alley and then the ignition of a Luna, only the cylinder visible in the golden arcades. A firecracker shooting across the holographic sky and a woman to her left falling from the balcony. A trolley pulling up, driven by a mysterious girl, a Luna resting in between her fingers, and then Morgan hopping in, two minutes riding, covering half a mile, driving over bodies that had turned to rot since this morning, bustling through the flies and maggots, and then another firecracker and the girl’s eye explodes and the trolley twisted and Morgan managed to run the last sixty feet to the elevator, summoning it to take her out of this crystalline hellscape, a tear at the witness of her explodes sisters skull. The elevator’s pneumatic tubes whirred and Morgan, looking out to the arcade, the fallen trolley in the middle, the bodies hung like tossed laundry over ochre banisters. The elevator jammed.

She pulled out her gun, sniffed the air. Smelled a Steeple cut through the aroma of blood. By some psychic connection Morgan could not explain, she knew that her Sister had returned.

“Look at what you’ve done,” Bijoux called out from the balcony behind a fallen trolley, jangling a set of keys that Morgan had seen city maintenance use to manually control the lifts. “You have ruined everything. Come out, little Bee.”

“Bijoux,” Morgan said, her name tasting like sour lemon on her tongue. “What happened to you? I thought you learned your lesson at Koch Lake.”

“A failure, to be sure. I’ll admit that.” The industrial *click* of a rifle. “Very clever. Distracting me. Using me. Not today, False Daughter.”

“Using?” Morgan said, her pistol drawn to her check, knees pulled in tight. She hid behind the trolley. They were about 12 feet from one another. “You’re being used right now, Bijoux. Stop this nonsense. Join the rest of our Sisters.”

“My Sisters. Mine. Not yours. Mine.”

“You still don’t understand? After all this?”

“What I don’t understand,” Bijoux said, appearing from the corner of the trolley, the butt of her rifle blocking the shine from the morning sun permeating through the large Uppers windows. “Is that after all this, a simple Steeple would make you think you can sense me.”

Fireworks wrapped around Morgan, flashes of darkness permeated into her skull. She fell backwards towards the glistening cobble stones. Bijoux stood over her.

“You might be wondering why none of the other sheep are not coming to your aid. In case your brain isn’t still rattled, they met *me*.”

Morgan crawled backwards on her elbows, feeling disoriented, Bijoux’s beehive hairdo a duplicate swirling around itself. This, combined with the influx of death abound, made Morgan nauseas. Bijoux’s silhouette trembled and transported to Morgan’s thigh. A grunt, a pull of her materialized shoulder, a tendril of blood, a bloom of fire. Adrenaline coursed through Morgan and her eyes recentered, seeing the saber of light eclipse from the blade in Bijoux’s hand, rising as if to strike upon an altar.

“Do you remember what you said to me last time we met?” Bijoux yelled.

Morgan held her thigh, fumbled with blood caked hands for her dropped pistol. Bijoux kicked it away.

“You said that you were better than me. Look at you now. Look at what horrors you beset on the Globe.”

“Bijoux, listen, I have a cure--“

“I don’t want your cure,” she said, her face drawing into the light, revealing the left orb to be bloodshot, a string of tears trailing down a scarred cheek. At this Morgan noticed Bijoux’s other afflictions: shambling knees held upright with brass knee braces, a farmer’s row of ridges upon her arm, a split lip, recently opened and gurgling ruby. She continued, “I want you to see what you have done to us. To your home. I want to complete my Assignment.”

Bijoux picked up Morgan by the back of her head and slammed her forehead into the fallen trolley, each strike sending a starburst of electricity into her existence. Morgan fumbled, tried to stand, was kicked down.

She said, “The Queen Bee said this is all mine. She finally said it. She gave it to me. Not you. It’s no longer yours to reject. You idiot. You *idiot*. Now you have nothing.”

“You will inherent a fallen kingdom,” Morgan said, holding her sides, receiving a heel to the chin. A flood of copper infiltrated the roof of her mouth.

“And you shall inherent Hades, False Daughter.”

Morgan turned onto her back, “Bijoux, wait.”

Her face twisted; brows furrowed. She rearmed herself, twisted the strap of the rifle underneath her shoulder, aimed it at Morgan. The smell of gunpowder was faint but present. The smell of a Steeple was faint but present.

“You took everything,” Bijoux said.

Morgan opened her palms to show she had nothing hiding. She stared at Bijoux’s broken face. She eyed Bijoux from her uncomfortable position, her neck craned on a brick. “I am not your enemy, Sister.”

“Stop calling me that!”

Morgan slanted her eyes. She looked away, “Have you smoked a Luna yet?”

“Not your poison.”

“It’ll cure you. From the psycho-oysters. No more Steeples again.”

“What if I don’t want it?”

Morgan wiggled slightly to her right, her fingers poised.

“You don’t want to cure yourself?”

“What if I like my allegiance to the Globe?”

Morgan sighed, adjusted her thigh in an attempt for gravity to keep the blood from seeping out of her. A curtain of blood dropped from her left brow, fragments of rust dotting her split forehead like grains of sand. “Then you would know that the Queen is using you. You are a tool to her, an instrument.”

“Enough!” Bijoux yelled, and from her reddened eye several tears dropped down her cheek, cutting dark rivulets through the ash and smog that had begun to weigh on the tormented Uppers streets. “The Queen Bee promised the Globe to me if I kill you. She said I was the great protector. Not you. You are a cancer!”

Morgan propped herself up on her elbows, careful not to evoke Bijoux. Her fingers curled into a fist and she stared down the barrel of Bijoux’s rifle. She could not use Bijoux’s anger against her as she had in their previous bout, the rifle was too close to Morgan, her sister’s fingers too close to the trigger. Any besides, Bijoux now did not seem possessed with her fatal flaw. She looked at Morgan not with ire, but with calculated, personal hatred, the force of which emitted in strong, solar waves.

“Your beloved Queen has put us into biological bondage. Do you not notice how our Sisters were clawing at one another to get a Steeple? Do you not notice how much happier and safer they are when our own biological adequacies are no longer an issue? Do you love the Queen Bee more than our Sisters? More than Tilyou’s Daughters?”

The rifle shook. Bijoux adjusted her knees, shifting her weight from one metal clad brace to the other. “I love the Globe.”

“The Globe and the Queen are not synonymous, Bijoux.”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up!” Bijoux said, and at this moment Morgan kicked Bijoux’s metal brace, pushing herself off the trolly, the rifle exploding right next to Morgan’s ear, the shockwave disorienting, the world reduced to an incredible metallic ring. Morgan grabbed the rifle’s long barrel, winching as blisters formed on her grip, and pulled the rifle down, bringing Bijoux to the ground. Morgan and she tumbled, entangled like a pair of bickering siblings, until Morgan pushed Bijoux onto the ground, held her with her knees, ignored the throbbing in her head and the torn muscles in her thigh, and picked up a rock, holding it an arc, the morning clouds eclipsing the two of them. She struck and Bijoux’s shoulder went limp, and for a second Morgan had thought that she had smote her.

Bijoux eyes pried opened to lasers but her lips subconsciously pouted, her chin trembling. She looked like a small girl. “Why do you always keep winning?” She asked. “Why am I not good enough?”

Morgan looked at Bijoux with an influx of contempt. Her face dissipated as if they were tumbling sands in a mirage, and through her half ichor clad face Morgan no longer saw Bijoux. It was the face of Samantha, the murdered Daughter, the swollen and raisin faces of Faux-Ophelia and her Dredge ilk, killed by Bijoux herself. The multitude of dead bodies that lay about the Globe, had always laid about the Globe, hidden underneath the espionage of acts committed by Morgan herself. Robert Forrest.

“Do it,” Bijoux said, spitting to the side, her crying eye creating crystalline pebbles down her cheek, her chin. “Kill me. I see it in your eyes.”

Morgan bit her lip. The shadow of the brick covered Bijoux’s face.

Bijoux said, “You’re looking at me the same way I look at you.”

Morgan’s hand trembled. She habitually bit her busted lip, fighting to resist wincing. Bijoux was different from their other Sisters. At first Morgan assumed she understood Bijoux, even when being bested at the Requiem, even when her and Robert were cowering their heads from the machine gun fire in the Dredges, even when Morgan herself was hunted at Koch Lake. It was her Assignment, attuned by the Auditors, the great, greasy hands of the Queen Bee. Assignment meant law, an axiom of existence. But Bijoux fought harder than her Sisters, and if they were to be on the same side, they would be unstoppable. Bijoux represented the impenetrable psyche, remaining stalwart, fueled by vengeance and a need for recognition that went beyond their Sisters who had proven themselves to see reason in this great campaign against their creators. But there was a fire inert in Bijoux that far exhumed from her identity as a Sister, even in the figments of her personality that were her own. It was a personal hatred, one which was fueled by whatever machinery set in forth by their abuse from the powers which ruled them. Morgan understood that, even though she had maimed her knees, forced a constant stream of tears from ruptured ducts, that Bijoux would never stop hunting her, would never relent in a mission that had transcended Assignment and turned into a personal endeavor bordering on doctrine. This thought made Morgan both angry and sad.

Bijoux seethed. “You understand.”

Morgan dropped the rock, let out a minor snarl. “Why are you like this? Why do you continue to serve her? She doesn’t care about you!”

“Because,” Bijoux said, “if I don’t, then I have nothing. I have no purpose. That is our curse. We need purpose. Tilyou’s Daughters *need* purpose.”

“You could have been so much more,” Morgan said, “we could have been friends, actual Sisters.”

Bijoux’s arm twisted underneath Morgan’s knees and Morgan saw a flash of light and a streak of her blood. Morgan grabbed her pistol and shot Bijoux in the bicep, sending a flurry of crows that had settled on a pile of bodies hanging over the balcony. Bijoux’s face twisted in anguish as the cannon obliterated her arm. The blade that had once entered Morgan’s thigh fell to the side and Morgan pushed it away. She rummaged in the pockets of Bijoux’s flak jacket and retrieved the keys. Gingerly she put pressure on her opened thigh and stood over Bijoux’s, her body laid flat in the courtyard, eyes staring at the sky before focusing back on Morgan.

Morgan shouted through a stream of tears, “Stop hunting me! I will beat you again and again and again, and each time I will hurt you. Leave me alone, Sister.”

“No,” Bijoux said.

“Join us, or go to Manhattan. The Globe that you are trying to protect is gone. The Queen Bee’s reign ends today.”

“If I don’t save it, I will not inherent it. I will continue to hunt for you, Morgan. I will kill the False Daughter.”

Morgan shook her head. “Your arrogance is what is killing you. Stop this. I will not become what you want me to be.”

At this Morgan turned away, holstering the pistol, passing the fallen tram, piercing the shroud of smoke that had sunken on to the streets. She unlocked the elevator doors through a sideways panel and as the elevator reawakened she lit a Steeple. Looking up from the flame, she saw that Bijoux was gone, leaving only a bloodied spot in the middle of the Uppers, a phantom. Spots of blood trailed several feet and then disappeared entirely. For the first time in their relationship, Morgan did not believe she would see her Sister again.

The elevator doors opened and Morgan entered. She had shed enough tears already.

8.

Morgan slumped in the elevator; the fission in her thigh was becoming both numb and as if on fire. She drew out her pistol in case the glass doors opened to reveal more Daughters still sympathetic to the Queen Bee, although she wished within the very recesses of her soul that this was not the case. Every Sister that defended Morgan meant another of their Sisters’ potential death. Morgan had brought upon themselves a civil war. But outside the glass doors she saw a collection of Sisters not pointing weapons at the threshold but instead waving the flag of their unity by means of a Luna cradled in their fingers. It was a whole platoon, and they were battle-worn. Some of them limped and required makeshift crutches, others had slings, and yet some had bandages on their face that Morgan knew would permanently alter their visages. If this was the before times, any Daughter with a ruined face that could not be tended to by the best, Auditor vouched doctors was resigned to Assignments in the Lowers with their only beacon of cultural ascension being the occasional bout as a homely bar maid in the Middles. The worst cases had Daughters be sent to live, almost permanently, in the Dredges. What had they gotten themselves into? What battles have been fought while Morgan was underground, watching reams of the *Vox Sonic* semiotically reveal the truth, while she was sipping whiskey over a map of the Globe with Robert and the others?

Their pistols were drawn and the smell of burning hair and gunpowder enveloped them. They were on the landing that formed as the official perimeter to the Tectonic Biotechnics, and in a past life when Morgan had existed on the cusp of her ignorance, she had feigned tripping Arno to lift important documents. And in a past life when she crossed the boundaries of her reality, she had almost died and that was the last of her organs she had been born with. Now, looking past the rock wall with the marble *Tectonic Biotechnics* plaque, the cracked yet immaculate steps to remind the Middles who owned this land, she could see the great scientific engine manifest, looming like some nefarious, nameless beast, glowing faintly as if beckoning into a casino, or a brothel. The Middles themselves were to their back, a smoldering mess, complete now with decaying bodies being feasted upon by crows, more fires, new bodies of those who had not made the initial connection of the poisonous water or had been victim to the lack of order and ensuing chaos.

One of the Sisters, a bandage on her chin, bruised underneath her eye, came forward. The other Daughters looked on, their postures tightening at Morgan’s approach. She said, “We’ve tried to storm them, but we’ve only gotten to a standstill. Our stubborn Sisters won’t let us in. Hence why we’ve gathered here. They have no intention of letting us up the steps. We have no intention of letting them leave.”

“You’ve done enough,” Morgan said, “thank you.

“We’ve lost enough,” she said. “It was not easy banding together, but we did. You made it easy. You made it happen.”

Morgan nodded to the fortress, “How many guards?”

“No Global Police, they are too busy responding to the contaminated water. Their allegiances are…below what’s actually happening. Which I suppose is good.”

“It is,” Morgan said, pleased to hear some scrap of good news. “Don’t drink the water.”

“It doesn’t affect us,” someone perked from behind.

The leader continued, “Which makes us think-”

“That it’s coming from here,” Morgan finished, “Why is there a cease fire?”

The some of the women looked at their feet. The leader, who had a nose similar to Bijoux’s with skin just as dark, said, “They were waiting for you. They knew we were waiting for you. They told us to tell you to go alone.”

“Alone?”

“We don’t trust them. But they said that they will wait for you, that you were on the way. Since then, we’ve just kept then at arm’s length, making sure no one got in out.”

“Then I suppose it’s time for me to head there,” Morgan said.

One of the smaller girls blurted, “They will kill you, Sister!”

“It would not be in the Queen Bee’s interest to turn me into a martyr, just as it’s not in our interest to turn her into one.”

“You’re really going to go alone? That’s like walking to a lion’s den.”

Morgan chewed on this. This was insane, she knew it, but there was also credence to the half-lie that Morgan had told herself and her bruised and damaged Sisters. The Queen Bee was aiming to make a display of this all, and she had the resources to wait until the Globe’s population dwindled. Morgan’s Sisters believed they had time on their side, that they could simply route those within Tectonic Biotechnics, that eventually they would have to leave their shining fortification, but Morgan knew this was untrue. What would Robert do?

“If the Queen Bee requires my audience, I’ll be sure to give it,” Morgan said, collecting herself. “Keep yourselves safe in the perimeters. I don’t know what trap Ophelia is planning, but I know that it’ll go all to hell once you step on the grounds.”

“Be safe,” they said.

“I’ll try,” Morgan said, and she continued on her way, to face the lion alone.

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The Daughters stood like crows, occupying the benches in the manicured garden, sitting cross legged on the balconies with tendrils of Steeple smoke curling from their fingers, hands on hips, leaning on doors. Daughters of all variety, the dirty rags worn by the Dredges next to the glittering skin of the Uppers. It was odd to see the cultures clashed together in such this way, even though Morgan knew that every Daughter apartment was equipped with their own array of outfits in which to chameleon oneself. The Daughters were a class of themselves, not within the Globe nor outside it. They were the Globe.

Morgan felt the emptiness behind her as she walked up the path, past the hedges, the fountain with the glittering coins of sunken wishes. None of the Daughters had their weapons out, and none of them approached her. Several of them curled down their newspaper and eyed Morgan as she passed. Then Morgan heard a snap, much like a balloon popping, and had Morgan not instinctively looked over her shoulder, she would have assumed she was under fire. But the truth was more real, and she watched a parade of balloons float past her, accentuated with a louder pop in the sky ceiling above Tectonic Biotechnics turned kaleidoscopic, an aura that reminded Morgan of a psycho-oyster. Sulfur infused into the air. Outside a couple of Daughters ignited streamers that you would find at a children’s party. The entire lawn had acquired the mask of a celebration, and, what had started as a low tremor turned into an uproar of thunder as applause boomed around her. The Daughters were clapping from their perches, their Steeples creating smoke runes in the air. The applause was so total that it had begun to invade Morgan’s thoughts, sounding more like an avalanche or a war song of bees.

Morgan reached for her pistol, elated by the festivities, the surrealist quality of it all. None of the Daughters reacted, instead continue to cheer, whistle, wink. Morgan kept her hand steady atop her hip. Her feet landed on the steps of Tectonic Biotechnics as the sky illuminated with green and purple, another whiff of incendiary dust. A crowd of Daughters stood in front of the door, parting, continuing their jubilations. They flanked her, a river of Middles and Uppers and Dredges and Lowers, all outfits in one, jangled pattern, all versions that Morgan had floated in herself. And their faces, seeing them en masse, laid bare, made it all the more obvious of their relations, although without the proof of the Gene Division’s existence, Morgan would have had trouble believing they were anything closer than cousins. Ophelia’s face imposed upon others, the features sometimes exaggerated to a caricature if you were to compare the copy to the original, but pretty none-the-less. Samantha’s eyes flashed over Morgan’s body. Morgan’s own red hair, emerald eyes stared back at her. And the other Sisters all had different combinations of attributes, as if their faces were simple shuffles, unique by the randomness of it, uncreative when seen at once. And behind it all, an ephemeral goo that turned into black ichor, floating in vats, a living thing that was not alive, more important to the Globe than even electricity.

Morgan allowed herself to be led like a log in a river, kept within bounds of the Daughters. Morgan’s sisters were correct; all of the Daughters sympathetic to The Queen were here, localized as one unified cluster. Any sane person would tell Morgan that, even given the circumstances, The Gene Division had given up pretense of secrecy. In lieu of the myriad gates between the receptionist and the Gene Devision, the required key cards, the very architecture of the building itself steering you away from its care, there was now streamers and fire crackers and the smells of soda pop and popped corn. The Coney Island Smiler had been painted above the vestibule, his manic eyes and haunting, hungry smile beckoning in Morgan as if this were a ride on the Steeplechase of old, the very grounds of which the Globe itself was cradled, and risen from the oyster-laden pillars underneath the briny, mottled pier. Morgan ignored her Sisters as they cheered, whooped, hollered. She kicked open the door just as someone had blown a streamer behind her, the *pop* exploding tinsel of forest green and baby blue.

The Gene Devision opened before her, the large vats that Morgan had only revisited in her dreams looming like gigantic ale caskets, the black ichor of Morgan and her Sister’s genesis and defect swirling like some cotton candy aerator, tiny, slimy things floating in the ether, others containing full grown women levitating in the goo, their bodies content, others convulsing with pleasure that Morgan knew was the best they would ever know. There were no scientists present, their bug-eyed, clipboard holding selves no longer skittering on the banisters, inking complex mathematics and graphs on stainless steel tables. Instead, the Daughter’s flourished, sitting on the railings, cross legged, wearing a smirk in front of the black cancer that has been instilled in the rest of them. The Gene Devision was cold, empty, somehow more vacant even with the streamers and the hot dog carts and the fried clams and the firecrackers. Several Auditors smirked at her approach, flanking the doors, large cigars in one hand with bars of chocolate in the other. Some looked like Arno, their stomachs the size of king’s during plagues, others looked like slinkies, themselves mottled with years of decadent living, their eyes reduced to near-sighted hollows. All of them were greasy.

And before her, the Queen Bee sat on her wheeled throne, tiny reeds of her legs covered with a hand-knitted blanket, various pipes and dials grasping her chair, weaving in and out from under her clothes, forming hard lumps that concealed biomechanical horrors underneath the quilt. Wisps of her hair looked like tentacles of cotton fluttering down her face. Swollen bags surrounded the hollows of her eyes. Continents of liver spots etched upon her face, sprouted from the last time version of her that had etched into Morgan’s memory. She looked more like Faux-Ophelia than herself, an aborted caricature of even the stately, frail doll that had once offered her the throne of the Globe. At once the effects of Morgan’s endeavor grew heavy as it became evident the influences on her joweled face. The aged woman was not ageless. Her eyes displayed that undying emerald fire, and when she parted her lips like two starchy curtains the applause ceased, so hefty was the presence of sudden silence that it was almost a sound in and of itself.

“Little Bee,” she said, her voice half a croak, “look at how far you’ve come. Do you like the party that I’ve thrown for you?”

Morgan looked around, her voice finding itself unable to manifest.

Ophelia said, “Look at what you’ve done. I’m very proud of you.”

“You look well,” Morgan said.

“You’ve caused me such a great deal of stress, Daughter. My organs…they’ve needed replacing faster and faster. They say anxiety is bad for the soul.”

Morgan blurted, “The water. You poisoned it.”

“I did,” she said, her face twisting. “Horrible sight.”

“How did you expect this to go down, Ophelia? Did you expect to poison me and everyone in the Globe? Would you rather have everyone die than live not as their ruler? Is human life so unimportant to you?”

Several of the daughters snickered. The Auditors coughed black phlegm from their cigars. The Daughters in the incubations bobbed in the ichor like sleeping mermaids.

“Well,” Ophelia said, “Egyptian Kings would offer a hand in the deaths of his army, so they accompany him across the mortal coil and into the infinite blackness. They considered it an honor.”

“And the Globe? You plan on taking all the innocent men with you? And the woman and children? You need them all to cross the river?”

“I am the Globe,” Ophelia said, eyes alighting once more, lips pursed. Morgan needed to resist flinching. “And you could have had it all.”

“Reverse it. Shut off the valve,” Morgan said. “Flush the water.”

“Into the Hudson River?” Ophelia said, “that kind of thinking is what made the Globe to powerful. You will do great.”

“Will?” Morgan said. “I’ve enough of your tricks.”

“When you set yourself on this path, my lovely Daughter, you rejected my offer to have you run this city. Now, you’ve returned. Not exactly the way I’d hoped, but all eras must end, and thus they must start. Whether you like it or not, you’re here to usurp me. You already have.”

“Enough tricks, Ophelia.”

“What tricks?” She said, raising a gargoyle claw, gesturing. “You act like you walked into the lion’s den, that you’ve stumbled into court to amass judgement. Yes, we’re holed up in here, celebrating your success, but only because you’ve managed to push me into a corner. We could kill you, but that wouldn’t change anything. If anything it would only make you a martyr. And that’s what it’s about, my dear. Martyrdom. Once, the Daughters would have torn the Globe asunder if you killed me when we last met. Now the dial has shifted, and the False Daughter has embedded herself a champion. Quite the spectacle.”

“You’re so arrogant!” Morgan shouted, her voice echoing from the rafters. “I will not fall into your tricks, I will not secede to you.”

“Then kill me,” Ophelia said, “I’ve instructed my Daughters to not raise a weapon to you.”

Morgan furrowed her brows, “I don’t believe that.”

“It’s true. They want to watch.”

“Watch?”

“The end,” she said, smiling. Then she added, “Take me outside. Show the Globe that this is the end of an era.”

“There is no Globe, you’ve killed everyone.”

“I’m tilling new fields for you, my successor,” she said. “Now, will you take these old bones outside? The rest of the Globe is waiting. The fields are just aching to blossom.”

Morgan stalled.

Ophelia gripped her wheels, her chicken-wing arms made to further the treads. Several Daughters stirred to assist her wicked body, several Auditors made to move. Ophelia shielded herself from their aid with a wave and a growl. Then, with gnarled knuckles, she pointed straight down the path to Morgan. “I want *her* to help me.”

“I’ll do not such thing.”

“Then will you kill me, here and now? You can. Or were you planning on some public execution?”

Morgan hesitated. She actually had not gotten this far, had indeed expected some sort of heroic fire-fight, some moral conquest, a no-mans land established between Biotechnic Tectonics and the freed Daughters. Robert would know what to do. He would know to sow the seeds of democracy among these oyster-laden fields.

Ophelia continued, “I am your ancestor. Have respect. I only want to gaze upon my city one last time.”

Morgan shook her head. “I am not your decedent. I am you. But I know your descendent, and he had been a better person in his young life than you have in an eternity of yours.”

At this Ophelia stopped her momentum, the wheels creaking, needing grease, the mysterious lumps of machinery pulsing and swaying. “Ah. I believe you, Morgan. I predicted this event. That one of my siblings would haunt me through the branches of the family tree.”

“That was the start, sure. But rest assured, Ophelia, that your end is now. Because of me.”

“Then you have the power to offer an old woman her last wish.”

Morgan looked at this tyrant and reexamined the meaning of the word. Ophelia had caused a great many trauma for the Globe, generations of ill-fitted scaffolding that fixed itself like an incorrectly mended bone. Who was Morgan to change the course of the Globe’s history? Who was she to become the champion of this city? People had not discovered they were unhappy until they had been shown a mirror, content in their ignorance. Morgan’s endeavors had unveiled the masses a giant mirror to their own miseries, the evidence of their own manipulation, as if pulled from the curtain of a great stage. At this Morgan considered Ophelia’s initial proposal. *No,* she thought, *no. The people should know of the strings which had pulled and puppeted them, much like my Sisters*.

And Morgan’s first decision was her own, and it would be one of mercy. She would allow Ophelia one last gaze of the city she had abused, of the power she had coveted to the point of addiction. Perhaps she would see the ruin she had decided to leave behind.

Morgan rounded Ophelia’s chair, took the handles with their flaking plastic and paint, and pushed her through the anemic labyrinth of the building, its white tiles and crystal faces adorned with balloons and streamers, the study hum of the psycho-oyster incubation tanks transforming into the applause, some Sisters weeping, others excited. Her wounded leg made her limp and the wheelchair traversed slower, jankier than she would have hoped. Halfway through her wound reopened and a slug trail of blood added with the streamers and the glitter that blanketed the floor.

Morgan remained suspicious; she could simply kill the old crone and get it over with. If she died by her Sisters, then she would be martyred and the Globe would be freed. An aura of sadness exuded from Ophelia’s ancient pores. Two sisters opened the door and Morgan wheeled Ophelia to the balcony overlooking the Middles. The fountain and the landing were below, the green lawn dotted with deflated balloons and cigar ash. The doors closed and Morgan and Ophelia were on the balcony alone, Morgan standing behind her like some lieutenant, and at being conscious of them stepped aside, pulled out her pistol.

“You understand,” Ophelia croaked.

Beyond, the Middles smoldered, no doubt looking similar to the other strata of the Globe. An army of decay lay in the rafters, rotting in the fountains, on the tram tracks, in restaurants. A buffet of flies. Yet before them was a small lake of those who had come to witness this critical moment. Sisters, the remaining Warehouse Boys, the editors of the *Vox Sonic*. People from the Middles and the Dredges, the Lowers and the Uppers. A crowd had amassed before them, witnesses, a thousand eyes. Morgan’s eyes traveled to the front of the crowd and she got distracted by the appearance of an orange-red firefly, drifted up in the sway of hand. Robert ignited a cigarette, doffed his cap, his face weakened but tired, like a man who had spent many nights amidst smoke and whisky vapors. Robert Forrest smiled across the lawn, and Morgan’s knuckles stretched taut, turned white, their connected gaze the creation of a universe.

Morgan raised the pistol to Ophelia’s liver spotted scalp, the tendrils of her whisps floating like the fingers of ghosts in the breeze. She pulled out a Steeple and popped it into her mouth, aiming to smoke it amidst the gunpowder smoke, the loudness of the ensuing silence. It was symbolic, she knew, but she allowed herself this.

“I’d wait a second, dear,” Ophelia said, looking out the smoldering city, the remaining threshes staring up from the lawn of Tectonic Biotechnics. “You’re forgetting the reasons for it all.”

“Those are your last words? Your apology?”

“You still don’t get it, Morgan,” Ophelia said. Then she straightened herself, her chest popping, shoulders creaking, her face tightening with effort of muscles that had not found use in years, decades. She pulled her shrunken, gremlin hand underneath her quilt. “It’s about the spectacle.”

The world became engulfed with a white light, the air soured into the acrid smell of sulfur, a burnt match, cinder. Flames appeared to Morgan’s left, lapping at her elbow, her hip, her leg. Before her was a bonfire, a self-contained fire-spirit atop the balcony, and within it, visible only from Morgan’s proximity, was the silhouette of Ophelia Tilyou’s crumbling body, the hard ridges of her wheelchair caving. The world erupted with burning hair and greasy burning flesh, the cinders and dials popped. And the Globe watched in stunned awe, the bonfire next to Morgan, the fireworks display. The collective gasp of the audience was synchronized enough to be barely audible amidst the crackles. For several seconds which had masked as infinity, Ophelia Tilyou burned in ode to the only god she knew: herself. Her body did not warp, it simply waited, stiff, as if this were some magic trick. Morgan drew a breath because she had forgotten to breath, had inhaled an odorous menagerie of burning corpse, of centuries of medical procedures, of skin grafts, of organ transplants, of psycho-oysters, of hot dogs, of fried clams, of skyscrapers, of lighthouses, of carnivals, of dancing bears, of Lilliputians, of bagel babies, of sake, of sea salt, of pickles, of the Smiler, of magic, of love.

Morgan made to turn, not wanting to give The Queen Bee her last audience, but as she did so a series of booms that Morgan initially perceived as kernels popping snaked its way along an invisible, unpredictable concourse, moving from the lawn, to the foyer, bouncing like a dropped dime in a well. A magnificent explosion blossomed from the top of Tectonic Biotechnics, its streams vising into the sulfur clouded sky. It was obvious to Morgan that the colors of the pyrrhic streams were the same kaleidoscopic patterns of fresh psycho-oysters.

“Beautiful,” Morgan said, the warmth of Ophelia Tilyou at her back.

She was answered by a colossal combustion that rampaged through the halls, slamming into her like a dragon’s breath. She felt her center of gravity upend, and the fireworks faded, and then she saw a figure in orange, sitting atop a throne like some royal Ifrit, and then the world was black.

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“Look,” said a voice that sounded familiar but far away, a voice that made Morgan need to search her mental rolodex that that dropped onto the floor. “She rises.”

A thunderbolt slammed into Morgan’s temple, following the tail end of a meteor strike. She was on a cloud, her body covered in wrapping that bound her elevated neck and ankles. A cluster of people stood over her rectangular island, their shadows intertwining.

“Get that smoke out of there, Robert,” a woman said, swatting a firefly away.

Morgan’s tongue felt twice the size, as if someone had replaced it with a sponge. She looked around, found familiarity with the blond gentlemen, the sneering girl, the woman with tangles of sticks in her hair. The blond man leaned on a thin reed; legs positioned awkwardly.

“She needs rest,” said the stick-woman, her eyes as wide as saucers, reflecting a ray of green from the lights above. She looked like an octopus. “Leave her be, Mr. Forrest.”

The firefly zipped upwards. “I’m not doing anything,” said the voice, “she’s the one that welcomed herself back to the land of the living.”

At once it hit her, the tendrils of her memory snapping into place, the gears turning, the shadows of dream and wake dispersing like candle flame.

“I see you’ve earned yourself that ticket, too, Mr. Forrest,” she said, each syllable a clash of cymbals held between a smiling monkey.

The faces relented, morphing at once from a rigid display of trees to a more incorporeal form.

“She’s back,” said Rosemary, “thank goodness!”

“Hardly doubted that she even left,” said Frederique.

Morgan made to sit up but hands rushed into the sit her down. She waved them away. “What happened? Ophelia, did she really-”

“Set herself on fire?” Robert said, “My great, great, great aunt to the nth power? Yes, indeed she did.”

“And what of the rest of everyone? There were fireworks, an explosion.”

Robert puffed on his cigarette, exhumed smoke. “Well, let’s just say that the good people of the Globe weren’t the only thing that she demanded come with her to the other side.”

Morgan resisted shaking her head; her nausea clamped upon her temples, everything moving both fast and slow. “My Sisters, my poor Sisters.”

“Mourn the fallen later,” Robert said, “Because the Sisters that matter now have been up clogging the hallways and the lobby as if you were some pop star.”

“Lobbies?” Morgan asked, her senses sharpening to reveal the opulent wall paper, the purple silk sheets, the distant tinkle of a fountain. “This looks like the Empress.”

“It is,” Frederique said.

“We burned it. Robert burned it.”

“Just the room,” he said, “I’m not fond of property damage, unless it burns important documents that blueprint an entire revolution of a city-state run by a woman who makes clone assassins of herself and who also uses them to farm for organs.”

“But what of you? I thought you were dead. The last I saw you were in the psycho-oyster lab.”

“I’m happy that it’s still referred to that, instead of infirmary,” said Rosemary.

Robert shrugged, “That was a rough day. I had a lot of strange dreams. But look,” he said, displaying the black cane, thumping it near his shoes for effect, “I’ve got a third leg for it. One I’ll need for the rest of my life.”

“You look older,” Frederique said.

“You look statelier,” Morgan said.

“Exactly why I allowed myself to get sick. It was all a ruse,” Robert said, then, seeing that everyone had begun to lose patience with him, turned serious, “I was actually safe because of you, Morgan.”

“How?”

“Second hand smoke,” Rosemary said, “apparently all the Steeples you smoked in Mr. Forrest’s presence allowed him to build up an immunity. Not a total one, but enough that, well, he’s alive.”

“But the others,” Frederique said, “were not so lucky.”

Morgan stared at her, brows furrowed, felt a dull throb against her forehead.

Frederique continued, “Well, about forty-percent of the Globe’s general population. But for those who you would be more shocked by: Lewis Welch, a half of the Warehouse Boys. Ben, in case that matters to you.”

Robert sighed, “Your bedside manner is stupendous, my dear Frederique.”

“Of course, I care,” Morgan said, trying not to hurt by what she had come to appreciate as Frederique’s defense mechanism. “I’m sorry Frederique. Grief seems to follow you.”

Frederique offered a sad smile. “Well, let’s get on with it, then.”

“There are people that are waiting to see you,” Robert said, “you’re the great champion. The True Daughter of the Globe.”

“I need to see them, everyone waiting for me. They are outside?”

“In the halls,” Rosemary said, “in the bars, on the lawns, hanging on the balconies. Even people digging the mass graves have an ear to the Empress, waiting for news of your recovery.”

Morgan made to stand and rejected any offers of assistance. The hefty duvet slid off her legs and she saw that underneath she was in her undergarments, an array of fresh bandages wrapped around her thigh where Bijoux’s knife had landed. She fumbled at this sight, allowed herself to be caught by Robert, whose own lack of balance shifted from the cane. She settled back down into the comforts of her bed, hating it.

“I think it’s time for me to be alone,” Morgan said, “does anyone have a change of clothes for me?”

Frederique gestured towards the armoire, “You’ll find an array of clothing in there. From Macy’s.”

“Macy’s!” Rosemary said, her eyes alight, “I’ve always wanted to go.”

“Macy’s?” Morgan asked. It seemed a lifetime ago that she was there.

“On your original trip, back when Robert had two good legs,” Frederique said, “I was instructed to buy you clothes. Based not on your personas or assignments.”

“Wasn’t that the whole point originally? To buy my own clothes?”

“For the old you, for the False Daughter,” she said, “but not the True Daughter of the Globe. You’ll find a mismatch of clothing. You can pick how you want the people to see you. I hope, after all this, you’ve learned to dress yourself.”

At this they left her, and Morgan sat in stunned silence, prodding the bandages on her thigh, the heartthrob of a wound. The left side of her body had been tempered with some gel to stop the burns that had etched a seemingly permanent splotch of darkness on her skin. But the gel was little more than a thin layer now, no doubt goopier and more disgusting upon initial application. She tongued her mouth, felt a cotton ball, spat it out. There was the faint outline of stitches where her tooth had been knocked out and sutured, but she was fortunate that it was one from the back. Morgan was never one for vanity, but she could allow herself such a common-sense relief. Then she stood, pawing at the walls, the furniture, testing the strength of her legs.

Frederique was right, the armoire was well equipped with an array of clothing. There were simple outfits that could appeal to the Lowers and the Dredges, workingman’s dungarees that could speak to the Middles, crystalline dresses that would identify with the Uppers. None of these appealed to her, all of these appealed to her. At first, she thought of wearing an amalgamation, but even in her minds eyes she knew this would look atrocious. Then she closed the armoire doors, swore to herself, and found a bathrobe in the reflection of the mirror in the corner of the room. Everyone could relate to a bathrobe, she reckoned, and the Uppers quality of the robe itself explained away by the fact that she was recovering in the Empress.

Bandaged, blasted with anti-inflammatory goo, her hair a wild landscape tilted to one side, her eyes puffy and red to accompany the right side of her mouth. She looked like no hero, no champion, no True Daughter of the Globe. She looked as if she had run through a washer machine, had been rattled like a collection of coins in a can. It was precisely the outfit she was looking for.

Leaning on the furniture for support, Morgan donned her royal purple shower robe, tied the sash around her waist with uncooperative fingers, and made her way to the balcony, the wound on her leg pulsing, the bandages itchy. As she neared, she could see through the frosted glass the threshes of people outside of the Lawns of the Empress. Morgan stopped, took a breath, and opened the door. An ocean of people not unlike the ones which she had witnessed outside of Tectonic Biotechnics had gathered and taken root, people with *Vox Sonic* newspapers, which seemed to run in Morgan’s unconscious state and above Louisa’s grief, others smoking cigars. Others had pitched tents, which meant to Morgan that the proprietors of the Empress allowed this. The Globe’s strata were separate, discernable by their dress, their machinations to their environment. To the very left was the Dredges, their grimy and itchy clothing a mottled grey collective. The Lowers had ill-fitting clothes and kept to themselves. The Middles drank beer and played card games. The Uppers were smoking fancy cigarettes and sipping wine with golden lips and silver skin. Even the Daughters, evident no longer by Morgan’s sixth sense, but by the sheer magnitude of gathered woman, stood together, a stretch of lawn between them and the populace. And beyond, the Uppers glistened in its contentment, the fires extinguished, the dead cleared from the banisters. It was an empty city, a tired city, but it was here. These communities were divided but they stood together, and even though they still considered themselves and island, Morgan could see them now from atop her perch, and they could see each other.

They had not expected her appearance, and she stood before them dressed in her hospital garb, looking haggard. Soon someone pointed and then all at once the Globe looked up from their cards, their cups, and their newspapers. A torrent of applause began in islands, and then, as one, everyone began to cheer.

9.

“I suppose this is it, then,” Morgan said.

The Globe was above them, a great moon-shaped colossal that was itself a nation. It lorded over the river like some relic of ancient times. Her and Robert stood on the same dock which they had escaped from the Globe a year and a half prior. It was early morning, and the sky was a pinkish-orange, the orb of the sun just beginning to crest over the briny Hudson river. The boards bobbed underneath them, and Robert, still getting used to his cane, floundered occasionally before collecting himself. He stared at the waking skyline of Manhattan.

“Once, Coney Island was attached to land,” he said, “it was a part of Brooklyn. But before that, it was an independent city. Manhattan and Brooklyn were simply neighbors. Then they joined together. I’m hoping that the Globe can perhaps follow suit.”

“I believe it will,” Morgan said, “I’ve had enough of this insulation.”

He turned to her, and in this pink light he looked to Morgan to be older, more wisened. His eyes had sunk and, even though she would not say it to him, she could spot several strands of silvery gray along his sunshine-colored scalp. It was perhaps an effect of the cane, but this all coupled to add to his stately appearance, a face that needed to be in front of the newspaper, a broad smile that belongs to orate on podiums and unify people. Morgan did not quite understand American politics, but even she knew that his ambition to be mayor of New York City was too small for him.

“It’s all yours, now,” he said, “what’s your first step?”

She shrugged, “Repair the property damage, help the Globe recover from its losses from the poisoned water. Reintroduce my Sisters into society. Then we can actually begin.”

“Good start,” he said, “you know Frederique is staying, right?”

“I would be honored.”

“But I think, perhaps, she’s not looking to be employed by whatever cabinet you might be putting together. She’s brilliant, but I think she’s looking for a place to live, not to help govern, not to make choices for others.”

“She’s earned it,” Morgan said, “I’ll see to it, even from afar if I have to, that she’s on her feet.”

“She’s a cat, Morgan,” Robert said, “she’ll be fine.”

“And of you, Mr. Forrest? Are you going to campaigning for mayor?”

He looked across the water, watching it ripple. “I’ve a favor first.”

“Politicians aren’t supposed to do favors,” she said.

“It’s for Aldous.”

“Good exception, I think,” Morgan said, “tell him that he was my first friend when I met you all, and that I’m very grateful.”

Robert stirred, “What we were?”

“Colleagues! Relatives.”

Robert looked at Morgan and then at the boat which bobbed at their feet. He made to get in and allowed Morgan to help him. He started the motor. Then, he reached into his inner pocket, pulled out a cigarette, struck a match, and tossed the remaining matches to Morgan.

“Be well,” Robert said.

“When will I see you again?” Morgan asked

“I remember a time when my sheer presence annoyed you.”

“It still does. But you’re a closer brother to me than any of the Daughters are as my sisters.”

Robert opened his mouth to speak and then shut his lips, bobbing his Adam’s Apple. He gazed at Morgan, then the sky, and finally, craning his neck all the way up, attempted to swallow the breadth of the Globe, its black orbital essence levitating a fourth of a mile from the meniscus of the river, held aloft by massive reinforced *socles*. “I’ll see you along the way,” he said, “and if you don’t receive a Christmas card, I’m sure I’ll see you at fancy dinners and galas, you know, now that you’re you. And I’m trying to be me.”

“Enough of that, Robert,” Morgan said, “you’ve done more for the Globe than anyone has. New York City would be honored to have you as their champion.”

Robert doffed his cap and skated away. Morgan watched him as the sun reached its morning Zenith, the colors of plum and apricot reflecting upon the light, Robert’s triangular vessel drifting farther across the reflective blue-green that separated their cities.

Morgan watched until he was no larger than a fly, and she pulled a match from the pack Robert had thrown her, ignited the band, and lit a Luna. She smelled the salt and the brine and the oil and felt the Globe behind her, above her, underneath her, within her. And Morgan listened to the sounds of the world and counted them; the horn of a faraway tugboat, the gentle creaking of the wooden dock, the slight shifts of the great metal from the Globe’s outer shell, the steadily waning buzzing of Robert’s motorboat.

*End*

Years of dock working had made him an avatar of the harbor, a walking monstrosity that only rose during the night, hardly visible even then. When away from the docks people could find Aldous drowning in his own isolation, huddled alone in a corner, parts of his body always consistently wet, as if bringing with him a personal puddle or a raincloud. He had become a figurehead in the seaport, a creature that did not venture into the metropolis, the border of his territory determined by the dryness of the cement. He was an inside joke amongst the barflies, the knowledge of Aldous’s existence as opposed to mythological vagrant a clear separation from tourists and the true denizens of the West Side’s blister and callous laden midnight reality. No one ever talked to Aldous though; he was not a neighbor, nor a coworker, even though he was employed by many of the same people as the whiskey drinkers down the edge of the bar, and most people wondered if this aquatic man even slept in someplace dry, which he did not.

Aldous fermented in his own existence, looking into the brown ichor of his whiskey glass. Lines of cartography traced upon his calloused his knuckles. His socks were squishy from the rain and his coat smelled like a wet dog. Underneath his clothing were patches of oyster shells that grew upon his flesh like mushrooms, little coins of scalloped, glistening scales that felt like fingernails to the touch but are tough like armor. At first, they had only appeared to cover an open wound, like a scab, but now every time Aldous wakes, he found new patches that must be painfully excavated with a trowel only to have them reappear later in the day. The rate of these inflammations was growing alarmingly fast, and now Aldous had come to accept that he will eventually succumb to these patches, to this strange mollusk sickness, and he will be found underneath the docks as a giant oyster clinging to the piers. He knew that when this happens, and it would happen soon, that he would not die, but he was not sure if he would live anymore, either. Already they are pushing out his shins, poking on the insides of his shirt, lining spots on his back.

Without gesturing to the bartender, a new glass of whiskey arrived, pushed by a quick poke by a meaty finger and withdrawn just as swiftly, as if fearing that Aldous would snap like those alligators dominating the sewers. Ten minutes later the bartender reappeared with a fresh glass.

“No more,” Aldous said, and he meant it. His wages from the dock masters always seemed to slip from his fingers every week to flush back into the Hudson.

“It’s been paid for,” said the bartender, who left before Aldous could respond.

A struck match announced the coming of a flame. It rose into a steady, haunting pyre. The cigarette was a dowser, balanced in long, slender, and gloved fingers, revealing a woman wearing a navy-blue dress hemmed at the knees. Her brimmed hat was tilted to the side, dripping pebbles of rainwater over her shoulders, deep auburn hair too dark to appreciate in the shadows of the bar but enough to see the tint.

Aldous looked up at the woman as she stared him up and down, one eyebrow raised, cigarette in stasis between her fingers. She inhaled and exhaled smoke into the room, her back erect, exuding a confidence that Aldous had not seen in a woman in a very long time, perhaps ever.

“You’ve bought the length of the drink,” Aldous growled.

“All I need is the length of the cigarette. Are you Aldous Aldous?”

“Woman shouldn’t smoke,” Aldous said, evading the answer, using his internalized stoicism not to react to someone saying his own name.

“Consider it my torch of freedom,” she said, shrugging. Then she said again, “Are you Aldous Aldous?”

“No.”

She approached the table so that her entire body invaded his circle of light. She stood over the whiskey glass like a lord over constituents, her shoulder pads arced back like wings of a gliding bird. He took a slow, full sip to remind her of the time.

“My name is Cassandra Wilde.”

She revealed a picture and slides it next to the whiskey glass, placed a finger over it and revealed another picture underneath. In this order: His whiskey, a newspaper advertisement for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, and an advertisement for the Infantorium, located in the threshes of Dreamland, Coney Island. Aldous looked at this trifecta and saw all that was his anima laid out to bare, reduced to symbols.

“Are you Aldous Aldous?”

Aldous kept his gaze now between the two pictures and with each valley a fire rose in the pit of his stomach, threatening to make him jump from the table and flee like a hot air balloon.

“Yes,” he said, and downed the rest of his whiskey.

“I need your help, Mr. Aldous,” Cassandra said, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a shining vial that glinted underneath the exposed lightbulb. “I can help you.”

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He rowed from the West across the East, the wind at their back, his knuckles white as they gripped the oars. The rain was heavy and salty and created a fog monster that reduced all the lighthouses to tinted yellow bulbs in the darkness. Cassandra Wilde sat at the stern, smoking another cigarette, the pyre blooming from her lips in slow, steady drags, kept dry underneath her raincoat.

Aldous did not mind the rain. It felt like home.

“The Infantorium was created by Dr. Martin Couney,” she said, “are you familiar with the Infantorium, Mr. Aldous, with incubators?”

“Yes,” Aldous said, grunting against the current. They heaved past the Seaport, where he worked ten years ago. “Babies in bottles.”

“Fermenting, stewing, soaking,” Cassandra shrugged, “the babies are not just for show. But you know this already.” She shot him a sideways glance, her face half alight by the cigarette, her hat blowing in the wind.

Aldous grunted and crossed the East River, the waves pushing the boat back and forth. The Brooklyn Bridge was a hulking, shadowed skeleton to his right. Several tugboats floated in the distance, their beacons flashing to alert every one of their presence.

“We are going to get those babies,” Cassandra said, “we are going to bring them back home.”

“Are you NYPD? FBI? A social worker?”

“A Pinkerton, Mr. Aldous.”

“Pinkerton’s don’t exist anymore. Not like they used to.”

Cassandra furrowed her brows and took another drag. She said through a dumpling of smoke. “Consider me the new guard, then.”

They rowed for another hour, and the muscular strain might have squashed a weaker man. The lights of Dreamland appeared at the edge of the drowned void, the flashing lights beckoning unversed ships to a faux-dock, a simulacrum of a harbor for the shipping containers that would typically navigate their way over the East River and unload into Aldous’s hands under the management of the Yard Limited. The pyre of Cassandra’s cigarette disappeared.

Aldous rowed underneath the planks holding upon their shoulders the sleeping mechanical giants of inactive roller coasters. The great refrigerator of the Swiss Alps hummed its signature noise, ever present but dulled by the crowds during the day. A bottled Pompeii gazed adjacent to it, overlooking the staged play of a building set aflame and consequently rebuilt, like a phoenix. Aldous had never seen this spectacle, but he had heard it was popular from those who are willing to talk around him at the docks. There were lights on in Lilliputian Village, the miniature gables and windows and streets collectively awake and basking in their own existence. And it is here that Cassandra infiltrated Dreamland with Aldous begrudgingly in tow.

They moved underneath the guise of darkness. The replicated avenues and streets were dark, the storefronts empty, as a reminder that Dreamland was not quite the utopic pocket universe that it was designed to be, that the people go home. Aldous likened it to walking the streets of a city after hours, like he is used to, but also mixed with the conception of breaking into a business.

Cassandra made a sharp turn around a candy shop and then proceeded down the avenue, sticking close to the walls even though the only signs of life were of the midgets at the other end of the park.

After a while, Aldous asked, “Why me?”

She lifted her head and recited a news headline that Aldous was too familiar with: “*Stray rock during a bullfight riot smashed into the Pike*!”

Aldous remained silent, which was easy for him.

Cassandra continued: “*Ruined clinic totals four isolates and one firefighter dead.”*

Aldous grunted, and by then he knew the ruse was over.

Cassandra turned on her heels and stared at Aldous underneath the starlight. She repeated a final headline, one which Aldous knew to be exactly the one that made his heart stop nearly a decade ago. Now, he cared not for how she triangulated him, only that his time in New York City was over, that he would have to find somewhere else.

She said, “*News Flash: Floating bodies in Gowanus appear to be petty criminals. Sightings of a mysterious juggernaut, whom locals call the Drowned Man, suggests a link.”*

“And then?” Aldous invited, knowing it is futile to resist her journalistic discoveries.

“All it took was months of figuring out who everyone was so afraid of.”

Aldous stopped in front of a haberdashery, the insides vacant and lonely. “Judgement should not be held solely by those who hold dominion over others.”

“A bible verse?” Cassandra asked.

“There is no god,” Aldous said, and he meant it.

“A god would not allow the killing of children,” Cassandra added, “nor the propensity of man to leverage this.”

They continued walking, past the rides and concessions, down avenues and over bridges. The lighthouse flashed red and white, threatening to lure a blinking ship at the end of the bay like the patient jaws of a Venus fly trap. The Infantorium came into view; a black rectangular building dwarfed by its neighbors, a deep red glow emanating from the inside like some muted crystal cavern.

Aldous stopped and bit his bottom lip, remembering the red glow with a painful psychic strike, an unwanted invasion of memory. He remembered the riots, the escalation of noise from angry murmur to vocal explosion, the beer-stained hands dislodging a stone and arcing back like a trebuchet to shatter the ticket booth, a stray rock misdirected like an accidentally launched artillery strike into the glass shells containing the twisted and prenatal infants floating in their artificial wombs, their embryonic journeys propelled in motion by modern science. And he remembered running into the violated infirmary, stepping onto broken glass like some ritual of worship, grabbing each tiny body and feeling just how *light* they were, and how exposed they were existing in the space between life and death, the shriveled and sometimes deformed forms collecting in his arms and just *leaking* their scientifically engineered embryonic fluid into fresh wounds sustained by the rioters, changing his own DNA with the freshly leaked stem cells of dying infants who, by grace of modern medicine, have defied the divine end which comes for us all, spitting into its face in defiance. The weeks after defragmented his mind, which he learned upon fleeing the state in a frantic dash that it was a defense mechanism to cope with his changing biology, that his mind was trying to comprehend against itself that he no longer needed to hold his breath under water, that he can lift twice as much as any man he had encountered, that rainwater hydrated his skin and stopped him from feeling any pain, that the shells have begun to invade his body like the scabs of a leper. And even that, eventually, the oyster shells growing in patches at his body like little mushrooms would eventually consume him whole, the biological armor that protected him from the threshes of the city scum would eventually render him immobile, a true monstrosity, and even now he could hardly fight against the numbness creeping at the precipice of his psyche, his consciousness half submerged under water with the scales that he can still thankfully keep hidden under damp, baggy clothing. But soon he’ll be a human oyster, and if everyone will see him as an ambered, algae laden sarcophagus, then he will at least know for himself that in his time as a man he did all he could to kill the great virus of personality within the underside of the city, that he could fight one final fire of passion against the scaffolds of another potential riot, another thrown rock, another misdirected projectile.

And it was not the fact that he had developed these abilities which had pushed him from the Louisiana bayou to the New York City harbors. He had killed the man who had started the riot by breaking into his house and strangling him in his bed. Had Aldous known that justice would have been the arbiter for his descent into near hermitage he would have stopped himself before justice became the only thing he knew, his only anchor to sanity to shield him from psychologically disintegrating into the monster that he knew he would inevitably become.

“Why am I here?” asked Aldous.

“People think these infants are a mere amusement. For twenty-five cents you can see modern science at work,” Cassandra said, “babies not meant for this world are given a stake in which to plant their tiny feet and declare their existence. Beautiful, wouldn’t you agree Mr. Aldous?”

He was silent.

Cassandra continued: “Under the guise of American exceptionalism there exists another form of American exceptionalism. Those twenty-five cents help fund the research for the prolonging of prenatal children. That research also funds the creation of weapons. All those children are fermenting in an embryonic fluid giving them latent abilities best kept to science-fiction pulps. If left unattended they will have enough power to conquer nations at a whim, to move mountains with their mind. As I’m sure you already know, Mr. Aldous.”

“You plan to free the children,” Aldous said.

“In a way,” Cassandra answered. “Then you and I will part ways and you can go back to handling petty crooks.”

They walked across the boardwalk. Aldous remembered the Infantorium in St. Louis, the rumors of tests beyond the public’s watchful eye, conducted at night to avoid the argument of morality. The one here, in Dreamland, was too much of a spectacle, too small to be of any consequence. Perhaps this was the perfect ruse in which to hide the revival of this endeavor. It was up until now that Aldous had still not quite taken Cassandra seriously, aside from her journalistic victory in triangulating Aldous from Missouri to New York City.

There were figures moving in the windows of the small infirmary, men with white lab coats and nurses following like a platoon of ducks, checking each sleeping infant for vitals, ensuring that the chemical balances of their embryonic fluid were equalized. Cassandra made to move to cross the starlight plaza but stopped when a pair of trench coated men smoking cigarettes with Tommys swinging from their hips appeared from the shadows, looking up at the night sky. This was enough to convince Aldous that his experiences during the Bull Riots were the misfortunate union of luck and science, that his aquatic descent as the Drowned Man and subsequent fracturing of his identity between the true Aldous and the isolated dock worker must have meant *something* bigger than himself.

“They’re hot, Mrs. Wilde,” Aldous said, reaching an arm to pull her back to the safety of the shadows.

“Of no consequence, Mr. Aldous,” she said, stepping out of the shadows and onto the planks.

She continued across the opening, defenseless. Aldous had to restrain himself to cover her. His shell-scabs can defend him from fists and hammers, but he was not sure that bullets from an arm cannon like that would cushion the blow. He kept the shadows, watching as the guards noticed Cassandra coming into view, winking at her, their cigarettes bobbing up and down. She began speaking to them but Aldous knew that they are only looking at her body, their eyes scanning her left and right, up and down. The metal on the guns reflected the ruby lights emanating from the Infantorium. They rounded her, cornering her like two panthers stalking a gazelle, and Aldous stepped out of the shadows and started to cross the plaza when he saw one of the men raise a finger to Cassandra’s cheeks, touching her with a greasy sausage finger. Before Aldous could reach them both men buckled to their knees, crumbling like a squashed can, their limbs twisting uncomfortably as they writhed on the splintery boards at Cassandra’s feet. They clawed on her heels, trying to find purchase with limbs that for some reason refused to work. One of them managed to wiggle through the pulses of this sudden electricity to finger the handle of the Tommy, but Aldous placed a sopping boot on his knuckles before the connection could be made. A couple of seconds later both men lay fetal, sobbing and cringing.

Aldous did not understand what happened, but he did know that this was not an ordinary chain of events. “What did you do to them?”

Cassandra wiggled one of the guns from his hand. The red lights of the Infantorium illuminated her face like a campfire.

She said simply, “I broke their minds.” When Aldous did not respond, she continued: “I can look at someone and see radiowaves in their skull. I don’t know how, but I can twist them into knots.”

“Did you kill them?” Aldous asked, stepping over the two men who had become comatose.

“No. But they will need to relearn how to stand. And how to chew. And how to use the bathroom.”

“How can you do this?” Aldous asked.

“*Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles*,” Cassandra said, “the first Infantorium. Only one child survived.”

Aldous’s eyes widened. He felt a surge of warmth and empathy. “Did you save them too?”

“No Mr. Aldous,” she said, “I grew up.”

“Are you a god?”

“Mr. Aldous, you’ve already stated you don’t believe in gods. I am no more man than you are.”

“I hardly am,” he scratched at an oyster shell patch nestled under his ribs. Particles of shellack spat from underneath his wet shirt.

Aldous looked at the men before them. He would have preferred to drown them like he had the other gangsters and criminals plaguing this city. The Drowned Man offered a baptism even though he is not religious, a forced determinant to cleanse of them of their sins before their last breath. Whatever Cassandra did reverted these men to a shade of themselves. It was embarrassing.

The doors were locked but Aldous was able to twist the iron chains enough so that the links shattered. They walked into the building, where a front room no larger than a concession stand had a podium in which an attendant would take tickets to view the babies in their artificial wombs.

“Twenty-five cents to see a marvel of medical advancement. What a time to be alive,” Cassandra said, looking at the banner.

They neared the doors and before Cassandra could open them Aldous asked, “Can you see my radiowaves?”

“You see, Mr. Aldous, that’s what makes you so peculiar. I can’t.”

To Aldous’s lack of surprise, the Infantorium is a small display that is more carnival gesture than laboratory. A path determined by velvet ropes dictated the one-way travel of the onlookers determined to get their monies worth to see medical inventiveness, to see the domination of life by machine. The floors are a shining porcelain, completely out of synch with the boardwalk outside. A ghastly ruby glow emanates like an escaped genie. Dr. Martin Couney’s portrait lorded over the room.

The infants floated in their boxes, the machines blinking and purring, rattling and wheezing. Their eyeswere half closed, tiny fists flexing absently in dreams. Pink bodies were in stasis, trapped in red gelatin, kept alive by it. The technology had increased in the last ten years, but he remembered these machines all the same. These infants knew no morality, their umbilical cord to life a triumph against the natural forces of divinity.

Aldous placed a calloused hand on one of the glass cases. It was not their fault he had mutated into the Drowned Man. It is not his fault he mutated into the Drowned Man, either.

“Is Couney here?” Aldous asked.

“I hope not,” Cassandra said, her visage reflecting off the same glass, “poor Dr. Couney is genuine in his endeavors. He wants to save these infants lives. He truly believes that the initial stimulus funding to recover from the Louisiana Purchase Exposition and transplant to New York City is wrought with good intentions. I hope he recovers from this, Mr. Aldous, I really do.”

Aldous growled. “So what are we to do? Kill the infants? I can’t do that Mrs. Wilde, even if you have an antidote for me. I’d rather become a monster through biology than to become a monster of my own volition.”

“If you’re worried that other versions of *you* can come about this world, I’m afraid I don’t have much an answer. If I were you, I’d be more afraid of them becoming *me*.”

Cassandra reached into her pockets and pulled out a compact binocular, unfolding it as she neared craned her head and stared out of the window, her brows furrowed. Moonlight shaded one half of her face in a cooling blue. With a free hand she placed another cigarette in her mouth and, resting it between her lips, reached into her pocket again for a match that she flicked on the heel of her boot, lighting it. After two indulgent puffs, she took the cigarette out of her mouth and traced the pyre in the air as if she were drawing random shapes on a chalkboard. A yellow rectangle flickered across the street in an apartment building. Then she turned and leaned on the wall, puffing the cigarette, her mind adrift. Aldous stared at her and she looked at him without turning her head.

“A truck will be pulling up in ten minutes. I’ll need you to transport the babies.”

“What are you going to do with them?”

“Get them on their legs and bring them to orphanages so they won’t know their genetic destiny.”

“Like you?”

Cassandra paused. The pyre illuminated like a heartbeat. Finally, she said, “Yes.”

Aldous’s arms and torso started to fortify five minutes later. He had gotten used to these flares, no more than rashes that appeared in the morning and required some maneuvering to dislodge over the bathroom sink, like raking rock at a quarry. However, this one was different. Aldous raised his arm and found himself unable to contort his muscles, his limbs ambered by the oyster shells that had somehow fused the hollows of his armpits together. Aldous fell to his knees, his kneecaps hardened by oyster shells that crumbled and fell away like dandruff but returned faster than Aldous could clear.

“Mr. Aldous!” Cassandra said, coming to his aid.

His voice was garbled, his throat had adopted a slimy, salty quality that made him feel like he was underwater. He yearned for the docks so he could breathe but stopped himself from venturing backward, the incubated children vulnerably bobbing in their red gelatin enough to make him hold onto the fragments of his fleeting human form.

“Mr. Aldous, the car is here!” Cassandra said, then she perked up like meerkat, the nub of the cigarette falling onto his now scalloped fingers. She came back to him, her eyes wide and frightened, “people are outside. The Pinkertons.”

“Aren’t…you…a…”

“The new guard, Mr. Aldous,” she said, her lip quivering, “the kind that got Booth into the matinee.”

Aldous tried to stand but found his toes and knees fused together by what felt like a slimy plastic. He grunted and groaned, felt his muscles burning, his sinews craving for water so he could breath. His fingers got heavy, his neck weighted as if dragging an anchor on his shoulders. In the corner of his eyes shadows moved about the windows, men with Tommys and bats and machetes, men who kill for money and not honor, men who care not for the future of weakened children. Cassandra sprung at the heavy knock on the door, leaving Aldous to attempt to scrape the shell-esque scabs from his arms, his chest, his collarbone. He heard Cassandra near the side of the door, heard the door burst open and smelled the sulfur of several stray bullets and Aldous wanted to call out *don’t hurt the children* but before his mouth could break from his black shell he saw the men, two brutes that Aldous swore he recognized from the West docks, fall to their knees and piss themselves.

Cassandra called over her shoulder, her voice strained, “I got them, Mr. Aldous. I don’t know how much I can take. Please stand. I beg you.”

Aldous had fused to the floorboards of the Infantorium, his body curled into its own fetal position, the incubating babies positioned to be an idol of worship. He could let it go, of course, he could simply fall into the murky transition. A primal aspect of his psyche convinced him that he would return from this transition, that this briny chrysalis would rebirth Aldous Aldous and turn him anew, into the Drowned Man. That he could simply allow the transformation to harden his atoms and muscles and sinews and whatever words are on the tongue of men smarter than he. It would be easier, he knew.

Cassandra yelled from the end of a very long tunnel: “Mr. Aldous! Mr. Aldous!”

It was the sound of her voice that drew him back like a yanked balloon. It was the sound of all the women left alone and preyed upon in the alleys, all the daughters who cried because their father had bet too much on the ponies, all the children who would have no mothers because of the virus in this city.

Aldous stood, his muscles holding a newfound power, his back breaking from the ice cream cone of shells tenting his body, his joints electrified with a rediscovery of movement. He turned to the entrance standing taller, his fists clenching and unclenching, gills seething. Double eyelids parted to see Cassandra held by her neck, one hand on the brows of a gangster, struggling to penalize him psychologically and failing. At least five men to her, groping, punching, some arms reaching towards their guns and Aldous roared and shook the foundations of the Infantorium and he was suddenly there, his glistening, hardened hands bloodied with the gangster’s biomass, the room heart beating ruby and sapphire, their bodies tearing like paper, like twisted Nathan’s hotdogs. Through a tempest of rage and tensed muscles all Aldous could see was fire fire FIRE.

Cassandra was in the corner, her body folded into the fetal position, eyes rattling. Aldous reached a glistening, shelled hand to her, his five fingers now four, his breathing reminding him of the time he went deep sea diving, and she cowered before recognizing the hulking, sopping beast before her as Aldous. She took his hand, and he could not feel her delicate fingers, could not feel the shift in her weight as she stood and daintily stepped over the mishmash of grinded bone and brain.

She slumped to the window and said, “The convoy is here.”

“Where…you…go…?” Said Aldous, his vocal cords straining with each syllable, choosing to only activate the most necessary words.

“Denver,” she said, sighing.

One by one Aldous managed to pick up each incubator with surprising ease, his muscles moving at double capacity, although he found his nerve endings no longer tactile. It required more mental energy to transport the cubes of infants into the bed of the truck than it does physical. Aldous picked up the last child and, with an important fragment of his humanity working on fumes, he stared into the cubic globe, examined the sleeping eyes rattling in dreams that Aldous wished the best for. He wanted to name the girl but he could not think of a good name. With the last infant that Aldous knew he would cradle in his arms, he walked through the arcade and into the night sky.

“Mr. Aldous! You are walking in the open!” said a voice.

There were rocks thrown at him, hitting his armored back, bouncing off with light vibrations. They wanted to hit the kid. Aldous knew this and refused it to happen. He shielded the package, rocks pelted him as he lumbered along the splintering wood, the dead storefronts silent idols in his periphery. There was a place he had to get to, a place that meant JUSTICE and he would deliver this little creature before he couldn’t. And so Aldous lumbered along, his hunched shoulders protecting the HUMAN and he watched a tall girl holding fire fire FIRE in her hands staring at him but not in a way that made Aldous want to punish the people.

He placed the ANGEL on a platform that emitted smells of gasoline. The platform moved, carrying the HUMAN far, far, away, and the Drowned Man turned to face the rock throwers and saw these strange demons with oddly-shaped heads holding cannons and Aldous said: “Do not touch these children.”

But what the men heard was a roar that sounded like someone, or something, was gargling salt water.