

Note: This is a work in progress. These chapters are still being revised. I'd still appreciate any feedback that would help me improve them.

Also, this story is inappropriate for young readers. If you're a young reader then you likely won't heed this warning, but at least do me a favor and feel bad about reading past this point. (Quite plausibly it isn't appropriate for any readers and you should all feel bad. But, hey, what did you expect given where you found it?)

Prologue

As she stood in front of the door Jacky had misgivings. The storefront looked like the sort of place a laundromat should be, or a sticky little Pizzeria. The glass windows stared back at her blankly, displaying nothing. The unassuming sign above the door did read "Collective Financial", but it was just a banner rather than a true sign. Still, if what her friend had told her was true perhaps this was exactly the sort of spot she should have expected. And she'd followed the rumor this far. Taking a deep breath, she thrust open the doors and walked in.

Her first impression upon entering was of a lot of empty space. Only a few desks stood to take up the space that had at some point been a retail space. Worn carpeting in a faded blue showed wear patterns that no longer corresponded to anything. "Can I help you?" inquired a man sitting at a desk directly in front of her. He had on a suit and tie and looked reputable enough.

"Yes," Jacky answered and then pause—if the story wasn't true she'd look ridiculous, and how likely was it to be, really? "I heard you offer, uh, loans? At really good rates?"

The man behind the desk looked her up and down with interest as if sizing her up. Apparently satisfied with what he saw he smiled, "You heard correctly. We're granting some small loans. Have a seat." He gestured to an empty folding chair.

"Free money," was how it had actually been described to Jacky by Lana, a college friend who was still in town. "There's a cult or something that's giving out loans. But it's like they're just handing out cash because you really don't have to give the money back! It's some crazy psychobabble—like they'll reposes your thoughts or something. Basically, you take the money, and never pay it back!" She had at that point held up a wad of twenties for emphasis.

Lana wasn't the sort of friend you trust implicitly—quite the opposite actually: she was the sort of unreliable friend who perpetually exaggerated and repeated rumors as facts. But she was waving a wad of bills, and her story did not collapse into hearsay when she was questioned. She'd been able to give some specifics, and even produce an odd looking paper that did indeed look like the sort of thing a cult might provide when giving out loans.

Nonetheless, Jacky was startled to discover Jacky had been, by-and-large, correct. She could really use a few hundred dollars—who couldn't? And this had been a "what could it hurt" situation. But the man sitting across the desk from her outlined much the same deal Lana had described: she could borrow a small sum "against her presence in the collective unconscious continuum". The man would have fit just as well in a proper bank, though his desk was nicked and discolored as if handed down from long use. Of the other four desks only two were occupied.

Still suspicious Jacky probed for the catch. What were the interest rates? Quite low. Was this legal. Yes, it complied fully with applicable state usury laws. Where did the money come from? A small corporation formed by private investors with a unique perspective. If she fell behind in repaying would collectors show up at her home? No, under no circumstances, and she could get that in writing—the

investors were quite satisfied with intangible assets, the sort of things burly men in trucks weren't much use for obtaining.

Finally, "But why? Why are you guys giving out these loans?"

"Miss Fairfield, Jacky, the corporation I represent is offering these as a service. The perspective of the people whose money I'm disposing is rather different than yours, radically different in all probability. Trust me when I say that from our point of view, this deal seems like a good one: small loans can be offered to deserving parties such as yourself at much better rates than payday lenders, and you can use as collateral something which everybody has."

It took nearly thirty minutes for her to finally accept what was being offered. But in the end she slid a proffered document across the distressed desk with her signature on it and, in reply, the man reached into a drawer and pulled out a wad of bills. She left the cheap little storefront with cash in her pocket all but given to her by some new age eccentrics. Sometimes life was alright!

Chapter 1: Arrivals

Ambassador Kel was having a rough morning. He was behind quota, and his current session was shaping up to be an ordeal. He wasn't actually an ambassador yet, only a recruiter, and that was part of the trouble: the Ambassador core, perhaps even more than other divisions in the City, was meritocratic¹. They faced a constant numerical need that must be met so successes were rewarded and failures quickly washed out. And full Ambassador position were, of course, much sought after, not only for the status that accompanied them, but for the private quarters, the privileges, and the prospect of kept pets. Thus the position of a recruiter could feel somewhat precarious as many motivated people competed for the same prizes.

That said, Kel had been able to report pretty reliable success for a while now, he had some rhetorical gifts, and showed some creativity within the existing formats, and promotion had begun to feel increasingly within his grasp. But then a day like this gave the dismaying feeling of his prize being yanked back out of his hands. Scenarios flitted through his mind of being knocked back down to technician work. Plausible or not, it was hard to entirely put them out of one's mind.

But he was doing his best to ignore them, and his anxiety generally, so that he could focus on the task at hand, that being a solo recruiting session that seemed to be going off the rails. The dossier said that the woman, perhaps ten years his senior, was a business woman, a manager in insurance of some kind. He felt he could have filled that in for himself after speaking with her for a few minutes, her entire posture and attitude gave it away, even ignoring her short dark hair and businesslike attire. She was clearly, he thought, one of those people who was addicted to being a boss.

Kel wasn't wrong. In her day job Ms. Debra Keane was something of a terror to her subordinates, and she relished negotiation as sport. Her session with Kel had started smoothly enough. Honestly, the deal he offered seemed a good one, and she had every intention of taking it, but her instinctive sense alerted her to something in this young man's manner that betrayed anxiousness to close the deal. With no reason to do so beyond her own enjoyment, she'd decided to exact some concessions, leaning back in her chair and relishing the opportunity to make this young man squirm a bit.

¹ Indeed, women were allowed to work as ambassadors, the only place in the City where they could rise to such official positions. They could not formally achieve the rank of ambassador, of course, but they had a simulated rank high enough to enjoy some latitude and to outrank many men.

"So about the conditions of my visit..." Debra began again. She and Kel sat across a small wooden table from each other, with some documents in between. Kel sometimes glanced at his pad, while Debra fixed him with a cat-like stare.

"Yes?"

"It says here," she said, pointing at a line in a document open in front of her, "that my stay will be for a 'standard duration'."

"Yes, and you can find details on the length of a standard stay if you'll turn to section 3.B..."

"Yes, yes, not to my point." Debra cut him off. "It seems to me that I ought to have some latitude in determining the length of my visit."

Kel did his best to keep his face from betraying his reaction to this. "Well, Ms. Keane, that isn't how this ordinarily works."

"And why would I be interested in how it normally works, young man? I don't recall having asked about that. What I'm suggesting is that perhaps the standard stay is not to my liking. It seems only reasonable that if I'm to come the duration, and some other particulars of my stay should be worked out more specifically. Of course, if you don't have the authority to depart from what is standard perhaps you could let me speak to somebody who does?"

Kel gritted his teeth. "What do you have in mind, Ms. Keane?"

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Julia found herself in a drab little room with no clear idea how she'd gotten there. She was reclining on a pedestal that took up most of the small chamber. Half rising, she could see slate grey walls all around, black tiled floor below, grey ceiling above. Directly before her was a closed door which looked as if it might be made of metal.

Where was she? And how on earth had she gotten there? No answers to the questions were forthcoming. She searched her memory but turned up only bits of a mundane day: trivial events at work, humus at lunch, reading a cheap novel in bed at the end of it. The trail ended there unhelpfully. She swung her legs off the platform and rose. The room was small, essentially a cell. There were no windows and only the one door, though it was brightly lit and didn't look at all dingy—more like a night club bathroom than a prison cell. She tried the door but found that it lacked a handle and would not yield to pushing. It was at this point that she noticed she was wearing her pajamas.

Julia was beginning to become perturbed, even a bit frightened, though she didn't panic. She banged on the door and called, "Hello! Can anyone hear me? Hello!" The door reverberated in a way that seemed quite solid.

A moment later she started as the door almost silently swung away. In the doorway stood a man in a blue and burgundy uniform. His shirt fit tightly as if it were athletic wear, while his pants were cut more like cargo pants. "Hello, Miss," he greeted before Julia recovered from her start enough to say anything, "Sorry for the delay. If you would come with me please." He stepped aside and gestured through the doorway.

"Where are you going?" Julia asked, unsure how else to reply.

"If you'll just come this way, we're going to the orientation." Replied the uniformed man as if this was perfectly clear.

"Orientation? But...where are we?"

"If you'll just come this way, Miss, the orientation should answer that."

Unsure what else to do, and reassured by the man's official politeness, Julia followed him from the room into a bright hallway beyond. She was lead along a corridor featuring many doors like the one she'd just come to, into a higher, wider hall. The uniformed man led her along at a brisk pace, his boots clumping and her bare feet padding on the smooth cool floor behind him.

Soon the hallway terminated in a room of enormous dimensions. Julia paused in surprise and gazed around. The room was long and tall like an airplane hangar. She and her guide had entered mid-way along one long wall. There were many other figures moving about the room, including quite a few more men uniformed like this one, and others in attire she did not recognize. Many of the men seemed to be leading women in ones or small groups. There were also some sizeable pieces of equipment standing here and there the function of which Julia couldn't even guess. She only had a moment to take all this in before her escort, noticing she'd stopped, turned and said, "Please follow me, Miss. It's not far." Falling in with him again she glanced back over her shoulder at the wall from which she'd just entered the towering space. It was honeycombed with openings such that already she couldn't be certain which she'd come from. She'd exited at floor level, but above that were two more tiers of doorways and openings. Stairways connected these tiers to the floor, and masses of tubes and lit bands ran throughout as if the entire wall were some sort of futuristic pipe organ.

Even more quickly than before, her guide led her across the remainder of the wide room and through a much more ordinary looking set of double doors in front of her followed by a second set. She found herself standing in what seemed to be a small auditorium. Or, at least, it had a raised stage on one side, though there were no seats. "Please wait here," the man said, "your orientation will begin shortly." And with that he turned on his heel and departed.

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Kel breathed a sigh of relief as Debra finally exited his little recruiting suite. Glancing down at his pad he cursed—that had taken a very long time and what should have been his next session had been rerouted to someone else during the delay. He'd been subjected to a string of little changes and concessions at the business end of her condescending smirk, but the heart of things had remained intact. It had seemed touch-and-go for a bit as she picked at the contract clause by clause. He'd been simultaneously worried that she'd notice too much of what the document actually meant, and that one of her arbitrary demands would break things by dumb luck. But a bit of quick reverse psychology had focused her discussion of fixing her stay's duration on extending her visit, and everything else had turned out to be trivial. In sum she'd been too busy torturing him to notice the big picture.

He didn't have long to relish the feeling of relief. If he was going to make up lost time he'd need to rush to set up the suit for the next appointment. But he did take a moment while he was filing Debra's contract to tag her profile. The thought of checking in on her a little later warmed him deep down. He allowed himself a smirk.

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The room was quickly filling up. There had already been a few women standing uncertainly about the place when Julia found herself among them, and the uniformed men were escorting more in all the time. They'd bring the women in and then withdraw to the periphery where a row of them, apparently at attention, now limned the room. Looking around the throng Julia saw a lot of women who, like her, seemed like they might have recently been in bed. Some women looked as confused as she, but

many others seemed somewhat nonchalant. With the exception of all being relatively youthful—Julia didn't see anyone who looked much over forty—they didn't seem to share any unifying characteristics.

Leaning towards a black woman in a bathrobe roughly her own age, Julia asked, "Do you know where we are?"

"Yeah," she said, "This is the resort that..."

The explanation was interrupted by an authoritative voice from the front of the room. On the small stage stood a man in blue and burgundy. He was clad like the others except with added indications of seniority: his shoulders bore neat epaulets, he had on a beret with an insignia on the front, and his thick mustache had hints of grey in it. "Hello, ladies. If I may have your attention, we can begin." Every eye was on him.

"Now, strip down to the waist." He spoke with calm assurance as if he had just instructed them to close their eyes or cross their fingers. A hint of a smirk might have played around the corners of the mustache, but then again it might not have. There was a murmur throughout the room. Women glanced around to see if anybody else was complying. Nobody was. The statement was so jarringly discordant with the tone in which it had been stated that most were unsure how to react.

"It seems you don't yet understand the import of the instruction. I'll repeat myself momentarily, but in the meantime I will lay things out quite clearly."

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Emerging from his final session of the day Kel was spent. He was also somewhat dispirited. He had, with great effort, wrestled his numbers back to a more respectable place. But even after the marathon session he was still not a place he was entirely happy with. He grumbled invective against Debra Keane the great and powerful as he trudged across the atrium to his hub, contract case in hand.

A blue-uniformed tender touched his shoulder as he passed. "Just so you know, Archon Ra is on the floor."

Kel nodded his gratitude for the heads up and his friend acknowledged with a wave as he moved off about his duties. Ra was the archon ultimately overseeing the entire diplomatic apparatus and had a hand in maintaining and developing the Antechambers². He sat on the City's First Circle. A visit from him was not too unusual as he liked to be directly involved in the operations he oversaw. And he was fairly well liked, but still intimidating in virtue of both rank and a reputation for brilliance. Just now Kel was a bit apprehensive about how an interaction with the boss of his bosses might go.

After slotting the new batch of contracts into the system, Kel lingered to look at the grand board that displayed a summary of the day's recruiting activity. Each hub had such a board, showing neatly tabulated numbers not just for the staff working out of that hub, but for the Ambassadors' entire recruitment efforts. It might be disappointing to see his own relative standing, but there was also some satisfaction to be taken from what his labor contributed to. His hard work, after all, did contribute to a vital requirement for the City's operation. Momentarily absorbed by the columns of figures he didn't notice Archon Ra walk up beside him.

"Recruiter Kel," Ra greeted him quietly.

² "The Antechambers" was the collective name given to the constellation of interconnected spaces where recruiting primarily took place. Some were as small as a few rooms, some larger and more elaborate, a vast, decentralized edifice, constantly being altered and redesigned.. They were not part of the City proper and well beyond its boundaries, a reality necessitated by the venerable law that a woman could only set foot in the City after signing a contract.

Kel was jarred out of his thoughts and swiveled to face his superior. "Archon, greetings."

Ra was garbed impressively, as was his habit. He wore a black duster crisscrossed with patterns of glowing blue. "You just came off a shift, yes? How did it go?"

"Not amazingly. I got off to a slow start and spent a long time in one problem session. I'm hoping to do better tomorrow."

Ra nodded. "Everybody has such days. The flux of human behavior isn't something that can ever fully be mastered. But I've been looking at the work of this hub, at your work, and it has been sound, even quite promising in places." He added, a wry smile on his angular face, "In other words you may relax." There was a reason Ra was well liked.

"I wonder," the young archon continued, "do you have any ideas for new recruiting methods? I find that newer personal often bring newer ideas."

"Well," Kel responded tentatively, "I've already been experimenting a bit with ways of setting up group sessions. I think there's potential for sessions with much bigger groups at once."

Ra let the vagueness of this suggestion pass. "Potential, though also logistical difficulty. Such a plan would need to see significant success to justify itself." he mused. "If you were promoted, might this be something I could expect you to undertake?"

Kel nodded. He actually had many ideas though he wasn't about to spout all his half-finished thoughts in front of Ra. Feeling rather bolder Kel decided to ask a question his recent experience had again made salient. "Sir, must the contracts we offer be so precisely...literal? I'm not questioning the policy, but obviously recruiting would be easier if we weren't so constrained in what we said."

Ra smiled. "It's a good question, one every recruiter should ask. Yes, obviously lying would work better for getting signatures, so why must we universally refrain from lying? Do you know about the role of culpability?"

Lacking confidence he even knew what the word meant, Kel shook his head.

"Ah. Well, unlike physical matter which follows simple rules of cause and effect, the Somnole is fundamentally psychological. It responds to psychological principles—you could think of it as having feelings about how things ought to be. In essence, matter only asks where and when, but the stuff we made all this out of," he gestured broadly, "also asks why."

"If we don't give it a good reason, it's much more difficult to make things stick, especially certain sorts of things. And it takes great power to operate counter to the deep laws. We wish to keep a great many people here daily. So, we must provide a reason for them to be here which the Somnole itself accepts. We must show that we follow the logic of the mental depths."

Kel nodded. Apparently this was a lucky day after all as he was getting a personal lesson in abstracta from one of the premier intellects in the city.

"Culpability is the answer." Ra went on. "We need them to be guilty of something. This provides a kind of hook. Why are they here? Well, because they deserve to be. Then, instead of flouting our efforts, the stuff of the Somnole will cooperate with them. So the point of the contract is not to have the signature—we could readily secure that in any number of ways—it is the signing. They must freely sign in a way that renders them culpable, that is to blame," he added graciously, "for so doing. That provides a kind of hook we can use to tether them here. If we lied through our teeth all the culpability would lie on us and we would have no hook. We would never be able to keep them all here."

"So," Kel hazarded, "the guests must deserve to be here?"

"In a certain sense. But don't take the metaphors too literally. We needn't show that they actually *deserve* to be here. That's the sort of thing you show to a conscious mind, and anyway, do you really think we could show it? No, we just need them to have some guilty which the dark stuff beneath

the subconscious will accept as a pretext. It's the same sort of thing that provides that feeling about who should die in a horror film. A reason that feels right, though it needn't be a perfect one."

"But there are other ways of getting that 'hook'?"

"Yes, though all founded on the same principle of culpability." Naturally Kel had heard of one or two other methods that were routinely used, but they were not where most recruitment came from, and he'd never directly worked with any. "The City's recruiters have tried a great many things down the years. Likely you've heard of the published incantation, as it still yields regular recruits. At one point, some of our people actually opened loan offices in New Jersey."

Ra grinned in a way that authorize laughing at this, and Kel and the Archon shared did so together before Ra departed to continue his work.

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The man onstage certainly had the undivided attention of his audience now. He continued in the same, calm tone, "You have all chosen to come here, and you have all signed contracts or otherwise entered into compacts," he held up a contract as if to illustrate, "which impose certain requirements. Since you freely entered these agreements, it is reasonable to expect you to abide by them."

"If I must spell this out..." He opened the document with expert hands and began to read, "Admittance will be granted to an exclusive resort, filled with marvelous sights, wonder, and sensual delights for a stay of finite duration.' But that's just an excerpt from the introduction. Consider clause 4.E, 'Visitors will participate in fantasy scenarios. And participants in the scenarios will accommodate themselves to the fantasy in question, in form, behavior, and etc.' it continues in that vain. Many specifics are adduced."

"But consider, whose fantasy is to be followed is not here specified. You may have assumed it was you. Many do. But no such statement was made. In fact," he again leafed through the document, "clause 6.C is quite clear that 'the scenarios, or fantasies, to be enacted are not exclusively or primarily those of the visitor (you).' " There was murmuring around from around the room—the verbiage was familiar, but like an optical illusion its meaning was shifting before their eyes. This murmuring intensified at the speaker's next statement. "We could go on adducing specifics, but the point is that you agreed to behave in accordance with a fantasy scenario as yet unspecified. I now specify—for the moment I am the one whose fantasy you must accommodate. And I fantasize thus: strip down to the waist. Understand that, by your own free contract, you are obliged to do this."

There was a significantly louder commotion this time, but still no stripping. From all over the room came questions, objections, flat-out denials. This was not what anyone had expected, and some were beginning to feel that it might be time to leave. A woman with a round face and frizzy brown hair made a break the doors by which she'd entered. Before others could follow suite she was seized by several uniformed men. In incredibly short order she was hoisted bodily, gagged, blindfolded, and hogtied to a thick which pole which was quickly screwed together in sections. Small tools which buzzed loudly were produced and in short order the woman's cloths were shorn away so that her body, bare of all but its restraints, writhed uncomfortably between the shoulders of two uniformed men.

All this transpired in little more than a minute. And everyone had seen it. Reluctantly, all over the room, garments began falling to the floor.

"Good." Said the officer, "You have followed your contracts thus far. Now allow me to explain things a little further. You are going to stay here, in this facility, for the duration of the time contractually agreed to. In that time, you are going to serve in a variety of fantasies, as you have contractually agreed

to do. All this is required of you. You do not have to approve it. Your only choice is to keep your word and cooperate, or refuse and break your word. Those that cooperate may yet find this the garden of sensual delights they were hoping for, as it can be. Those who do not..." he paused at this point, and clicked his fingers. In response to this signal several figure moved onto stage with him, "...may find themselves in a position they object to.

The new persons on stage took a moment to make sense of, but soon a collective gasp went up from the women in the room, many with arms slung over their bare chests. In front walked one of the uniformed men holding a leash, which was easy enough. But the leash was tugging another figure along behind. (Generally, when we have a visual impression of a person, our subconscious applies some standard templates to decode the image without our even noticing. Thus we pass men and women on the street and recognize them as such more or less automatically. But sometimes a thing is so far from normal parameters that this automatic process founders, and we consciously realize we must decode what we are staring at. Think of the first moments in which you looked at the Venus of Willendorf. That is what now happened here.) It was a woman. A mass of fine, bleached curls topped a very female form, almost entirely occluding the head such that only the chin protruded. Monumental hips tapered to dainty feet, making for legs with the shape of preposterous cones. The slim body connecting these was almost entirely hidden by two mammoth breasts, swelling mounts which dangled to just past her waist and protruded whole feet in front of her. This wobbling mound of pail flesh was barely graced by clothes, and the string bikini which was implausibly wrapped around her highlighted more than it hid: the triangle of black fabric at her waist merely sat in the middle of a blonde thicket twice its size, and the two on her chest not far above were stretched out like tents which failed to fully cover the darker pink plots on which they were pitched. Little red heeled shoes and a thick red collar completed the ensemble.

This creature now teetered across the stage, pulled without gentleness by the uniformed man. She must have been entirely unable to see, but her wobbling gate seemed to be more a matter of weight and balance. With each deliberate step her bulging haunches and mountainous chest quivered and swayed; one could surmise that faster movement would see her simply topple to the floor. The last thing to register was that this creature's arms weren't visible. They turned out to be behind her, hands bound together in a sleeve from which a little red purse was hanging, immobilized behind her massive rump.

"Jigglibits here,"³ he patted one meaty mammary sending it quivering, "used to be less impressively proportioned. But she was perpetually uncooperative, and this resulted in her being reassigned to a scenario in which this was the form she needed to take. You'll find that here, things you've previously taken for granted can be rather fluid. So cooperate, as you've agreed to do. Do not try to escape, and do not assault personnel or other visitors to the facility. Follow these rules and you may well have an enjoyable stay. Break them, and you will discover, as Jigglibits has, that there is always a fantasy less to your liking you can be participating in."

"Now," he paused and looked out at the stunned audience before him, "strip the rest of the way." As his order was met with rapid compliance from around the room he smiled outright. "Welcome to the City, ladies."

Julia stood in a room full of naked, stunned, women. She finally had some idea where she was. It was not a comfort.

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³ Formerly Hanna Carson, an enthusiastic tennis player and lively B-cup.

It had been a bachelorette party activity. As is typical for such events, it was selected not primarily for itself, but rather for how suggestive it could be. Julia was there to celebrate the upcoming marriage of her friend Amy, a waifish little blonde who had dabbled in Wicca intermittently as an adolescent. The organizer of the party, cognizant of this, had put spell casting on the list of activities—something to be produced when a few fruity drinks had already been consumed and anything to do with sex seemed like a good idea. In a book of “practical magic for powerful young women” the party’s organizer had dug up at a local library, she’d found a spell to “travel in sleep to a place of erotic delights” and she’d run Xerox copies off which she now handed out to the tipsy twenty-something women. Amy could have “one last wild night before her pussy closed up shop.”

Julia had followed the directions on the little printout along with the others. The wording from the book was entirely po faced, even formal, which just made the whole thing that much funnier. Candles were produced (birthday candles, but still), incantations were read, names were signed in melted wax. Everybody more or less forgot about it by the end of their full evening.

Cast this spell to travel in sleep to a place of unending erotic delights. Be wary though, this is not a spell for the faint or wilting: by casting, one opens and binds herself to powerful erotic forces. She who seeks to be whisked away in the night must seek also what follows, to be obedient in the ways of carnality, to take the form carnality requires! Quake ye innocents and turn back. Proceed at your own peril, ye seekers of Babylon, who seek in earnest to be tenderly touched by night, for you may get what you seek!

Chapter 2: Processing

The man on stage spoke continue to speak but most didn’t register his further words very well. The feminine figure bobbing next to him, whose chest he casually fondled as he spoke, drowned out his actual words (though the figure itself stood mutely throughout). Instinctively many in the room covered their own breasts as if by so doing to shield them from this swollen fate.

As he concluded, doors were opened on the sides of the room, different doors than they had entered by, and one by one pairs of uniformed men entered and lead each nude woman out between them. There was a growing murmur in the small auditorium, and Julia, along with many others, was looking back and forth from the hogtied woman at the back of the room to the bulging one at the front. Perhaps if they made a break for it together... But this thought was interrupted prematurely when a strong grip took hold of each of her arms. She was away to the left, feet barely touching the floor, and never saw whether some of the women left behind made another bid at escape.

She found herself in a realm of white walls and white tile, an antiseptic space that felt very like a hospital. This feeling intensified when she was lead to a small room where she and several other women in her position were being loaded onto gurneys. “Where are you taking me?!” she cried repeatedly, or meant to, her words came out as a shrill whisper.

“Processing,” replied one of her captor’s matter-of-fact-ly.

“Processing?” the neglected words of the officer on stage floated back to her from short term memory: “You’ll all go now to be prepared for your visit. You will be individually processed to make you fit for the rolls you’ll occupy, and then you’ll be shown to your new quarters. Stay calm and all this this will be a smooth experience.”

The woman being strapped to the gurney next to her had apparently not heeded these last words as she struggled vehemently with her captors, kicking, flailing, and roaring in frustration. But it made no difference, in short order the athletic looking Asian girl was tied down on the gurney, her face contorted in frustration. "Be quiet now," one of her captor's ordered, "or we'll fill your mouth."

Julia allowed herself to be similarly strapped down. What was the point of resisting? Each gurney was pushed from the room by a single uniformed man. Julia was pushed head first, such that she could not see where she was going, only the bands of the lights overhead and the uniformed figure before her calmly pushing her along. She was entirely bare, splayed out in front of him like a pinned from. Though he seemed to take little notice, she had never felt so naked in all her life. This was soon to change.

Her first stop was a brightly lit room where someone in a long white coat and gloves stepped to the side of her and looked her over intensely, glancing back and forth from her body to a tablet of some sort in his hand. It was as if he was making a minute study of every inch of her immobile form. Julia said nothing, only bit her lip and waited, quivering slightly within her restraints. She never even noticed the similarly clad figure from the other side approach until he jammed something over her mouth.

She cried out in surprise. Within seconds a warm heavy feeling began to permeate her body. The cup over her mouth was removed, but she could feel her eyes begin to flutter. She struggled against the feeling and tried to cry out again, "What are you doing to me? No! Let me go..." but it was no use. She passed into oblivion, the man above her still manipulating his pad while scrutinizing her defenseless body.

The rest of her journey through processing was a blur. Julia thought she'd been unconscious for most of it, but seemed to have been dimly aware at intervals. She remembered having her hair cut off, or at least that was what it felt like, warm bussing all over her scalp as several figures stood around her. In that recollection she seemed to have been propped upright.

She also remember the feeling of latex-gloved hands all over her torso, though this recollection was matched with no visuals. It did not seem to have been erotic, just uncomfortable, and there had been some other odd pressures. Unrelated to this, she had a flash of seeing long glass tubes filled with thick translucent reds and yellows, and of a lab-coated man with odd eyewear, like night vision goggles, moving about among them. Beyond that, all was still blackness. And she did not return to full consciousness for some time.

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Throughout processing Julia's experience was replicated. Women were wheeled first into a room to be sedated and assigned. At this point even the women most vehement about not accepting their voluntarily undertaken fate fell silent. Their assignment would determine how they were routed through the remainder of the facility, room by room, until they came out the other side ready for action. Each woman was of course already in the system, and a tentative assignment was already matched to her profile before the orientation ended. But it was good to take a closer look to make sure the initial match was a good one and to note any issues that needed special attention.

From here the tender pushing the card could simply follow color codes to navigate the rest of the facility like a production line. After each room was passed through, the cart itself would display the color corresponding with the next step, all following the approved processing profile. Some rooms were only brief visits, others could take quite some time. For example, denuding a visitor of hair, above or below, could be done by an unskilled technician with a simple tool in moments. Adding new hair was

generally done from template, and though it took a bit longer to do the actual injecting and smoothing at the edges, it was an efficient process.

Resculpting, on the other hand, was a process which really had to be individualized to each guest. Skilled artisans like Shaper Eld, who had worked on Julia, had templates at their disposal, to be sure, but these were just starting points. Applying them blindly, if it worked at all, would produce grotesque results, sometimes subtly, as when things simply did not match up in a way that would read as natural, sometimes grandly, as when a particular body just wasn't as a template supposes.

Eld enjoyed his work. His competence combined something of the technical nature of a surgeon and the aesthetic sense of a sculptor into one task, a task at which he excelled. But he did sometimes wish for a bit more creative liberty. His sessions consisted of doing very much the same thing over and over, with his skilled eye employed mainly to make it look good in each case. There was a challenge to it, but it was trivial compared to the allure of the blank canvas, the patient where he'd be given his head to do as he liked.

The nearest to this he ever got, at the moment, were reprocessing cases where something really outlandish was called for. Sometimes these were just as proscribed as any ordinary process-y, but occasionally he'd be given only sparse instructions about the completed affect, and be left free to figure out how to achieve it. Though he was the oldest and second most senior shaper on the processing staff, he was far from the top shaper in the City.⁴ So, for now, his ambitions must answer to the needs of the moment, and he'd have to content himself with bringing the pudgy 30-something who'd just been wheeled in front of him to the specified point.

He envied the academy shapers who could experiment freely and develop new patterns which he then merely followed. But this was still enjoyable, he reminded himself—the curvy young thing before him was infinitely preferable to never-ending balance sheets. He allowed himself just a moment to appreciate the soft lines and pert pink nipples before he reached down towards the unconscious figure and began his work.

• • •

The first thing Julia became aware of was discomfort. At first it was just discomfort; It was full minutes before its source formed itself coherently in her mind. She was lying on top of something uncomfortable she dimly thought. Why'd she fallen asleep over the arm of the sofa? As she struggled back to consciousness the uncomfortable pressure beneath her torso grew until finally she opened her eyes and tried to rise.

She only tried, because Julia did not actually succeed in sitting up on her first attempt. For reasons she could not at first grasp she rather half rose and then tumbled back to the position she'd been in. Eyes open now, her head cleared a bit and she recalled that she was not in her living room, a fact abundantly obvious in any case. Rather she lay face down on a cot in what looked like a bunk room. Simple bunk beds in rows sat on a wooden floor. A few of the beds seemed to have occupants, though most were empty. Blue-grey walls punctuated by standing mirrors lay at the edge of her still focusing vision.

⁴ The truly virtuoso shapers would seldom be doing line work in processing. They were to be found in the ransks of the Shaperate at the Academy. Though shaping was one of the most skilled and prestigious jobs in all of processing, the high shapers who presided over the Shaperate, archons all, were some of the most elevated persons in the City.

With another effort she managed to sit up on the cot, and only with further effort avoided toppling over again. Was she wearing a backpack or something? She looked at the cot to see what she'd been hunched over. Her still bleary mind declined to make sense of what she saw, which was nothing but the cot itself. She sat there, her legs swung over the edge of the bed, and tried to clear her head.

The room, lit somewhat dimly, appeared to contain many rows of beds and little else. Here and there, at a distance, Julia could see other sleeping women, and a few up and walking around. From somewhere off to the right she could hear noises of voices and muted activity from what sounded like it must be a fair few people. She screwed her eyes shut and then opened them again. Where was she and why did she feel like she might tip over?

She raised her hands to massage the sore places on her chest and finally noticed, with a start, that this was where the feeling of being weighted down originated. Her hands touched flesh much sooner than she expected and, looking down in surprise, she saw herself. The shock jarred her still returning senses. Staggering to her feet she nearly fell over again. But steadying herself, she shuffled over to one of the mirrors on a nearby wall and stood before it. There, staring back at her, she was. Julia gaped. In the mirror was a figure who, mostly, looked like the one she saw in the mirror each morning, with one glaring exception.

In most particulars, Julia had not been greatly altered in processing. She'd always been an attractive girl, and at 22 still enjoyed the bloom of youth combined with a mature body. There had been some changes though. She'd been slimmed just slightly, losing a couple pounds of weight she'd put on in the last few years or working a day job, and some skin blemishes had been removed. More noticeable, her hair had been altered. Still brown, it was several shades lighter and a curly bob had replaced her loose pony tail. Her lips were ever so slightly fuller than they had been the day before. But none of this registered for some time. Her attention was entirely dominated by her chest.

There, in defiance of reason and desire, two enormous breasts now hung. Gone was the C-cups bust that had filled out a swimsuit so nicely. In its place were two ludicrous mounds that must have been... L cups? M? N? Her ability to fix letters to physical features had never till now had reason to extend past the first four letters of the alphabet and now it foundered in alphabetical absurdity. Each pendulous breast was more than a match for her head in mass, and hung down nearly to her naval. Aside from their size they looked natural, each pink orb swelling to its conclusion in a prominent nipple pointed just slightly downwards. She had to run her hands over each more than once to convince her addled mind they were really part of her at all. They were.

She could feel emotion roiling inside of her as she stared, aghast. She looked like one of the things the guys in junior high had penned in the backs of English notebooks, like some lewd joke. She whimpered to herself as she continued to stare at her reflection. "What happened? Oh, god, what did they do to me?"

A voice beside her, to her surprise, interrupted her confused moaning with an answer, "They gave you huge tits, honey."

Julia looked over to see a woman in her underwear. (Julia had not yet put together that everyone in the bunk room, save those like herself who were exempt from a bra, wore a uniform of simple white bra and panty.) She was older than Julia, perhaps in her late thirties. Her coarse, dark hair was pulled up into tight stubby pigtailed. Her figure would have passed for buxom most places, but did not begin to rival the improbable proportions of Julia's own new body.

"What?"

"I said they gave you huge tits," she pointed, "that's what they did to you. It's a shock, but calm down, it could be a lot worse. Just calm down, honey." She took the stunned Julia by the shoulders reassuringly and guided her back to an empty bed where she sat next to her. "What's your name?"

"Julia."

"Hi Julia. I'm Jacky." The older woman responded. "It'll be alright."

"But my body..." Julia began in a plaintive wail.

"Yeah, it happens to all of us some way. It's part of being here. But it's not the worst thing. And hey, wouldn't you have killed for tits like this a week ago?"

Julia shook her head vehemently. There was a long pause before her addled brain grasped that it had been a joke. She smiled faintly. "Where am I?"

"You're in a bunk room. This is where you'll be sleeping from here on. I stay here too. You just came out of processing, and you're in the City."

Julia tried to take this in. "Why did they do this to me?" She again indicated her chest.

"Because somebody wants you to look that way? Somebody thinks it's hot. But they just changed your shape a little. You'll be OK."

Julia whimpered, but again Jacky reassured her. "I'd guess it's nothing too bad. Not like her," she gestured at a slim black woman with a huge afro and bulging lips who passed them at some distance. "I'm guessing she's going to spend a lot of time on her knees looking like that."

"On her knees?"

"Yeah, they only focused on the part of her that guys will look down at, on her hair and face. It looks minor compared to your bazooms, but trust me, you wouldn't want to trade with her."

"What will they do with me?" Julia cringed.

"Don't think about that now. Nothing you can't handle. Just leave that for later. It will be alright, whatever it is. Right now, you need to rest."

This seemed like sense, and Julia went to lay back on the cot. To her consternation, her breasts slid heavily off her chest to either side.

"No, no, honey." Jacky said, grabbing her arm and propping her back up. "You don't sleep here. That will happen if you lie on your back."

"But I can't lie on top of them!" Julia almost howled.

"It's OK. I know, honey. Follow me over here." She raised the bleary Julia to her feet and led her to one corner of the block of beds. "Here, these are the special beds for girls like you," she said, gesturing. Julia went to climb into one, but again Jacky stopped her, "No, honey, not on the bottom, on the top." She half guided, half heaved the befuddled Julia up onto the top bunk and helped her get into position—no trivial task since Julia was having balance issues even while standing still. Finally Julia's shocked and foggy mind grasped what was going on: there was a window cut out of the material bellow her just at chest level. Carefully, her breasts could be dangled through so that they hung free over the bed bellow while the rest of Julia was supported by the cot above. In any normal situation this would have been impossibly uncomfortable for at least three reasons, but Julia wasn't in a normal situation.

"Get some rest. You'll feel better when the shit they dosed you with is all out of your system." Jacky patted her shoulder comfortingly.

Her head spinning, her breasts hanging like pendulums for all the world to see, Julia still sank back into unconsciousness in mere moments.

• • •

Not much is known with certainty about the founder of the City. The man who would later be called Adan, the High First Archon, didn't seem to have been much interested in autobiography. Lore had it that he was an unsuccessful inventor from New England, a man with many patents but little money. He was a career bachelor some said, and an amateur astronomer said others. There was some reason to think his given name had been Hugh though a handful of other indications would have it as Sidney.

It seems that around 1919 this man had begun a series of experiments into the nature of human dreaming. He was certainly not the first, nor the last, to embark on such an investigation. His own period had seen a reawakening of interest in dreams. Thanks largely to Sigmund Freud, scientific study of the mysterious recesses of the human subconscious was in fashion. And the terrain these European intellectuals were now trying to make sense of had been comfortably tramped by folk magic back almost to the dawn of human recorded history. Yet, in a few short years an anonymous man from New England would surpass all of them in his understanding of the mysteries of dreams.

So Hugh, or was it Sidney?, seemed to bring a different perspective to his investigations. To him, somnolence was a place, a region with geography to be explored replete with its own perils and opportunities, not unlike opening up a new continent. This was the spirit world of the shaman, denuded of its magical elements. He thought of his peculiar, private researches as "expeditions", and of himself as an explorer rather than as either a psychologist or a medicine man. He had built, it was said, odd apparatus to help him penetrate further, and practiced exercises of his own invention convinced that the right methods would see terra incognita open before him.

And, whether in virtue of this conceptual device, an innate genius, or a combination of the two, these investigations did penetrate further than those of any of his contemporaries no matter how notable. Within two years he'd detected what most other had missed: the existence of a murky substratum bellow his own phenomenal dreams. And, having discovered it, rather than attempting to become famous off this discovery, as he surely could have, he decided to venture further in the dark alone.

One can think of this substrate, the Somnole it would come to be called years later, as an Ocean. Like any good analogy this one has its shortcoming, but is still instructive. If the dreams individuals normally experience are warm coastal waters, then the Somnole is the cold, unfathomably deep water of the ocean in between. The same stuff flows into each, but the depths are vaster and qualitatively different. And just as the deep ocean had been an unseen reality for much of human history, so the dark depths of the Somnole had barely been glimpsed by human observers.

It was out into these dark waters between the dreams of individuals that Adan now ventured. Even here he was not *quite* first. Carl Jung had glimpsed it in his idea of the collective unconscious, a term coined a few years earlier. And shamans and the like, as well as a few outlying dreamers, had ventured there and gotten some intimation of its nature. In fact, one might say that in many periods, right back into antiquity, it was generally accepted that some unseen expanse linked human dreams.

It is not known what year he first successfully crossed out of his own dreams through the dark and into the dream of another. But he was the first modern man to deliberately do it, and to know what he had done. And again, he passed up status as a visionary scientist or cultic figure to plunge even deeper into the abyss. When this anonymous man, a crank in the eyes of those who took any notice of him, found himself in a land Jung had glimpsed and magi had tremulously passed through, he decided to build a kingdom.

Julia woke up abruptly. Nothing seemed to have startled her awake, which made the sensation rather alien: usually it takes at least a short while for a mind to fully transition from sleep to waking. For some this period lasts hours or is only terminated with stimulants.⁵ Not so here. She seemed to have gone from complete oblivion to full consciousness in a moment. It was as if a switch had been thrown.

She discovered that she'd been sleeping face down. Activity was audible all around her and she sought to rise but found herself unable to for reasons which, though you've anticipated, it took her some moments to work out. The process of finding the impediment and then painstakingly extricating her new bosoms from the bed beneath her provided all the priming necessary for the events of the previous day to replay before her mind. When she finally did succeed in rising, she at least knew, for the first time in a while, what room she would find herself in.

The bunk room was astir with activity. It seemed that everyone had woken up at about the same time, as all over the square of beds women were rising and stretching. Some had already risen and were walking about, finding one another, or heading into an adjoining room through a wide arch Julia hadn't remarked the night before. Her head was much clearer than the last time she'd awoken here. In the midst of so many strangers she was suddenly acutely aware of her bare and ludicrously distended chest. She had no experience being naked in large groups, even shared changing rooms were something she'd mostly avoided after high-school, and though nobody seemed especially interested it was hard not to feel that her new chest stood out like a pair of fleshy beacons.

She looked around for her comforter of the night before, the only familiar element of this whole ordeal. She turned out to be quite close talking to a redhead a few beds down. Julia slid down from her bunk and found herself sprawled on the floor. She'd neglected the greatly increased mass before her. (Her new center of gravity would remain an irritant for cycles to come. Very seldom would she actually fall, but any movement she undertook without being adequately deliberate risked her losing her balance just slightly and having to throw out her arms or stagger. That her ability to comfortably walk in her own body had been taken from her proved a lasting insult to her dignity.) Gingerly Julia raised herself again only to find that Jacky and her redheaded companion had walked over to her and each now offered her a helping hand.

"This is Julie." Jacky said to her friend.

"Julia, actually." Julia timidly correctly.

"Julia, right, sorry. This 'll be her first cycle."

The redhead looked Julia up and down. She had a sharp chin and angular features. Her hair, too deep a red to be her original shade, was buzzed to a short stubble. This combined with thick eyebrows to make her rather intimidating. "Hi. I'm Torch." She said in a somewhat husky voice.

"Here, we'd better get her into the assembly room." Jacky said to torch, then, to Julia, "Come on, honey, we all have to wait in there after waking up. It's your first day so they'd cut you some slack, but it's better if you just do what they want."

"Do we need to help you walk?" Queried Torch.

"I think I'm alright." Julia replied and followed the pair to the end of the room. There she found herself in a further room, quite similar to the one she'd just left but devoid of furniture. Two other walls were punctuated by wide entrances like the one she'd just come through, while on the forth stood a row of institutional looking doors with vertical bars in front of them. Most of the floor here was hardwood, just like in the bunk room, but a strip of space nearest the doors was smooth blue-grey, like the walls

⁵ Usually coffee, but to each their own.

and separated from the rest by a vivid red stripe. There were a number of women milling about the room already, and more were filing in from the bunk room all the time.

"Now," Jacky began in an earnest tone, "we wait here for them to come get us. When they call your name, march right over to whoever said it and go with them. Don't fight them or anything," at this Torch snorted softly to herself, "and whatever you do don't run off, just go where they take you. Until they call your name, though, just wait here. Stay away from the doors. Don't cross that red line until you hear your name."

For a moment Julia had so many pressing questions in her head that it was difficult to actually verbalize any one of them. Finally several burst out at once in a frightened jumble, "When who comes to take me where? What's...? What is this?"

"Ok, try and keep calm, Julie, I mean Julia. Damnit. Sorry, I knew a Julie." Jacky didn't actually sound overly upset. "First, some tenders are going to come get you. You know those guys in the blue and red uniforms?"

Julia nodded.

"Those guys are "tenders." They tell us what do, where to go, and make sure we do it—like our prison guards."

"Or zoo keepers." Torch offered.

"They are going to take you somewhere—to your assignment, the job they want you doing here."

"What's my assignment?"

"Don't know." Torch spoke this time. "There all sorts of reasons they might give you those." She gestured at Julia's breasts, which Julia was doing her best to fold her arms across.

"But you aren't being punished or anything yet, it's your first day, so it shouldn't be too bad." Jacky reassured. "They save the really bad stuff for people who piss them off. That's why I'm telling you to cooperate with them. If you don't, you get reassigned." Jacky had been talking rather quickly this whole time, as if rushed. As she did, the room had rapidly filled up until the entire content of the bunk room stood there waiting.

"There was this girl they showed us...they were leading her around on a leash..."

"In your orientation? Yeah, they usually show you some poor girl that's being punished to make sure you do what you're told. Did she..." Jacky's explanation was cut off by a voice calling "Gwendoline." One of the doors had opened, and two tenders stood on the far side of the red line. The room hushed, voices went quiet and women stopped milling as all attended to the doors. A blonde, Gwendoline apparently, trotted over to the two men who lead her out through the door they'd come through. The bars dropped back into place behind them with a swish. Something occurred to Julia as she looked at what must be nearly two hundred women around her.

"How will I be sure I'm the Julia they're calling?" she whispered.

"You're the only Julia here." Responded Jacky under her breath, "They're insanely organized. Now sshhh." She gestured for Julia to face the front of the room.

One by one women were called by pairs of tenders who entered through any of the several doors. Often several sets would enter on each other's heels and names would be called quite rapidly. Julia did not have to wait long to hear her name. She was within the first thirty names called. For a moment she was rooted in place. From behind Torch gave her a light shove. "Go!" she mouthed. Face burning, and looking down at the floor, or more accurately at her own chest, she marched over to where the two uniformed men stood. Quickly one waved a device by her right ear which beeped faintly. Then they took her by either elbow and lead her out of the room.

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Obviously the human mind can shape the stuff of the Somnole forming it into forms and structures. Most nights it does so without meaning to, casting a shadow of its own inner workings onto dreaming space. But, like shadows, these constructs are constantly changing and short lived. And they only exist in proximity to the mind that cast them.

A mind with a strong will can do something similar deliberately in the depths of the Somnole. But this takes technique and great effort and will nonetheless be evanescent and unstable. One could build a tower, but it would fade like mist or, more troublingly to most, take on aspects of a serpent in a fairly short amount of time. To this problem the future Adan now turned his attention. If he was to colonize the depths then he must find a way to build things that would last.

As he ventured out into the dark he did discover some lasting structures already there, the sediment, it seemed, of the collective unconscious of the human race settling in drifts and formations. These tended to be surreal and difficult to fathom or process, like the cyclopean works of some primal absurdist. They were useless for permanent construction. Disrupted, they would reform. And pondering their form for very long had a disquieting effect on a lucid mind.

The Somnole seemed in constant motion. But there were ways to work with this flow, forms that would endure in it. A river may erode a bank, but it also may dredge up its bottom to keep a sandbar in existence. So, if one could find forms which were sustained rather than eroded, then perhaps one could impose lasting structure.

Of course, this too is a metaphor. Metaphors are all but unavoidable when you are dealing with a realm that is not inherently spatially arrayed, and which is animated by forces which have no direct analogue in physics. Talk of “forms which were sustained” might give the idea of looking for shapes which will sustain forces, like a terrestrial engineer. But isn’t right. The forms that were called for would be more aptly compared to things like archetypes and motifs in stories.

And progress was made along these lines. He began to formulate a cannon of principles that allowed a form to “satisfy” the Somnole, keeping it from so easily distorting or slipping away. For instance, it was easier to give an object a property if it resembled an object the human mind expects to be united with that property. Somewhat subtler were principles like balance, unfolding, and desert. Much of what he found is still taught to shapers with only slight amendment.

It was at this point that he seems to have first sought collaborators in his labor. Here many patterns were established that would long persist: instead of turning to others he was acquainted with in the waking world, Adan found and initiated his collaborators through their dreams. His vision was contagious, and soon a handful of others were diligently laboring alongside him. It was also here that the practice originated of taking somnolent names different from those used in waking, and here also that the name Adan was first employed. Soon, with so many laboring together and the principles needed to bend dreams to their will beginning to reveal themselves, the foundations were laid for the first version of the city.

Their construction would go on for years, though now little record remains of this dead predecessor to the City. It was grand in its day, its citadels and streets populated only by the few handpicked companions who labored alongside the visionary Adan. All else in the city was mere simulacra. And though they’d had great success, and new insights were yielded every day, the ability to establish things with true permanence did not precipitate. At the edges, the first City was fraying even during its brief zenith.

Adan concluded that had been fundamentally misguided and that he must start again. The insight this second version of the city would be based on was this: mere passive endurance would never provide what was needed. Passivity did not truly endure, only activity could truly abide. To form a bastion of solidity in the depths would require an active power that would constantly reestablished what had been created, a model less like a castle of dead stone, and more like an organism of tissues through which blood coursed.

So Adan and the first circle of archons let their first labor decompose around them, first into a haunted place, then a mere echo. They devoted their energies to discovering their active power.

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Julia found herself being lead at a rather rapid pace down a maze-like series of halls. There were turns, and intersections, doors, and at one point a round elevator that rushed upwards with complete smoothness. She had toured a power plant once, years ago, and these endless, windowless corridors reminded her of it. The passages looked almost identical save for markings on the walls which seemed to be signposts of some sort but in an alphabet Julia could not decipher. All the passages had round ceilings in the same grey as the walls. The floor was a very faint cucumber green. It felt cool and just slightly yielding underfoot. Very quickly it all became a blur.

The thought of running off down a side passage did occur to her, of course, an inevitable upshot of her dread of what lay before her. But it wasn't workable. The men on either side of her were muscular and had firm hold of her arms. Even if she broke free, they passed others walking the halls with and without women in tow regularly. And Jacky's words rang in her ears, "whatever you do don't run off, just go where they take you." So instead she asked the two men, pleadingly, "Where are you taking me?"

"To your assignment," the one on the left answered curtly.

Finally her escorts turned down a hall noticeably unlike the others. Down one wall was a row of smaller doors that looked as if they were made from planks. They looked old and thus starkly discordant with their surroundings. Her escort opening one of these she was shuffled into a dim space beyond, almost a booth. The only light seemed to come from an opening high on the wall before her. Illuminated by its beam she could see an apparatus of straps and bars on the floor. Exercise equipment perhaps?

Onto this device, whatever it was, she was curtly maneuvered. "Step there." She stood where they directed her, and the men set to work. In the semi-dark various elements were moved into place around her. She could feel pads of some sort in front of her knees, and something like a metal sleeve was pushed in snug over each arm. "What is this? What are you doing?" she demanded. But the only response was a "Hush." from one of her tenders. She instinctively tried to get free of whatever was holding her and found that her body was now held fast in its upright position.

At least, it was upright for a moment. Having installed her to their satisfaction the tenders began to turn a crank. As they did Julia began to tip forward and at the same time bodily rise forward towards the gap in the wall. Soon her head poked through, then her entire torso. Finally, with a clunk, the movement stopped as the plate which held her fixed below the naval made contact with the edge of the opening and her movement ceased.

After the dimness it took a moment for Julia's eyes to adjust to the brighter room her front half now occupied. The scene that met her eyes was a surreal one. In front of her was a rather old-fashioned looking pub, almost faux medieval, the sort of thing that might really exist in an English village and was likely kitsch anyplace else. There was a bar, and rough, round wooden tables surrounded by chairs. Over

the bar hung a hand painted sign that read, "The Generous Cow" in gothic lettering. But what made the scene so surprising was that at intervals along the wall facing her (and indeed, along three of the room's four walls), the busts of naked women protruded at regular intervals, like the bawdy figureheads of great old ships. Each woman had enormous breasts which, due to their angle, dangled freely below her. Her arms from the shoulder down were covered by matte metal sleeves giving almost the impression that she had none. Beneath each hanging pair of breasts a little shelf extended from the wall. The women were mounted high up, so that their cleavage would be at about eye level for somebody standing on the floor below. And, of course, this was Julia's own position as well. She was part of an identical row of women running along her side of the room. Craning her neck as much as the brace holding her in place would allow, she could catch sight of the woman to either side.

There were several people on the floor below apparently getting things set up: arranging the chairs, laying out mugs and coasters, and one thin fellow with a mustache moving from woman to woman with a small step ladder and a little gun-like device. Turning to the woman on her right as best she could, Julia quietly asked, "What is all this? Where are we?"

The woman she was addressing looked like something out of a sixties advertisement. Her hair was a blonde bouffant. Her breasts tapered to points reminiscent of bullet bras of the era, only instead of bullets these were clearly a pair of torpedoes. The woman inclined her head slightly and whispered back, "You're new?"

"Yes," Julia mirrored the woman's whisper.

"We're the cows in the 'Generous Cow'."

"What?"

"We're the cows, the ones that get milked. Now quiet, he'll hear us." Apparently she meant the slender man with the step ladder.

Indeed he had heard something. He looked up at them with an ironic smile and said, "You cows had better quiet down. I don't want you heifers passing gossip about our customers." His voice was a bit high and sing-songy. He drew his ladder up beneath Julia and climbed a few steps up. "Ah, a new 'face' I see." He said impishly, staring at her breasts. "Are you ready for a day of fun?"

Julia said nothing.

"Well, who can complain when a cow keeps her own council? We'll just set you up then..." He lifted the gun-like apparatus. Up close it looked a bit like a hot glue gun. He pulled a cylinder full of taupe liquid from a pouch in his apron and plugged it into the back end of the device. Pressing the front end up to the top of Julia's right breast, almost at the armpit, there was a click and Julia felt a sharp sensation. A moment later he popped the empty cylinder back out of his device. Clearly she'd been injected with something. "There you go little Julia moo. Aren't you just in for a fun time." Still smirking he moved on to the sixties woman on the right.

Julia almost inadvertently again began struggling and straining against the bonds keeping her in place. Some assiduously placed bits of padding made her confinement bearable when she was still, but beneath they were solid metal and didn't budge an inch. Parts of her were actually free: everything below her waist was just sort of propped in place. Her knees rested fairly comfortably in a sort of stirrup but nothing bound them there. Her hands were free to clench and unclench at her sides, but couldn't get hold of anything. She writhed and wriggled, and still she was immovably mounted on the wall.

As she struggled, though, her chest began to feel oddly. She began to feel a slight warmth and diffuse pressure. Soon the heat intensified and the pressure became more localized towards the end of her breasts. Her nipples began to tingle and then ache. Soon her entire chest felt as if it were even heavier than it had previously been, swollen with some internal weight.

"I'm sorry." the woman on the right whispered. "I didn't mean anything. It's just that we're supposed to be quiet while we're up on the wall. They might punish us if we're too loud. I'm Maryanne."

"What did they put in me?" Julia squeaked.

"I don't know what it is," came the whispered response, "just what it does. Do you have that awful inflating balloon feeling in your tits?"

"Yes."

"That's because they're producing milk."

"Milk!" Julia barely restrained a shriek.

"Shhhhh. Stop yelling." Maryanne sounded a bit panicked.

"But...but why? What's...why milk?" Julia pleaded pitifully.

"Shhhh. Like I said, we're the cows. They're going to..."

"Now, now!" It was the fellow with the step ladder again. "I thought I told you cows no gossiping. Julia is new and doesn't know any better but Maryanne, I'm surprised at you. He strolled over towards Maryanne, who looked pained.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. She just kept..."

"It's OK." The man smiled in a manner unwarmed by kindness, "It's nothing a second shot won't fix." Climbing up the step ladder again he emptied another canister into the wincing blonde. "There, now you'll have something better to do rather than be a chatty Cathy." He trotted away.

As soon as he was out of earshot Julia whispered, "What happened? Did he..."

Maryanne interrupted in a hiss, "Look what you did to me! Just shut up, shut up!"

"I'm really sorry." Julia sincerely was. "But you were telling me what this place is..."

Maryanne just groaned miserably and said nothing.

Turning to her left she saw an older Japanese woman staring straight forward. Her dark hair was piled high on her head. Whether because of what had just transpired or for some other reason, this stately individual would not acknowledge Julia in any way. So Julia had to simply wait like a deer on a trophy wall to see what happened.

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You would think someone a fool if they told you that sex is a powerful psychological force as if that were news. Freud saw it everywhere, an animating force that takes many forms. But older thinkers, moralists and libertines alike, had been quite as aware how deeply its roots went. The insight that Adan had was somewhat different though: his insight was that human sexuality might here, in the realm then called Somnolence, later just "the Somnole", be a force one could harness to shape things, the electricity of his City.

This is not to say that sexuality had been entirely divorced from the work of him and his friends up to that point. Who would set about building a dream city and not seek to see their dreams fulfilled? So erotic fantasy couldn't help but enter into their shaping. But to now this had been a matter of artifice: simulacra were constructed to cater to individual whims, servants made in the same way as walls and windows and from the same stuff. This meant that they faded in the same way. Though they had a tendency to linger, at least in part, longer than one would expect.

But what if real sexual scenarios, real in that men actually interacted with women, were introduced? The sexual bond between men and women must surely be on the same level as things like

the principle of balance or of ordinariness. Had not sexuality been an engine of human evolution, and therefore likely imbedded deeper into the stuff of thought than almost anything?

Experiments were conducted. The galvanic potential of man and woman's uniting was immediately apparent, but tapping it would take work. How was the potential of human sexuality to be harnessed? Like magicians binding a spirit, the right incantation had to be found if the power was to be of any real use.

Out of this effort a new plan began to emerge: a new City, coursing with refined sexual energy. They dubbed it simply "urge". Their construction would no longer be established solely by will, rather the will of the Shapers would direct a primal intensity which would carve the Somnole with ease. Once the framework were laid and the dynamo harnessed they could build what they wanted—and enjoy the dynamo for its intrinsic qualities at the same time.⁶ This was the project, and they embarked on its realization with vigor.

But how to generate the needed urge? A handful of men perusing their own pleasures would never be enough, even if they allowed themselves to be entirely preoccupied by sensuality—an intention none of them had. They'd need to come up with something more.

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Julia, had been staring around the room in unbearable suspense for what seemed like hours. The other women mostly seemed to be waiting in dejected silence, though Julia noticed that sometimes when backs were turned pairs of heads did lean in furtively to exchange a few words. She earnestly wished she could hear the words being said. Her own neighbors remained silent, save that Maryanne periodically emitted low moans under her breath.

The heated feeling inside her chest had cooled, but the bloating pressure and soreness had only intensified. Indeed, Julia felt disconcertingly as if her chest might have swollen beyond even its existing lewd dimensions. Glancing over at Maryanne's torpedo tits she felt she could actually see a change in size, and the woman's veins stood out sharply in a way Julia didn't think they had before. It was quite natural to reach a hand down to massage her aggrieved flesh, and she repeatedly began this gesture only to be jarringly reminded that her arms were strictly confined. This was an entirely alien experience for her, and there was something almost panic inducing about not being able to reach her own chest. She kept trying to push out of her mind the question of what would happen if she began to itch. It was trivial compared to her other worries, yet hard not to visualize once it occurred to her.

At a certain point the set up in the *Generous Cow* seemed to be completed. Staff stopped bustling about and retreated behind the bar. A bell was struck, and Julia sensed a collective wince from the wall-mounted women. Any furtive conversation ceased. Stillness blanketed the room. It was as if the whole place was holding its breath. The stillness was broken perhaps two minutes later as the door opposite the bar swung open and two men strolled in chatting. They were not tenders and, it occurred to her, had a bit more gut than she'd yet seen on any of the uniformed men. They were just the sort of guys one might find at any run-of-the-mill American bar talking about football. They proceeded over to the bar where large coins were exchanged for mugs—but empty mugs, oddly. Turning from the bar they sidled over towards the far wall and walked beneath the row of women.

Julia watched what happened next transfixed in horror. Perhaps she'd had some inkling of what might follow that she'd simply refused to acknowledge, perhaps not, but what transpired sent chills

⁶ Another added benefit was that the mental projections of actual people were one of the most durable things they'd yet discovered. This was one of many reasons to prefer a dreaming woman to a dream of a woman.

through her. The two men stopped in front of a redhead whose freckles extended beyond the areas normally exposed to sunlight. Still chatting they set their mugs on the little shelf beneath her. Then, without preamble, each man reached up and grabbed one of the redhead's great, round boobs and squeezed. The redhead's face contorted as the two tugged at her defenseless chest. White streams spurted from her nipples and into the waiting mugs. Julia's own chest convulsed in sympathy. The two sets of hands continued milking the woman's breasts, squeezing and pulling relentlessly as Julia winced and cringed. Finally, mugs filled, they released her tender organs and took seats nearby to sip their drinks.

As if released from a spell Julia began to struggle madly against the confines of the sheath that held her. The door at the front of the tavern opened again. Another patron walked in.