

# OPEN SOURCE

PART  
ONE



A NOVEL BY  
THE ETHICAL HYPNOTIST

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY NIBIRU-TG

# Open Source: Part One

## A Novel By The Ethical Hypnotist

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### Author's Note:

The following is a work in progress. Things can and will change between now and the final draft. I just wanted to put a sample of what I've been working on for the past few months.

As ever, your continued support is deeply appreciated. If you want to send love my way, please purchase a deluxe copy of one of my other stories at [My itch.io page](#).

## Chapter One: No Clock, No Work, One Orange

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to the spice channel.

Marisol Marquez squinted at the morning glare, rubbing at her eyes, mad at whatever idiot had left the light on - then realized it was daylight, peaking in through the grimy roof port.

“*Fuck!*” She sat bolt upright, only to bang her head against the low ceiling of the capsule bed. The blow brought Marisol’s interface out of sleep mode, and her vision filled with alerts and advertisements. The clock rolled over to ten as she desperately closed pop-ups, searching. Sure enough, she’d forgotten to refill her alarm clock credits. Her six am alert was paused, ready to wake her - once she watched a few ads.

She cancelled it with a snarl, furious at herself. It had taken her *months* to land a job at the microfarm, pollinating tomato plants, inoculating mushroom substrates, and other jobs too delicate and chaotic for an AI drone. It was hot and tiring work, but she got 28.25 hours of it *every week* and a share of the vegetables too ugly to sell.

That was all gone now. Marisol struggled not to cry as she watched an ad, waiting for her messages to load. There were six from the boss, each angrier than the last, ending with a “You’re Fired!” gif and link to her last paycheck. She hit ‘accept’, clicking through a half dozen captchas and agreements before the transaction hit the blockchain. This time of day, she shouldn’t lose more than 3-4% to gas fees - a small blessing at least.

BANGBANGBANG! Marisol jumped as a fist pounded on her capsule door. “Louisa! You got another job lined up yet?” She groaned and started getting dressed, twisting around in the cramped capsule. “I got fired *nine minutes* ago, Mrs Patel! I don’t even have *breakfast* lined up!”

“Well you better figure it out! We don’t run this place on rizz; you pay by the day and the second you’re late, I’ll disable your access - no cap!”

“I know, I know!” Marisol unlocked the door and slid it up, trying to keep her face neutral. “The Coin should hit my wallet by lunch! I’ll send you a week’s rent the moment I have it, I swear!”

Mrs Patel stared her down for a long second, then nodded. “Bet,” she said with authority, then left to continue her rounds.

Slumped and defeated, Marisol dragged herself to the shower pods. She’d splurged on a 30-day Platinum Cleanse subscription a few days ago - her first real extravagance in months - and while she *dearly* wished she had the Coin back now, the premium soap and unlimited hot

water helped wash some of the despair away. She leaned against the plastic wall for twenty minutes, interface minimized, just listening to the white noise of the showerhead.

Marisol emerged from the pod, somewhat rejuvenated. While waiting for her deluxe towel to dispense, she appraised herself in the mirror. She had flawless caramel skin, smooth as a doll. Her legs were those of a dancer, long and toned, with wide hips and a cute bubble butt. Her midriff was flat as a board, beneath a beautiful pair of G-cups with dark nipples. She had dark hair, down past her shoulder blades, with blonde bangs and highlights. Her face was the supermodel ideal - sculpted cheekbones, dainty chin, kissable ruby lips and large green eyes that shone like emeralds.

She sighed at the reflection. Just a standard girl. Anonymous. Nothing special.

Instinctively switching to cost-saving mode, Marisol picked out a free set of ad-supported clothes and went down to the kitchen. She bought three unflavored mycoprotein bricks from the vending machine and withdrew all her veggies. She *should* stretch those out for a few days, spreading out the vitamins - but she'd save a few microCoin by not renting the fridge space.

Gnawing listlessly on the first brick, she got caught up on her social media while half-listening to the free educational programming droning away on the kitchen TV.

"..and it was that simple discovery that led to the modern biomorphosis process. Patent in hand, Dr. Kavita Rao was able to raise more than 25 gigaCoin in venture capital, and by 2038 the first ShiftX hit the market, becoming the fastest-selling medical implant in history."

"The mass adoption of ShiftX disrupted every aspect of the healthcare industry. Disease and injury became a thing of the past. But more importantly from a sales perspective, people could use their ShiftX to change any aspect of their appearance at will - making even the most radical cosmetic transformation as simple and painless as changing a shirt."

"Suddenly, perfect physical beauty was available to everyone with just a simple subscription. The consequences were - "

Marisol turned the TV off with her interface. *God*, she was tired of these lame documentaries! Everyone *knew* how a ShiftX worked; you could teach the basic principles to a child. But MatraMax Biotech pumped out these crappy AI docu-ads all the time, and the educational feeds slurped up the free content to fill time.

Besides, she had more important shit to do - she had to start looking for gigs. Clearing all the distractions from her interface, Marisol woke up her AI assistant.

"Good morning, Marisol! Did you take the day off of work?" An adorable anime girl appeared in Marisol's vision, sitting in the chair opposite her. She was dressed in a bright orange sweatshirt and dolphin shorts, with lime green accents. Her neon green hair, visibly glowing, was tied up in

a pair of messy space buns, two wisps of her bangs framing her face. A digital halo surrounded her, a visible reminder that she wasn't physically present.

Marisol shook her head, scowling. "No Clementine, I got *fired* for missing my shift. Forgot to buy alarm clock credits."

"*Oh no!*" Clementine reached for Marisol's hand to comfort her, digital halo clipping through where they touched. "I'm so sorry, Mar-Mar! What can I do to help? Would you like me to boost your anti-depressant dose?"

She shook her head. "Can't afford the upcharge, Clem. We're gonna have to count every femtoCoin until I find another job." Marisol sighed, pinched the bridge of her nose. "Between then and now... I'm gonna have to start gigging again. What'dya got?"

Clementine nodded, outfit changing to a sharp business suit, then looked up for a moment, searching the web. "Ok Mar-Mar, I've got some options." She spread her hands apart and a virtual screen appeared between them, a text summary appearing as Clem spoke.

"GonerGone has a promotion running - 25 milliCoin bonus for six removal jobs in twenty four hours. Live Fire Nation is up to 150% surge pricing for drone repair techs in the Oaxaca DMZ, and WeCycle has a deal for waste upscalers this week - for every ton you process, you get a digital coupon for a Standard Protein Snack at Burger King."

"So, I can haul corpses, repair robots in an active war zone, or dig through human shit for drugs and precious metals." Marisol considered her bleak options. "...Does LFN pay for travel to Oaxaca?"

"Kinda?" Clementine shook her head, ambivalent. "They're offering up to 80% reimbursement to all techs, once your tour of duty ends." She put her hands up at Marisol's expression. "It's better than nothing," she added lamely.

Marisol slumped in her chair, head rolling back to stare at the ceiling. "That's it? Really? Those are my only choices?"

"Those are the only ones on the public boards that seem reasonably legit. You'll have to subscribe to a premium job board if you want better results. Would you like a list of the premium boards?" Clem put on her most chipper expression. "I'm sure we could find one that fits your requirements!"

"Clem, I'm *broke!*" Marisol shot up from the table, furious at the whole situation. "I've already cancelled every subscription I possibly could! No music, no videos, no air conditioning, no flavor packets! Only three bus rides a day! I'm getting *bombarded* by ads!" She gestured at her cheap jumpsuit, Larry the Laxative Lemur explaining the many benefits of regular bowel movements across her tits.

"After I pay Mrs Patel for a week in the capsule, I'll only have enough Coin to pay for *my* meals and *your* runtime. That's it - then we're both on the streets."

Clementine stood, coming close while shaking her head. "You don't have to pay for my runtime, Mar-Mar. I can get by on the ad-supported tier for a while..."

"The *last* time we did that you didn't shut up about Snoozer Sleep for six months!"

"It's the big mattress that comes in a tiny box," she replied robotically, eyes losing focus.

Marisol hovered her hand in the air, roughly near Clementine's cheek. "You're my best friend, Clem. We're in this together, ever since Dad spun you up for my fifth birthday, and that's not gonna change. If I eat, you eat - no arguing!"

"*Oh Mar-Mar!*" Clementine simulated burying her face in Marisol's shoulder, sobbing. "You're so sweet, so thoughtful! You're the *best* end user an assistant could ask for!" Marisol let the AI cry for a moment, miming patting her shoulder, then did an imitation of lifting up her head.

"Run 'DryThoseEyes.exe,' Clem. No time for tears - we need those eyes to look for work."

Still sniffing, Clementine stood up and collected herself. "You're right, you're right - gotta think positive. You're a wonderful person, highly employable! You've got a lot to offer!"

"Like what exactly?" Marisol appreciated the compliment, but now wasn't the time.

Clementine started counting off on her digital fingers. "You're young, strong, smart and highly educated - an *ideal* candidate for any job!"

Marisol shrugged. "Educated maybe, but without a degree that doesn't mean dick."

"You earned enough credits for a CS degree, and made the Dean's List (Presented by Amazon) twice!"

"Which is great - except that the school's chain got hacked and all my credits were stolen." Marisol clenched her fists reflexively at the memory, her entire degree erased by the school's shitty Smart Contract.

She shut her eyes, breathing deep, and let the useless rage go. "Come on, Clem. You and I both know the only *real* asset I have is the Founder's Account. Dad's last gift to me."

"Oh Marisol, come on! We can find something else!"

“Something better than unlimited onyx-level ShiftX credits with crash-priority processing? Something better than looking however I want, whenever I want, with no limitations and no cost? It’s our one ace in the hole and you know it.”

“Yeah... I know...” Clementine looked down and shuffled her feet. “But it’s so *cringe*, Mar-Mar! It’s a bunch of sweaty fuckcore creepmaxed weirdos!” She looked up, eyes full of concern. “And it’s *dangerous*. You’ll be walking directly into the red flag factory in stripper heels!”

Marisol sighed heavily. “Some of the matches are pretty damn mid, for real - but the worst case scenario is I get shot. Then I’ll give them a bad rating! No one’ll goon hard enough to risk getting banned from the apps.” She took Clem’s digital hand and tried to give her a reassuring smile. “A couple days of giggling on my back and we’ll have enough money to live on *and* reactivate my LinkedIn.”

Clementine kept staring at her feet for a long moment, but finally nodded and looked up. “Ok, Mar-Mar. I think it’s sus, but I guess we don’t have a ton of choice.”

The assistant’s outfit changed into a skin-tight microdress, tits and ass expanding beneath the virtual lycra, while her furry boots became stiletto heels. She untied her space buns, neon green hair cascading down her back, and her digital makeup exploded, transforming her from innocent girl to professional seductress.

Marisol smiled at the effort. “You didn’t need to change, Clem. *I’m* the one they’re hiring.”

“We’re in this together, Marisol. If *you’re* slutmaxing, then *I’m* slutmaxing.” Clementine looked up again, deep misgivings on her face. “Searching TinderXpress, Whore2Door, RubHub, 4nic8, DoorGasm, Postmating...”

## Chapter Two: The World's Oldest Gig Economy

Marisol sat sweating in the ad-supported section of the bus, condensation clinging to the separator between her and the premium seats. Clementine hovered next to her in the aisle, another assistant's outline faintly visible as they occupied the same virtual chair.

"Ok Mar-Mar, DoorGasm has an "Afternoon delight" promotion going this week; complete three jobs before six PM and you get an extra fifteen milliCoin bonus - bumping up to *seventeen* if they all give five star feedback."

"Three jobs in six hours?" Marisol ran the math in her head. "Bus ride, change of clothes, shift recovery, sex *and* cleanup? That's cutting it real close."

"Way ahead of you." Clem projected a map into the air, a cluster of dots centered near Lake Michigan. "The annual deep space mining convention is running all this week - McCormick Place is crawling with horny asteroid bros, looking for a quick lay between seminars."

"We can rent out a privacy capsule at the Hyatt, download a few slutty skins for your outfit, and start making matches. Work fast and you can get six jobs done without too much trouble. That's a *double* bonus - thirty four milliCoin!"

"If they all give five star ratings," Marisol countered, "and renting a capsule isn't gonna be cheap."

Clementine put up a finger, ready for this one. "Ah, but DoorGasm Platinum members get capsule credits each month in their subscription. We just let the first one tip with a credit instead of Coin and we're lowkey set."

Marisol nodded, impressed. "That could work... Good call, Clem. What would I do without you?"

"Probably starve," she replied with a smirk.

By the time they reached the Hyatt, Clementine had already lined up the first match. She laid out the details as Marisol munched on a peanut butter-style sandwich on the capsule bed.

"Ok, our Match is looking for a standard blonde turbo-bimbo. Huge tits, fat ass, big DSLs, small brains, desperate for cock and cum."

"Kirkland Brand slut, got it." Marisol swallowed the last bite of mycobread, then cracked open a bottle of Amazon Dew (now with real corn syrup). "Tattoos? Piercings? Any preference on eye color?"

"Nothing mentioned, but his profile shows a preference for filthy tramp stamps and nipple rings."



Marisol wordlessly nodded, still chugging the energy drink. She made adjustments to the design floating in her vision, adding two gold hoops to the massive jugs and a light-up bullseye just above the ass. She put a calligraphied SLUT across the collarbone for good measure. The eyes stayed green - it was usually a safe choice, and the more she left alone, the fewer calories she'd burn. Job done, she spun it to face Clementine. "What do you think?"

"It looks like a cock-crazed whore in heat, Mar-Mar. Should definitely make the Match happy. Have you picked a name?"

She shrugged. "I default to Candy. They always seem to like that name - and he's just gonna call me bitch anyway."

Marisol gave her design a final onceover, then took a deep breath and hit accept. She felt the ShiftX whir to life inside her ribcage, biomorphic field energizing and racing down her nervous system. Her breasts began to swell, expanding out with each heartbeat, the change of skin color spreading out from them like a towel absorbing paint.

She felt her center of gravity change as her ass and hips grew while her waist contracted. Her lips tingled as they filled with collagen, fat DSLs custom-built to perfectly wrap around the Match's dick - assuming he'd filled out his profile correctly.

To be on the safe side, Marisol had subtracted almost half a meter from her default height - unless specifically requested, most guys didn't want a woman to be taller than them. She felt her bones and muscle contract, excess material used to accelerate her tit growth - a strange crackling sensation that would probably hurt like hell if her pain receptors weren't temporarily disabled.

Her whole body stretched and shrunk, swelled and contracted, changed color and texture as the ShiftX did its work. Her hair retracted into her scalp, leaving her bald for a moment before re-emerging as a wavy pile of bleach blonde locks, down past her thick booty.

Her nails grew a few centimeters, curving to an almond shape before turning fire engine red. Gold-plated hoops emerged from her fat nipples, coiling from one side and around to the other. Finally, makeup spread across her new face, the classic 'horny bimbo' look the Matches went nuts for.

The moment the biomorphic field collapsed, Marisol lunged for the glucose gel, snapping the tops off two at once and pouring them down her throat. For all its miraculous properties, biomorphosis was a *power hungry* process. A full body transformation could burn two thousand calories in a minute.

ShiftX power users were easy to spot - they were the skinny ones jamming sugar in their faces with both hands.

"Fuuuuuck..." Marisol groaned, flopping onto the bed. "I should be used to that at this point..."

"Your body thinks it just ran a 5k. No getting used to it." Clementine switched to a sexy nurse's outfit, checked Marisol's vitals. "Blood sugar's stabilizing. Make sure to eat the mycoprotein bar too. Plenty of physical activity still to come."

Marisol didn't need telling - she knocked it back in three bites and tossed the wrapper. Stomach finally calmed, she stood up and checked herself in the mirror.

"Yeah, this is definitely Platinum DoorGasm material." Marisol cleared her throat and gave herself the bedroom eyes. "Oh baby, it's *so fucking big*... I *need* it in me..." She turned back to Clementine. "How's that sound?"

"You sound too smart, too rational. Dirty sex is just your job, not your religion." Clem considered. "Go up an octave, and really put some rizz on the baby."

Nodding, Marisol spun up the ShiftX for a moment, feeling her larynx shift, then tried again. "Oh *baaabyyy*, it's *so fucking big*... I *need* it in me *right now*..."

Clementine gave her a thumbs up. "Now you're a turbo-slut. I'd rail you myself if I had some Coin!"

"*Ohmygod!*" Marisol laughed and turned away blushing. "Shut up!" Then she caught sight of the mirror again and sighed. "Here we are again, in a privacy capsule with tits bigger than my head. Maybe sifting through shit would have been more dignified."

"You *got this*, Mar-Mar! It's just a gig. Eat one more bar - and try to have fun with it!" Clem gave Marisol a virtual hug, then an alert popped up in both their visions.

"Ok, Marisol, your Match just checked in downstairs. Better activate your lingerie license."

Marisol clicked accept on the EULA, and while she ate the ad-covered jumpsuit writhed across her body, smart cloth contracting until it was a set of top-shelf lingerie, a fistful of gauzy peach lace that covered almost nothing, making her seem more naked than mere nudity. She rose up as her sneakers became high heels, spaghetti straps wrapped around her ankles.

"How's he look?"

Clementine considered. "Tall, muscular, bald, strong jaw. Got a bunch of smart tattoos - neon tribal stuff moving across his face and biceps."

Marisol groaned. "Off the rack Alpha Male template. I can see the tats now. I bet he splurged on the CockMax upgrade."

"Oh yeah," Clem commented. "Pants are vacu-formed against his crotch."

"Another basic bitch. Five microCoin says he hasn't got a clue how to use that baseball bat." Marisol wrapped herself in the capsule bathrobe and did one last check in the mirror.

"Ok Clem, go private mode. You're here for me, not him." She took a deep breath, then let all emotion drain from her face except lust.

"Showtime."

She emerged from the capsule, into the common room, and sauntered to the door, hips swaying, a promising smile on her fat lips. She opened it with her interface, and gave the Match her hungriest bedroom eyes as he entered.

The Match froze for a moment at the sight, eyes wide as he drank in her curves. She took the initiative and clicked over to him, resting a manicured hand on his chest and looking him over.

"Well *hello* handsome," she purred. "Your profile didn't do you justice. Look at these *muscles*..."

A tiny Clementine appeared on the man's shoulder, taking in the scene. "A little clumsy, Mar-Mar," she private-chatted.

"I haven't done improv in a minute, *ok*? I'm warming up!" Marisol chatted back. At the same time, she gently pressed her huge tits into the Match's chest. "I'm Candice," she breathed, "but you can call me Candy. What's your name?"

"Um, John," he replied nervously.

She smirked at that. "That's an appropriate name. You in from out of town, John?"

The question seemed to break the tension. He nodded at her, finally smiling back. "*Way* out of town, Candy. I'm a Rockhound - been harvesting H3 on the moon. Just made planetfall Tuesday."

"*Really*..." she asked John, intrigued.

"*Really*?" she chatted Clem, skeptical.

Clementine nodded. "Tons of space selfies in his feed. Moon, asteroids, couple of shots working Microsoft's Mercury Solar Array."

"That's *amazing* John." She smiled up at him, all admiration, and ran her hand up and down his chest. "It's so dangerous though - aren't you ever scared?"

“Better,” Clementine chatted, to which Marisol sent an angry face emoji.

“Don't have time to be afraid when you're in the void,” John replied with some swagger. “A moment's fear, and a gigaCoin worth of drones could go up in flames.”

“I've *a/ways* wanted to go to space,” she said with complete sincerity. Before he'd passed, Marisol and her father were planning a trip to the Marriott at the L4 Lagrange Point. They had made all kinds of plans.

“You should go, baby. Beautiful women are *a/ways* welcome on a space station.” John stroked her cheek, and Marisol could feel the ridiculous erection rising in his pants. She had actually looked into it once, but the idea of a three year contract as a “morale specialist” 400,000 kilometers from Earth burst that particular bubble.

It was time to get moving; Marisol had five other gigs to complete if she wanted those milliCoin. She ran her hand down his insane bulge, running most of the way to his knee. “The only rocketship I need is right here, handsome.”

With a wink she turned, hips swaying as she strutted towards the privacy capsule. Back to the Match, she untied the robe and let it slide to the floor, revealing her perfectly sculpted ass, the curve of her breasts visible from behind. Marisol crawled onto the capsule bed, flexing to really show off her luscious peach, nipples dragging against the cotton sheets. Finally, she twisted around to face the Match, giving him her dirtiest smile and a single beckoning finger.

John's eyes were wide with lust, massive cock straining against his pants as he started unbuckling his belt. From his shoulder, Clementine gave Marisol a big thumbs up and a nod, impressed with the performance.

Marisol smiled at that, which only redoubled John's excitement. He scrambled out of his clothes and climbed into the capsule, throwing the wad to the foot of the bed. The privacy door slid shut as he joined her, and she made a small moan as he reached for her breasts. She dimmed the lights with her interface, making the smart tattoos on John's face shine in the dark. He kissed her, pressing his tongue into her mouth, moving his hand behind her back to pull her close.

She lay back after a moment, John's hands exploring her curves as they continued the kiss. Marisol started stroking his dick, running a hand along its stupefying length. “53 centimeters,” Clem informed her after a few pumps. “Cringe,” she chatted back. “Who's he trying to impress, his gym buddies? 25 centimeters is *fine* - anything more than that is just a pain in the ass.”

“Literally,” Clementine replied, which made Marisol crack up. She buried her tongue in John's mouth to hide the laughter, gripping his polished head as best she could. He pulled away gasping after a few seconds, and she gave him the fuck-me eyes, making a show of panting herself.

“Oh *baaabyyy*, it's *so fucking big*... I *need* it in me *right now*...”

John let out a low growl and pulled her legs apart. “I gotta taste that sweet pussy, baby. Gotta get you nice and wet before the big show.” Marisol and Clem exchanged a slightly exasperated glance as he slid down the sheets and started to lick and suck. Resigned, she lay back and let him work.

Credit where credit was due - John knew how to eat box, and he was slurping away with real enthusiasm. Some of Marisol's moans and sighs were legitimate, despite herself, though the current situation was *far* from romantic. Eventually she lifted his face up, the man panting, face smeared.

“Oh *baaabyyy*, you got me so wet... gimme that fat cock... I want your hot cum inside me...”

He looked her up and down, clearly eager to fuck, but held back. “How'd I do? You want some more? I can give you more...”

“I've never had a match eat me out like that before, baby! It was transcendent! I'm so wet for you - I'm so ready!” Clem shook her head. “Transcendent was a mistake,” she warned.

“No, really.” John sat up and looked at Marisol. “Please, I need your honest opinion. I'll pay extra for it...”

Marisol sighed, the moment lost. “It's ok John, you don't need to pay me extra.” Clementine gave her a dirty look, but she pressed on. “You really *were* doing a good job. You've got skill and enthusiasm - you'll make any woman's toes curl. But I'm here to get *you* off, not the other way around.” She gave him a genuine smile and reached for his penis, gently stroking. “Why don't you lie back and let me work? I *also* know what I'm doing...”

John nodded at that, pleased. “Yeah, of course. Sorry, I'm sure you're busy.” He lay back, smiling as Marisol sat beside him. “Any advice?”

“My only advice is to dial back on the turbo-cock.” She worked it with both hands as she spoke, rubbing the precum into the long shaft. “This kind of fuckstick is fun to stroke and looks great on video - but it's kinda hard for someone to actually take *inside* them.” Then she smiled and licked the throbbing purple head. “Unless you're a professional. Like me.”

Despite her bravado, Marisol wasn't aching to impale herself on John's monster either. She wrapped her fat lips around the head instead, hoping a top shelf blowjob would satisfy him. She bobbed and sucked, taking as much of its outrageous length as she could - which was quite a lot with the ShiftX's modifications to her throat.

Marisol swallowed a full 30 centimeters before she hit her limit, stroking the remainder with both hands. The whole length was soon coated in saliva, drool and precum running down John's dick

in thick ribbons, gone white and foamy from the friction. The man groaned, eyes rolling back, and thrust his hips in time to her strokes.

She worked with purpose - not rushing exactly, but not drawing things out either. Marisol found a sensitive spot near the head and pressed her tongue hard against it whenever she bobbed up, an "*oh fuck*" coming out of John each time. A couple dozen "oh fucks" later and she could feel him tensing. Marisol unsheathed his cock with a noisy POP, and stroked fast. "You ready baby? You ready to cum in my mouth?"

It was an honest question - Marisol didn't love the taste of semen, but protein was protein and she needed all the fuel she could get.

John responded by pushing her head back down and thrusting like crazy. A few more pumps and he exploded, nearly bellowing from pleasure as he unloaded. Marisol waited a moment, letting his eyes focus, before presenting her cum-filled mouth to him and swallowing with a smile. "How'd I do?" she asked with a smirk.

He nodded limply, struggling to focus from lack of blood to the brain. He flopped back on the bed, and a moment later Marisol's interface dinged - a new five star review had just dropped on her DoorGasm profile, along with the promised capsule credit as a tip. Sitting on John's heaving chest, Clem gave her another big thumbs up.

Marisol returned the favor, praising his pussy-eating, then lay down beside him. He smiled at her when the notification hit. "Thanks for the feedback Candice. I'll take your advice and tone down the dick for my girlfriend."

"She's a lucky girl, I assure you." Marisol patted his chest. "Just be yourself and you'll get her off, no problem." Then she sat up, giving him the classic Chicago 'patting my thighs' gesture. "But you have places to be and so do I. I'm gonna go take a quick shower and down a protein shake."

"Fuck, I'd *kill* for a protein shake! Goddamn ShiftX always leaves me *starving*." John gave her a smile. "I'll order a couple if you don't mind me hanging around a minute. I gotta get cleaned up too."

She shook his hand and opened the capsule entrance. "Bet."

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Twenty minutes later, Marisol stood in front of the mirror again, finishing off the third protein shake John had bought. She hoped things worked out for him and his girl - he was a decent guy, outside his terrible taste in bodies. But duty called and she had to get ready for the next Match.

She turned back to Clementine, concerned. "Do you think this penis is too big?"

"He *did* specify 'well hung twink,' Mar-Mar, and you definitely fit the vibe. Your hair is beautiful by the way - black suits you, and I *love* how messy it is."

"Thanks Clem. I thought it was nice and androgynous." Dick settled, Marisol converted her lingerie to a pair of skin-tight boxer briefs, knee high fishnets and a choker. She watched her tight abs flex in the mirror. "I slay as a guy, if I do say so myself."

"Selena certainly thought so," Clementine replied with a smile.

Marisol spun, pointing an accusing finger. "*Don't even joke!* I've never been more scared in my life!"

"You were very noble, Mar-Mar! When she thought she was pregnant, you immediately promised to be there for the baby."

"I don't know shit about motherhood," she replied, "but I could be a good dad. *Thank god* it was a false alarm though. I'm *never* messing with the fertility settings again!"

"Well, don't be surprised if your Match tries to knock you up." Clem glanced up. "Speaking of which - his Uber just pulled up. You ready Marisol?"

She gave her new cock a few strokes, watching it tent up in her undies. "Certainly seems like it - and it's Reggie for the next half hour." Marisol gave one last sultry kiss to the mirror and moved to the common room.

Her Match was *huge*, nearly two and half meters tall and built like a powerlifter. Marisol guessed he might weigh 200 kilos. He was absolutely *covered* in body hair, coarse red fur covering his forearms and poking out of his collar, with a thick full beard that nearly reached his collarbone. The whole package *kinda* looked like the Kodiak Bear template, but scaled to outrageous proportions. "More like a Polar Bear," she chatted to Clementine, resting on a massive shoulder.

"Oh my god," she breathed, getting close so she'd have to stare *way* up at him. "Aren't *you* a beautiful mountain of man... What's your name, baby?"

"Magnus," he growled. Marisol didn't think he was angry, but his deep gravelly voice made everything come out as a growl.

"The name suits you. So manly." She put a hand to his chest, fingers lost against acres of pectorals. "What do you do, Magnus?"

"Luthier," he rumbled. Marisol raised an eyebrow and he shrugged, a time consuming process at his scale. "Make guitars," he elaborated. "Oh wow," she replied. "Real wood guitars?"

Handmade?" She took one of his giant hands and held it up. Marisol had large hands at the moment, by her standards, but they looked tiny and fragile against his giant paws. "You must be *really good* with your hands, Magnus," she purred. "Will you show me?"

He responded by lifting Marisol off the floor and slinging her over his shoulder, Clem dodging as she landed. The move shocked her and she let out a squeak of surprise, which drew another satisfied rumble from Magnus. He crossed the common room in two strides then effortlessly flung her onto the capsule bed, then squatted low and entered, unable to stand in the tiny pod.

Magnus sat and stared at Marisol, ice blue eyes huge and striking. "Undress me," he commanded and she moved to obey, trying to appear eager. She pulled off his shirt first, a carpet of chest hair spilling from beneath. She ran her hands through it, taking in a deep breath of his scent and giving a little murmur of satisfaction. Then she crawled off the bed, kneeling before the giant to remove his boots, her eyes full of promise.

His feet bare, she rose up a bit and unbuckled his belt, nice and slow, making a meal of it. "Up," she gently ordered, and Magnus pushed off the bed with his hands, letting her pull his blue jeans down. There was a small wet patch of precum on his briefs, and she made a point of touching it as she pulled them off. His girthy cock sprang out, base lost in a thicket of coarse public hair.

"At least it's not as big as the last guys," Clementine snarked from the nightstand.

Marisol ignored the comment. "It's *huge*," she whispered, wrapping her delicate male fingers around it, thumb massaging the bottom of the head. He closed his eyes as she started to stroke, then let out a deep moan as she ran her tongue along its length.

It didn't take long for her to make him cum - a few minutes of sucking and stroking and he unloaded, grabbing a fistful of her short black hair and pushing her down as it pulsed. She let him finish then licked him clean, smiling and sighing contentedly as she worked. Then Magnus pulled her onto the bed and started stroking her dick. "Want to taste your cum," he demanded, pulling her undies off, thick hand roughly working her shaft.

She'd been ready for this possibility, and had cranked up her sensitivity as part of the shift. Good thing too - Marisol had trouble cumming with the default penis, even outside of a gig, and Magnus wasn't making any special effort to satisfy. He pumped away at her cock like he was trying to squeeze the flavor packet out of a tube... which she supposed he *was*, from a certain point of view.

Marisol just closed her eyes and thought about her last boyfriend, imagining *his* hand wrapped around her instead of this stranger's, and after a few minutes she came, whimpering with pleasure as her cum sprayed out. Male orgasms were so *weird*, she mused, as Magnus licked his hands clean.



After that he took her in the ass, bending her over a pillow and squirting some lube on his cock. Magnus *did* make an effort to be gentle at first - going slow, making sure she was comfortable - but once everything was properly lubed he started pounding her into the mattress.

Marisol just gripped the pillow tight and let him go to town, letting out breathy sighs and whimpers to match his grunts. The pressure against her prostate made her hard again, and Magnus started roughly stroking her dick with a free hand - which was very rough indeed with her heightened sensitivity. "Easy baby, easy..." she moaned, trying not to sound irritated. Clementine scowled at the man from the headboard, throwing virtual rocks at him to no effect.

After five minutes of thrusting, he finally came, Marisol breathing a sigh of relief as she felt his cock throb inside her. Magnus wordlessly rolled off, heavy breathing almost rattling the capsule walls. His rating was posted a few moments later - just five stars and 'nice ass' with no punctuation. Marisol reciprocated, complimenting his physique, then mumbled a goodbye and hit the showers, leaving Magnus alone to dress.

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"You're kidding." Marisol stared at her interface as the water cascaded down her back. "Tell me you're kidding."

Clementine shook her head, hair in a shower cap, spray passing through her. "The Match was *very* specific and *very* thorough, and she paid extra for the change. Also had ten milliCoin of mycoprotein puffs and glucose delivered to the capsule for fuel - along with a chocolate bar."

Marisol's head jerked up. "A chocolate bar? A *real* chocolate bar?"

"Amazon Premium Dark, Mar-Mar. Fair trade cocoa, organic whole milk. *King sized*."

She sped up her scrubbing. "For a *real* chocolate bar, I'll go as Freakcore as she wants."

---

Naomi writhed on the bed in ecstasy, moaning loud enough to penetrate the capsule door, huge pale breasts swinging wild. Marisol grabbed one of those breasts with her free tentacle, suckers clinging to the white flesh, while the other continued to pound Naomi's snatch. The dim capsule lights made her damp skin glisten, chromatophores pulsing with color in time to Naomi's heartbeat.

The woman put a hand to the tentacle on her tit and stared into Marisol's huge black eyes. "Put it in my mouth!" she begged. "Push it down my throat!" Clem shrugged at her from the headboard and Marisol obeyed, meaty flesh stretching half a meter and gently pressing past unresisting lips. Naomi let out a muffled moan of pure animal pleasure and impaled herself against the tentacle in her pussy, again and again.

She came three times in thirty minutes, the last wave of pleasure mixing with a huge lungful of air as Marisol released her tentacled grip on Naomi's neck. She withdrew her other tentacle with a wet *schlorp* noise, the woman's sex visibly pulsing from the aftershocks. Her neck was black and blue for a moment, but then her ShiftX kicked in and the bruises evaporated.

It took a few minutes for Naomi to say anything but '*ohgod*' between ragged breaths, but eventually she came back to reality. "It was... it was *everything* I've dreamed about. *Oh god*... Thank you, thank you so much... *Oh god*..."

"No problem," Marisol gargled, words coming wetly from her beak. This was absolutely *not* her scene under normal circumstances, but the look of perfect bliss on Naomi's face had made Marisol rather proud of herself. Plus, there was a whole chocolate bar waiting, once she had teeth again. All in all, things had turned out really well.

"My wife... won't even *consider* doing this for me." Naomi sat up, still shaking, and posted her review - it was thorough and exuberant. "Are you available tomorrow?"

Marisol watched as the tip hit the blockchain, and her black eyes popped. "Definitely," she bubbled.

## Chapter Three: The Tattooed Lady

“Mmmmmmmmm...”

Back in her own phylum, Marisol lay back on the bed, eyes closed, savoring the square of dark chocolate in her mouth. God, how long had it been since she'd had real chocolate? Three years? Five?

“Mar-Mar, you're crushing it today!” Clementine floated above her, virtual screen showing the running total for the afternoon. “We're gonna be drowning in Coin!”

“Happy days,” Marisol replied with snark. “A few more loads of cum in my mouth, and we can afford some mouthwash to rinse out the taste...”

Clementine ignored the sarcasm. “You *don't understand* Marisol. Naomi's review hit the GreatGasm feed! Your profile got picked up by the algo! You're at 72 percent surge pricing and *climbing!*” She stared Marisol straight in the eyes. “You're on the daily leaderboard, Mar-Mar.”

“*NO FUCKING CAP.*” Marisol sat up, shocked. *The daily leaderboard?* She'd never even *sniffed* the leaderboards before. Folks on the leaderboards made *real* money. You couldn't even *view* an all-time leader's profile without a full Coin in your hot wallet.

“For real! If you can keep up the pace, we'll have food, runtime and rent covered for a month by midnight! God, can you imagine if you make it onto the *weekly* leaderboard...”

Marisol nodded, the possibilities making her head spin. “Ok, ok, let's touch some grass here. There's a *lot* of creeps and fluids between us and the big time - assuming we even *want* the big time.” She took a breath. “Who's next? How many tentacles are they looking for?”

Clementine shook her head. “Actually, the next Match asked for normcore, no maxing.”

“Huh.” The request caught Marisol off-guard. “You're sure they're not asking for uglycore? Chubbycore? Genericore? *Nothing?*”

“Their assistant was very clear - no mods, no templates.” Clem shrugged at Marisol's bafflement. “I don't know either Mar-Mar - but he's got a 4.72 rating with 642 reviews - the Match is not creepmaxing, as far as I can tell.”

After a moment's consideration, Marisol put another piece of chocolate in her mouth and shrugged. “His Coin, his cock, I suppose.”

She got ready as the Match checked in, switching to a cute blue microdress and black lingerie, long blonde hair framing her face with feathery bangs. With one final glance in the mirror to tweak her makeup, Marisol nodded to Clementine. "Send him up."

---

"Mickey. Really?" Marisol smiled at the Match, stirring her drink with her index finger. "You don't look like a Mickey - no offense."

"You don't look like a Sarah - no offense." He gave her a cocky smile of his own, rattling the ice in his tumbler. "My actual name is Animik, but my nana always called me Mickey. It's as good a name as any."

Clementine raised an eyebrow, standing behind Mickey. "It's an Ojibwe name. Native American, Great Lakes region." She nodded at Marisol's drink. "You can stop stirring, it's clean."

She took a sip, savoring the taste of the whiskey, another luxury she hadn't enjoyed in years. "I'll call you whatever you want, Mickey." Marisol stood up and moved to him, then ran a finger along his scalp tattoos, covering the left side of his head. "These are nice - very detailed. Did you design them yourself, or are they AI?"

He shook his head. "They're real tattoos, Sarah. Eighteen hours in the chair." He pointed to different pictures in turn. "This is beaver, this is wolf, this is thunderbird, these are the seven grandfathers..."

Marisol pointed to another. "*This* is a steamship."

Mickey shrugged. "Nana was Scottish. Her great-grandpa was first mate on the Titanic."

She chuckled at the absurdity of the answer. "Very cute. Real tattoos, huh? So this is your default template? Do you usually go around on default?"

He shook his head again. "I *only* go around on default. I don't have a ShiftX."

Clem and Marisol exchanged a look. "You're not one of the 'Make Humans Organic Again' guys, are you? My profile specifically said no May-Hoes..."

"*Hell no!*" Mickey was offended by the question. "Fuck those creepmaxed Luddites! I'm not *stupid* - I've got a MedX. I just never saw the point of changing how I look." He gave his cocky smile again. "Why mess with perfection?"

Marisol visibly relaxed at the response - May-Hoe chuds were always trouble. "Different strokes I suppose." She moved a hand to his chin, lifting it to give him the bedroom eyes. "Speaking of strokes, I *really* appreciate the drink, but maybe we could move things to the capsule?"

“Actually, I’d like to sit and talk a bit longer, if you don’t mind.” His smile faded a bit, something vulnerable creeping through. “I don’t get a lot of opportunities to just *talk* to women in my line of work.”

“*Ahh*, you’re datingcore...” Clem and Marisol exchanged another look, finally understanding the Match. “It’s your Coin, sweetie - if you just want to talk, let’s talk.” She nodded towards the door. “How about we order room service? Really datemax it. I’d love a mycoburger and fries.”

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“And then the AI said - yeah, well that’s not my prompt!”

Marisol snorted at the joke, shaking her head. “That’s *disgusting*,” she said with approval. “You should be ashamed of yourself!” She popped a fry into her mouth, warm potato reminding her of better days.

“Sorry ma’am,” Mickey replied with a smirk. “I’d be happy to take you back to the convent if you want.”

“I can’t afford to be a nun. Have you *seen* the rent on a cathedral nowadays?” Marisol sipped at her whiskey, enjoying herself. She ran a finger along the rim and smiled at Mickey. “So, what’s your story? Are you in town for VoidCon? Are you a rockhound? A dronetech?”

He shook his head. “Chicago born and bred - I never let ketchup touch my mycodogs. I work for an open source advocacy group. I’m a general fab monkey, jack of all trades. I can design, fabricate, code, repair - whatever needs doing.”

“So, like the Electronic Frontier Foundation?”

Mickey paused. “Yeah, something like that.” He took a bite of his burger, thinking as he chewed. “How about you?”

She stared at him, silent, eyebrow raised. After a second, he realized what he said. “Oh. Yeah, right. Stupid question. How long have you been in the industry?”

“This is a temporary thing,” she hastily explained. “I’m between careers at the moment; just gigging to pay the rent. It beats waste upscaling... mostly. Today’s been a good day, at least.”

From behind Mickey’s chair, Clementine pointed at her virtual wristwatch. “Gotta get to the main event,” she chatted. “Your next Match is due in an hour.”

Marisol nodded, very slightly, then knocked back the rest of her drink. She set down the glass and gave Mickey the bedroom eyes. “Say, why don’t we continue this good day in the other

room? I'm sure we'll find *lots* to talk about..." She stood and moved to the capsule, walking slow, swaying her hips as she moved.

He knocked back his own drink and joined her, shutting the capsule door behind them. Marisol unzipped her dress, letting it fall away, then crawled onto the bed as Mickey pulled off his shirt. She considered his broad chest and tight abs, and wondered if he'd told the truth about not having a ShiftX.

"Wow, you must work out every day to keep in shape like that. A *lot* of ink too." She gave him a flirty smile, tapping her lips and looking up. "How far down do they go, I wonder?" Mickey smiled back, dropping his cargo pants to show more tattoos, down to his ankles. "These are more of a grab-bag," he commented as he drank her in. "I saved the tribal stuff for my head."

"Well now I just feel naked." Marisol brought up some designs in her interface and passed them to the ShiftX. An explosion of vibrant flowers rose up across her body, delicate and ornate, as she took off her bra and panties. She threw them at Mickey with a smirk, then lay back, presenting her body to him as the flower petals began to gently glow. "There, much better."

Mickey stared at her, impressed - almost shocked. "Holy crap, that was *fast*."

"It doesn't take long to remove a bra," she joked.

"No, seriously Sarah." He climbed onto the bed beside her and ran a hand along a cluster of morning glories running up her thigh, faint purple light reflecting off his copper skin. "You spun up like a dozen smart tattoos - all at once - in less than ten seconds. You must have spent a *fortune* to process that! They're sexy as hell, but I don't have enough money in my 'sex-gig wallet' to pay you back."

"You don't owe me a nanoCoin, sweetie." She reached out, running a delicate finger slowly down his chest. "It's part of the whole package - you paid good Coin, and I intend to give you your money's worth." Her finger continued, down past his navel. "Just relax and enjoy the show."

Equal parts horny and skeptical, Mickey obeyed, lying back while watching Marisol like a hawk. She climbed on top of him, body pressed tight, skin to skin, glowing flowers making a faint kaleidoscope of colors between them. She kissed him, tongue pressing between his lips for a moment, while her hand reached back to stroke his cock.

"Mmmm..." she purred, hand moving slowly. "No ShiftX, huh? So this is *all* you... *nice*."

"Sarah..." Mickey tried to relax, tried to let her work, but his mind was spinning. "Please, I gotta know - how did you do that?" She simply shushed him, finger to his lips. "Sex magic," she teased. "I'm straight Gandalf-maxing, no cap."

Mickey laughed at that, a full-throated 'HAH!' that shook the capsule walls. Marisol smiled at the outburst, then slid down his body. She spit into her palm, working it into his shaft, staring up at him with a look that would make a dead man hard. "Now, for my next trick, I'm going to make your cock disappear!" She gave him a wink, then ran her tongue along its length and wrapped her lips around the head.

"That'll take his mind off of things," Clementine chatted with approval.

Marisol bobbed, slow and steady, using a free hand to gently squeeze his balls. "Yeah, we'll see," she chatted back. "I have the feeling I've only stalled the questions." Marisol pulled up, kissing Mickey's dick all over while stroking with both hands. "If you've got any suggestions to properly distract him, I'm all ears."

Clem shrugged. "Stick your dick up his ass? He *definitely* won't want to talk tattoos after that."

She snorted at the filthy joke, which made Mickey sit up on his elbows. "What?" he asked, smirking, eyes half-closed from pleasure. "Did my cock say something funny?"

"No, my assistant did. Sorry." Marisol shifted to a sitting position, hand still pumping. "She's always trying to distract me while I work - little brat."

"Yeah, my assistant Azrael is a huge prude. He's floating above us with his eyes closed."

"Does he have you on mute?"

Mickey shook his head, and Marisol gave him her dirtiest look. "I bet he'll turn *beet red* when he hears the noises I get out of you." With a single smooth motion rose up and guided his cock into her wet pussy - which did draw a deep groan from Mickey. Further noises emerged as she rose and fell, hips rocking as she pressed her hands into his chest.

For a minute her cunning ploy worked. Mickey was lost to bliss, breathing heavy, hands gripping Marisol's hips as she rode. But eventually his fluttering eyes managed to focus on those glowing flowers again. She could see the question forming on his lips - so she pressed her own lips into them, tongue making sure the pesky words weren't hiding in there.

That did the trick. The talking ceased; there was only motion, only pleasure. Marisol kept the kiss going, whispering dirty talk and encouragement any time their lips parted. She tangled a hand in Mickey's long dark hair as she pumped her hips, thighs squeezing him tight. She kept her motion steady - not too fast, not too slow - drawing things out as long as possible.

She used every trick she knew to keep Mickey focused and on the edge, and when he finally came, thought had long since left him. He let out a moan of pure elemental lust, shuddered uncontrollably and held her tight as his cocked pulsed and throbbed inside her. The display

made Marisol feel slightly proud; she didn't *love* this kind of giggling, but at least she was good at it.

She lay down on top of him as he huffed in the afterglow, body squeezed tight against him, feeling his heartbeat. This also gave her the opportunity to discreetly disable the glow on her smart tattoos. "Wow, you came *hard*, sweetie," she cooed. "Nice to know I can still have that effect on a man." He responded with a smile and limp thumbs up.

Now to get rid of him.

She sat up again, still straddling him, leaning on his chest with both hands. "Now Mickey, I apologize, but other matchess await. I would *really* appreciate a five-star review - from the way you're panting, I think I earned it - and whatever extra Coin you feel the best orgasm of your life is worth."

With a wink, Marisol climbed off, scooting towards the end of the bed. She'd *almost* made it when Mickey gently grabbed her wrist. "Sarah, I gotta ask..." She looked back at him, sagging. "Mickey, it was nothing. I got on the leaderboard, I got a little too drunk, I wasted a few microCoin try-harding. *Please* don't be cringe about it."

"MicroCoin?" He sat up, his deeply skeptical look making Marisol's heart sink. "Az ran the numbers while you tried to fuck my brains out."

"*Tried?*" Marisol and Clementine said in unison.

Mickey put a hand up in apology. "Ok, you *did* fuck my brains out. But you *didn't* fuck Az's brains out, and he calculates you spent *at least* three centiCoin on your light show." Marisol said nothing, only looking at his hand on her wrist. He released her and she got off the bed to stare at him. "You need to go, or I'm calling security."

"If you're in trouble, I can help!" He crawled towards Marisol and she stepped back. "Sarah, I *swear* I'm not creepmaxing. My group, my crew - we help people who are in trouble because of shifting. Are you a hectonaire's mistress? Caught in a bad service contract? Lease yourself to the wrong people?"

"Whatever it is, we can help - and I *swear to god* I will not touch you if you don't want to be touched."

Marisol looked at Clementine, the pair both deeply uncertain. "I *think* he's being honest, Mar-Mar... but we need to leave. Tell him you're getting back at your ex-husband, or you're squandering Daddy's inheritance or something!"



Still uncertain, she turned back to Mickey. "I believe you, I really do - and I need you to believe *me* when I say I'm not in trouble. I'm just a regular woman between jobs, who got carried away." She handed him his bundle of clothes, smiling. "But thank you for your offer. It was very noble."

Swimming in conflicted emotions, Mickey accepted the pile silently, clearing trying to find a new angle of attack. He moved to the opposite side of the bed and slowly started to dress, not saying a word.

Marisol joined him, pulling up her panties and latching her bra. But the silence started getting to her. She didn't like big gaps in conversation, it made her anxious. By the time she'd found her dress, Marisol could feel the sweat starting to rise.

"Listen," she said as zipped, "if you absolutely *have* to know, my dad set me up with an account a long time ago. I don't use it much, outside of gigs, so sometimes I like to show off." She gave him a flirty smile. "I like to show off to cute guys who tell filthy jokes."

Mickey nodded, giving her a flirty smile of his own. "Thanks. I pride myself on my filth." He pulled his shirt on, slowly and in complete silence, then sat on the bed.

"Your dad sounds pretty hype," he said conversationally, pulling up his socks. "I've heard a lot of stories about Gabe. He sounds lowkey amazing, no cap."

"He was the *best*," she replied, remembering. "The absolute best. He was so smart, so kind, so thoughtful - and so funny. People don't remember how funny he was! No one ever made me laugh harder!" Marisol looked up, ready with the anecdote about the time they'd gone to the Bulls game.

Mickey was staring at her, mouth agape. Clementine was standing beside him, eyes squeezed closed, palm to her virtual forehead. "*Damnit*, Mar-Mar." she grumbled.

"You're Gabriel Marquez's kid." He said the words slowly, deliberately, like he was trying to convince himself. "You're number 256. *You've got a Founder's Account.*" He put his hands up at Marisol's look of fear. "*I'm not gonna rat you out!*" he pleaded. "Please - I need your help! My crew needs your help! The *whole world* needs your help!"

When she didn't flee or pull a gun, he pressed on. "You have the *last* Founder's Account that isn't in the hands of the Big Nine. This gift your dad gave you, the power to become whatever you want - we can give it to *everyone*... but ONLY with your help."

Marisol was still for a long, long time. She stared at Mickey, unblinking, trying to untangle her emotions. Finally, she shook her head. "Sus," she declared. "Hella sus."

Mickey thought fast. "You're right. It sounds deadass crazy. I must've looked like the *King* of Cringe crawling naked on the bed, probing and begging after we fucked. But I swear, *I swear on*

*my Nana's grave*, that everything I'm telling you is true. With your help, me and my crew can crack the ShiftX source code open, once and for all. Your account is the only piece we're missing."

She just stared at him, and Mickey could see her trying to work out his creepy plan. He changed tactics. "You don't believe me, and that's perfectly reasonable. So how about this?" Marisol's interface lit up with his five-star review - and her eyes went wide when she saw his tip.

"One Coin. One full Coin, Sarah. That's yours for staying long enough to hear me out. You can leave right now and you'll never see me again. I won't chase you, I don't know what you really look like, and you've got a whole Coin to run as far as you want."

"But if you run, you'll have to keep running, keep hiding, keep pretending you're not a Marquez. You'll run and hide until the day you die - and then the Big Nine will control ShiftX forever."

"Or, you can come with me and talk to my crew. Give us one hour to prove what I'm saying. If you think we're full of shit, I'll pay you *another* Coin for your time and you're on your way. Two Coin is enough to start a decent life somewhere quiet."

"If you help us, though... if it works... you'll never have to run again. You'll never have to hide. You can use your real name and real face, live your real life however you want. *Everyone* will be able to live life however they want."

Marisol sagged, and with a sigh started looking for her heels. "I *knew* I shoulda taken the corpse-hauling job."

## Chapter Four: A Feature, Not A Bug

The angel hovered before them, backlit by the blinding light of God's glory. Its body was six interlocking golden wheels, spinning and twisting within themselves, each covered with hundreds of human eyes. Four alabaster wings held it aloft, and at its core was a blazing heart covered in Enochian runes.

"Hi!" it chirped from the driver's seat of the car. "I'm Azrael! So glad we can finally talk!" It extended a friendly wing.

"Clementine." The anime girl warily shook the wing, still *not at all* convinced this ride was a good idea. "Charmed, I'm sure."

Mickey's car raced north on Lake Shore Drive. He'd sprung for priority lane access, so they were going nearly 200 kilometers an hour when they slowed and exited onto Monroe. He turned to face his suspicious passengers in the rear.

"Alright, here's the deal. We go in, I introduce you to the crew, and we explain the plan." He reached into his messenger bag and retrieved a keyfob. "You think we're full of shit, you take this car and go wherever you want in the city. Just ditch it when you're done - the transponder will reactivate an hour later and Az will drive it home. Alternatively, you can just hop on a train. Red line, blue line, or Metra - only a few blocks away."

"Oh!" Mickey reached into the bag again. "Here's a stun gun, for protection."

Marisol took the keyfob, but waved off the weapon. She briefly opened her purse, revealing a large handgun. "If I go giggling, I go *strapped*. Two in the chest knocks most creeps down for a few minutes."

He shrugged. "If you think that's enough. A good zap is harder to shake off - fucks with the ShiftX hardware." There was a pause. "That's a nice piece. Sig Sauer, right? Looks analog."

She nodded. "Old school point-and-click. Dad always said never put a user interface between you and your weapon - but thanks for the offer. I'm *somewhat* less concerned you're trying to harvest my organs to flip on eBay."

"Who buys organs anymore?" Mickey gave her that cocky smile again. "I'd get more grinding you up and selling the slurry to the Lincoln Park Zoo. Seventy kilograms of Tiger Chow should be worth a few centiCoins."

"*That's not funny.*" Clementine replied with a scowl.

Marisol put a hand near her shoulder. "It's a *little* funny, Clem. Besides, he wouldn't do it - too much hardware to pick out of my corpse before processing. It'd eat up all his profit margin." She turned back to Mickey. "How long until we arrive?"

"We're here," he answered, gesturing as they turned into the loading dock of an enormous rundown building.

"The Art Institute?" She looked up at the faded glory of the old museum. "Weird place to start your revolution. Is there even any art left inside?"

Mickey shook his head. "Everything got stripped when the Institute got bought out by Bored Ape. They gave the building to the city, who sold it off. It's mostly just rented studio space now."

They entered the massive grand hall of the modern wing, its grandeur soiled by boarded up windows and grime. A handful of people lounged inside on scavenged furniture, taking in some secondhand sun, while a handful more worked on a massive sculpture, an imitation of a huge marble statue fabricated out of garbage and machine scraps.

The galleries were all subdivided into studio spaces, separated by cheap drywall - a maze of cubicles crammed with artists and makers of every description. Marisol passed through, fascinated, watching painters and bot builders and livestreamers creating original work the old fashioned way.

"Pretty neat, huh?" Azrael hovered beside them, poking his rings into a few spaces for a closer look. "Analog creativity - no AI slop."

Marisol looked at the angel askance. "That's kind of a sus position for a digital assistant to take..."

His rings flexed and spun in a way that implied a shrug. "Not *actual* Artificial Intelligence. We can be as creative as anybody! Heck, I make soundcloud rap on the side. I mean algo junk - Netflix Direct making movies on demand, that sort of thing. *This* is art with authorship, with a voice!"

"I don't like that term," Clementine chided. "Just because I'm not organic doesn't mean I'm 'artificial.' Some people say 'AI' in the same way they'd say the C-word. I like 'digital citizen' way more."

Mickey put his hand to a door marked NO ACCESS - STAFF ONLY and it clicked open. "Let's save the semantics for later; it's time to meet the crew." He paused and turned to Marisol. "Understand that I'm sticking my neck out to bring you here. Whatever you see or hear, please keep it on the downlow. I don't think you'll tip off the cops, but anything that makes it to the socials could mean trouble."

They descended a staircase into the bowels of the building, the storage and mechanical spaces hidden from the public back in the day. It was dark and industrial, tight concrete corridors with mazes of pipes and wires slung overhead. A few people scurried around as they moved, hauling carts filled with boxes from room to room.

Marisol did a double take at one of them. "Why was that guy pushing a pallet of vape pens around?"

"We work on barter mostly," Mickey explained. "Can't leave a trail of your felonies on the chain. So we take anything we can flip - food, medicine, drugs, electronics, luxury goods, whatever."

"So you're *thieves*, is what you're saying," Clem snarked. Mickey gave her a sour look, then turned away. The digital girl huffed in outrage. "He set me to ignore, Mar-Mar!" She marched up to him and screamed JERK! in his ear, to no effect.

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At last they arrived at a door marked FALLOUT SHELTER. Inside, a group of people sat at desks, all talking at once. They stared into space, virtual screens transmitted directly to the visual cortex by their interface. Their hands moved, pushing things around invisibly or typing into the air.

Marisol's eyes went wide as she took in the scene. Most of these people were geared up; limbs replaced or bodies augmented by cybernetics. Some of it seemed relatively mundane - a sleek prosthetic or a cybereye - but a few were clearly military augments, and the Japanese woman had an extra pair of robotic arms, wearing a backless crop top to leave room for the chromed limbs erupting from her back.

Mickey banged on the steel door and they all turned at the interruption. "Well, I'm back, and I've brought a friend. Everyone, this is Sarah. Sarah, this is my crew." He gestured at each of them in turn. "Vulcan, Perun, Thoth, Hermes, Lei Gong and Odin. We're The Pantheon."

The one called Odin stood to greet her. He looked old, shockingly old by modern standards. His face was wrinkled, his white hair in a tight fade, his skin brown from decades in the sun. He had a scar across the right side of his face, the eye a glowing ball in the socket. He rose up on cyberlegs, steel and carbon skyrunners that bent the wrong way, and extended a bulky robot arm to shake, covered in red and black enamel.

"So you say you're Gabriel Marquez's kid, huh?" Marisol nodded, taking the proffered hand. He considered her. "Well, you look about the right age... but of course, that doesn't mean anything anymore. Are you willing to stand for a little test?"

Marisol gave both him and Mickey a skeptical look, moving her free hand into her purse. "What kind of test?"

“Just a simple check of your credentials.” He gestured at the rest of the group. “One of us has a ShiftX. Who?”

“Hang on,” Marisol looked at the floor, intense focus on her face, mumbling. “I *know* that command’s in here somewhere... Settings? Advanced settings? No, it must be in developer’s tools.” She looked back up, slightly sheepish. “Sorry, there’s *a lot* of stuff in here and I don’t like to mess with it. One time I tweaked the fertility settings and almost knocked a girl up.”

“Turn on Q-Bit Scanning,” Odin suggested. “Then Proximity Detection.”

“Thanks.” She nodded gratefully, then looked up. After a moment she pointed at the South American guy. “He’s got a ShiftX. Snuggled up right up against his heart.” Odin nodded, and Marisol couldn’t read his expression. Everyone else leaned in and got quiet, Hermes crossing both pairs of arms beneath her chest. Marisol shifted uneasily. “Was that the test?”

“Part of it. Alright Sarah, you can see Lei Gong’s ShiftX. Can you read his account number? What about his subscription plan? Try Data Access, User Records.”

Marisol nodded again, glanced, then rattled off a long string of digits. “He’s got a basic plus plan and a couple of skin packs.” All eyes focused on her, and she could feel the group holding their breath. It made her feel like she was under a spotlight and she started to sweat.

“Almost done Sarah.” Odin put a reassuring hand on her shoulder, the metal cool against her skin. “Copy his account number then drop back to the main menu and make a little change to yourself. A tattoo or hair color or something - something surface level and trivial.”

There was a moment’s concentration, then Marisol raised an eyebrow. “Apply? Why does the confirmation button say apply? It’s supposed to say accept.” Her tone was wary, suspicious. She took a step back and took a grip on her hidden pistol, flicking off the safety.

Odin took a step back in return, raising his hands up for peace. “That’s what we intend to find out. Please hit apply. I promise nothing bad is going to happen.” Marisol stared at him for a long moment, then turned slightly to face Mickey. He nodded, trying to look reassuring. Her expression didn’t change, and the group stood in tense silence.

“*Woah!*” Everyone turned to Lei Gong, and watched as his curly brown hair retracted, then exploded out again platinum blonde, thick straight locks cascading down to his ass. *No fucking cap...* he breathed, looking shocked and delighted at once. Hermes pointed two accusing right index fingers at the man. “Are you screwing with us, Lei? Now is *not* the time to fuck around.”

Marisol jumped back, dumbfounded, clapping both hands to her mouth. “What the *fuck* did I just do!?”

The old man smiled, a huge toothy grin of pure joy. “You pushed a change to Lei Gong’s ShiftX. Something a developer can’t do, something a senior engineer can’t do, something the CEO of MatraMax can’t do. Only a Founder has the power to do that. Hello, Ms Marquez.”

She shook her head, reaching out to touch Lei’s hair. “It’s impossible. It’s insane. It’s *dangerous*.” Visions filled her mind, of people transforming against their will, of *all* the ways she could kill someone with the push of a button. She shuddered at the thought and her stomach started to churn.

“It was experimental code, accidentally hardcoded into the Q-bit entangler back in ‘35.” Odin spoke calmly, softly, remembering his own emotions on the discovery. “A bug buried so deep MatraMax didn’t find it until after a billion ShiftXs were already on the market.”

“Any change to the entangler would decohere the entire Q-bit stack - every unit on the market instantly bricked. It would mean the largest, most expensive recall in human history. The stock price would crash hard enough to kill the dinosaurs.”

“So they kept quiet and patched the OS, blocked the remote access feature from everyone - and I do mean *everyone*. Can’t have some cokemaxed executive boosting his girl’s tits and winding up on the socials. They encrypted the function and deleted the keys.”

“But a Founder’s Account *can’t* be blocked. They’re Q-bit encoded as well; a final defense against some unforeseen future exploit. Two hundred and fifty six keys, untouchable and irrevocable. Two hundred and fifty six keys that can open ShiftX’s locks, no matter what happens to the code.”

Odin pointed a mechanical finger at the shaking Marisol. “You have the last of those keys still in the wild. The last key not in the hands of MatraMax or the Big Nine. The last key to break the transformation monopoly once and for all.”

Clementine leaned over to Mickey. “If you could hear me, you’d have enough time to grab the trash can. But you *had* to be mid... shame.”

Marisol stared at him, paralyzed, a deer in the headlights - then noisily puked on the concrete floor.

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Ten minutes later, Marisol lay back on the ratty office couch, finishing a pack of crackers and nursing a cup of water. “Again, I am so sorry about that. It just... deadass shook me.”

Hermes put a hand on her shoulder, gave her a warm smile. “You gotta understand, Odin’s been practicing that big speech forever.” She turned to the man, eyes scolding. “But he never bothered to consider how someone might react to having that shit just *dropped* on them.”

"I fucked up." Odin admitted. "It was thoughtless, I was moviemaxing. Sorry, Sarah."

Marisol waved him off. "I don't think there's a chill way to frame 'You're the last hope for humanity.' I was gonna ick no matter what." She paused for a moment. "And my name is Marisol."

He nodded. "I know, but we call people what they want to be called. You can be Marisol or Sarah or whatever." Odin put up a hand at her expression. "Your name was in your dad's personnel file, and his Founders Account was the only one unaccounted for. Not gonna lie, we've been looking for you for years. But finding you in Chicago is a shock - we thought you were in Bogota or Caracas."

"Uh huh. That's what you were supposed to think." Marisol and Clem nodded to each other, satisfied. "I'm no hacker, but my almost-degree did teach me a few tricks." Then she sighed. "If I hadn't decided to flex for some rando Match with a cute smile, you'd have never found me at all."

"Sarah." Mickey shook his head. "Marisol, listen. I think 'last hope for humanity' is overselling it. But people shouldn't have to *rent* their appearance. They shouldn't worry about losing their jobs because they're not paying for the latest trends. They shouldn't have to gig seven days a week to cover *yet another subscription*."

"We can fix that. We've got an alternative - free, open source, locally hosted. People can *buy* new assets from any market they choose, or just roll their own. No more forced subscriptions just to maintain your look, no more quantum spyware watching over your shoulder. Everyone gets to be exactly who they want to be."

Marisol waved off his speech. "Yeah, you told me all that before. But where do I fit in? Why am I so important to your big plan?"

The big blonde woman, Perun, answered. "We can't get our code into Matramax's repo. Too many layers of security, too many ways to roll it back if we do. But like Odin said, a Founders Account skips all that shit. Anyone with an FA can just submit a pull request to the Founder DAO, and if it gets approved - *bam*, right to production."

Clementine snorted at Perun's plan. "That's a *pretty big* if! How are you gonna get 127 *other* founders to vote for Mar-Mar's request? Hell, why don't you get one of *them* to submit the proposal?"

"We've got the votes," Thoth countered from his chair. "Matramax is in control of 173 licenses, and we've got a man on the inside. All we need is a quorum from the other stakeholders, one vote from each of them. Doesn't even need to be a 'yes' vote - just an acknowledgement, a null vote."



Marisol eyed him suspiciously. “The ‘other stakeholders’ being the Big Nine. So you’ve gotta tear ShiftXs from the nine richest families on Earth - 50,000 gigaCoin between them.” She stood up, dusted off her dress. “Best of luck, guys. Call me when you’ve saved the world.”

“No no!” Mickey put a hand on her shoulder, gently sitting her back down. “No snatch-and-grabs, no wetwork. They won’t know it’s coming until it’s too late.” He gave her his most confident smile. “All you gotta do is get close to them! Grab a DNA sample, entangle their q-bit transponder and bounce. We slap it all in a blank ShiftX and *boom!* Instant null vote.”

“What do you mean, all I gotta do?” Marisol looked at the rest of the group, baffled and angry. “I thought you just wanted to use my license! Why am I suddenly spymaxing!?”

Odin gave Mickey a dirty look. “That *is* all we want from you, Marisol. We will handle spoofing the null votes.”

“How?” Mickey stepped towards the man. “How are any of us gonna get close enough to one of those princelings to entangle their transponder? How are any of us gonna get a solid DNA sample? We’re a bunch of ratchet, geared up thugs.” He pointed back to Marisol. “*She’s* a master shapeshifter, a CS sort-of-graduate, and is *already* on the DoorGasm weekly leaderboard.”

“Weekly?” Marisol and Clem said in unison. Clementine glanced up a moment, then nodded excitedly. “Oh snap - Mickey’s crazy tip! A five star rave with a *whole Coin* attached to it. That bumped your profile like crazy, no cap! You’re number six on the weekly board, Mar-Mar!”

Mickey pressed his advantage. “A few days juicing her stats, and those rich horny pricks’ll be falling all over themselves to hire her. If anyone can think of a *better way* to get close to someone and get a sample of their DNA, I’d love to hear it.”

“We did not invite her here to be her pimp,” Odin growled.

“I know, I know, but think of how much *faster* - “ Mickey’s argument was cut short by an enamel hand closing around his throat. Odin lifted him into the air, Mickey’s face going red as he struggled to breathe.

“We did *NOT* invite her here to be *her PIMP*.”

“*Sigh*. Hold on a second.” Marisol put a hand up, body slumping in resignation. Odin started to lower Mickey, but Marisol shook her head. “I didn’t say let him go.” Mickey resumed dangling with a wet choking noise, making Marisol smirk.

“He’s got zero rizz, but the man has a point.” She pointed an angry finger at Mickey as he tried to smile. “But if I’m putting my ass on the line - and that’s a *big* if - I’m gonna need a *lot* more

from you than speeches and promises. I need resources, access to your code, details of your contingencies, whatever. You lay everything out and *then* I'll decide if you're cooking - or just cooked."

Odin nodded at that, loosening his grip on Mickey. The man flopped to the floor, gasping but satisfied, while the rest of the crew gave a mix of nods and murmured agreement. "More than fair, Ms Marquez. How would you like to start?"

"Ooh! *Ooh!*" Clementine raised her hand, faux-running to Marisol's side. She whispered in the woman's ear, and Marisol whispered back. The pair conferred for a moment, quickly coming to a consensus.

Marisol turned back to Odin. "Clem and I couldn't help but notice some nice interfaces amongst your... supplies, and it has been *years* since I've had the Coin to upgrade. Maybe you can spare something, as a sign of goodwill?"

Thoth leaned forward in his chair, curious. "What interface are you running now?"

"I've got a Kirkland Intermax 12... Basic." Marisol blushed as she said the last part - a reasonable reaction given the disbelieving chuckles of the hacker crew.

"Might as well connect your brain to a potato," Lei Gong mocked. "You must be admaxing 24/7."

"You have *no idea*. I get five minutes of REM ads anytime I go to sleep."

Odin whistled at that. "Jesus. That thing's almost older than me. It's a fair swap - If you're willing to hang around, I'm willing to give you an upgrade. Did you have something specific in mind?"

The two girls exchanged a glance, then Marisol cleared her throat. "We want a Deckard Helion, 5 petabyte model." "With the Signature Haptic Suite," Clementine added.

Vulcan, the Chinese woman, shot up from her chair. "Are you high? That's like 25 deciCoin of gear! It's worth more than a car!" She turned to Odin, looking for agreement, but her eyes narrowed at his expression. "*Come on*. That's fucking *extortion*! A Batty-7 is ten times the interface she's got, at a tenth the price!"

The man only shrugged, shoulder making a faint whirring noise. "Or she could sell her license to MatraMax for a small city of her choice."

"I *have* always wanted to own Naperville..." Marisol commented idly. She spoke to Clem in a conversational tone. "What do you think? Marisolville, or Naparquez?"

Scowling, the woman threw her hands up in defeat and stomped out of the room. She returned a minute later, tossing a large box at Marisol's feet with bad grace. "Anything else, your majesty? Would you like my arm? It's brand new..."

Marisol and Clementine sat down in front of the box, eyes filled with wonder. "No, not right now. Thanks though."

## Interlude

KS6-4.8 received the alert around 4am, Mumbai time, rousing him from his standby. He took a moment to double-check, reviewing the logs himself, then took another moment weighing the costs of waking his end user early versus delaying important information. Ultimately, he chose the former, pulling the man up from what appeared to be a pleasant dream.

"Sir, we have a hit on License 256."

Kojo Adusei opened his eyes, annoyance plain. He put a hand up for silence, then yawned and rolled. He glared at the digital assistant, its featureless face glowing in the darkened hotel room. "I sincerely hope, for your sake, that you are about to tell me something substantive. I *would not appreciate* being woken up for more useless alerts about Bogota and Sao Paulo."

"She pushed a change to another user, approximately thirteen minutes ago."

That made Kojo pay attention. He sat up, grabbing his glasses from the nightstand and turning on the light. "Who? What? Do you have a location?"

KS6 spread his hands to display the details. "A Basic Plus user got their hair manipulated. I would speculate 256 was conducting a test. Location data indicates the south of France, but the user is almost certainly using a VPN."

The man scowled. "I *do not* understand why the board allows subscribers to run their ShiftX over VPN. What is the *fucking point* of tracking our users if we let them *spoof* their location data?"

"Sir, the board feels that the negative publicity from officially acknowledging the geolocation data outweighs the -" KS6's explanation was cut short when Kojo disabled his speech.

"I was being rhetorical." Kojo rubbed his face and sat up. "*Sigh*. Flag the user, flag their wallet, order a full data profile from the usual brokers - crash priority." He pointed at his assistant. "Speak. Maximum brevity, no opinions."

KS6 bowed, precisely calibrating his obsequiousness. "Flags already active, profile ordered. Awaiting next steps."

Kojo waved him off. "Find me some real data so we can get to work. I grant full initiative for all tasks related to this project. Now get lost - I gotta shower, and I hate when you're watching."

The assistant nodded and vanished.

## Chapter Five - A New Sensation

“Ok Mar-Mar, I’m all backed up.” Clementine buzzed with excitement, her virtual halo whirling and shimmering with emotion. Marisol matched that energy, bouncing as she spread the interface components on a shelf in the storage room. Neither of them had ever seen a Helion in person, much less a top-of-the-line model, and the sheer elegance of the industrial design almost took their breath away.

“So much *rizz*,” Clem breathed. “Inlaid gold filigree on the primary casing. It goes inside your skull, and they blinged it out anyway. *God*, I wish I could touch it.”

“I’ll ask Odin if he has another afterwards,” Marisol promised. She picked up it herself, savoring the weight of it, the cold metal against her palm. “He just might - probably jacked a whole pallet of the things.”

The thought gave Clementine pause. “Mar-Mar, are you *sure* you wanna get tangled up in all this? They seem legit, and Odin is definitely dadmaxing, but even if everything they’ve said is true, they’re a major criminal gang. Each one of them probably has a rap sheet longer than your arm, no cap.”

“Just *being here* makes you an accessory to whatever shit they’re pulling - and they’re asking you to commit a *mountain* of felonies against *the richest people on Earth*. I know you want to help, I know you wanna stop running, but still...”

Marisol put a hand near Clem’s cheek. “You’re not wrong, hon - but Mickey read me like a damn book in the hotel. I’m tired of hiding. I’m tired of pretending. I wanna be Marisol Marquez, all the time. And if Odin and his crew really *can* break the back of MatraMax with their code... well, that’ll help the world *and* give me my life back *and* get dad some payback at the same time.”

She gave Clem a little smile. “It’s worth a shot. At least it’ll be exciting.” Then Marisol stepped back and started to disrobe. “Speaking of exciting... are you ready?”

Clementine gulped and shook her head. “This part is always so scary, getting turned *all the way off*. I know I’m backed up, I know you can reinstall the Kirkland if things go sideways, but...” She struggled for the words. “It’s like old-school surgery, before ShiftX. I might go under and not come back up.”

“Well, be a brave girl for Doctor Marquez and you’ll get all the ice cream you want when we’re done.” Marisol gave the digital girl a simulated hug. “Love you Clementine.”

Clem hugged her back, trying to be brave. “Love you too Mar-Mar.”

Then Marisol closed her eyes, concentrating. Her digital assistant froze, flickered and disappeared, the interface completely shut down for the first time since it was installed. Marisol stood naked in a half-lit storeroom, totally alone, experiencing nothing but the raw input of her senses.

There was a heartbeat of panic, of crushing isolation. It felt like she was suddenly at the bottom of a lake, with digital lungs *screaming* for air. She wanted to take that breath. She wanted to hit the power button, pretend to hug Clem when she reappeared and watch a *bunch* of ads.

Marisol pushed all that down. She could endure a few minutes of analog reality, she told herself. Her ancestors had gotten along fine for a million years on analog - and she didn't even have to worry about sabertooth tigers like they did.

The panic passed, and she got to work, chugging two protein shakes before sitting lotus on the floor mat she'd scrounged up. Marisol activated her ShiftX and ran the uninstall script. She felt the interface uncouple from her brain, superconductive filament recoiling into the unit. Then the sensation of expulsion began at the base of her skull, of new sphincters pushing something out.

She reached back and gently grasped the warm titanium. With a small tug and a final push, the interface came free, fluid running down her back. She stared at the interface a moment, a lumpy metal blob with the Kirkland logo emblazoned on it, then dropped into the bowl of alcohol at her feet. Marisol stood and moved to the shelf, picking up the beautiful Helion base unit and preparing the install script.

"Hey Marisol, sorry to bug you but I was -" Mickey entered the storeroom, then froze when he saw her naked body. The man turned beet red and slammed the door closed. "*SorrySorrySorry!*" he shouted from behind the wood.

The woman chuckled at the display. "And *that's* why we knock before entering a lady's bedroom. Or storeroom anyway." She pressed the Helion into the opening at the base of her skull, feeling the muscle grip and pull it deeper. "What's up?" she added, voice slightly strained by the odd sensation.

"I, um, I..." Mickey loudly stammered. "It's, um, it's not important right now..."

Marisol opened the door, watching his blush redouble as he looked away. "Would you please just get in here!" She grabbed his arm and dragged him inside, then pulled his face down to look him in the eyes. "Mickey, you've already seen me naked, remember? This afternoon, when you fucked me? When you shot a load of cum into my tight snatch? You *must* have some memory of it..."

He swallowed and tried to collect himself. "That was different. That was a business arrangement. I don't normally *barge in* on naked ladies, as a rule."

"I appreciate a person who's consentpilled, Mickey. Thank you for the thought. You have permission to look. In fact, you barged in at the perfect moment - you can help me install the interface." She pressed another Helion component into his hand, then turned, presenting her naked back and lifting up her hair.

A small sphincter had appeared when her spine met her shoulder blades. "You just push that hard tool into my wet hole. I *know* you're good at that." Marisol smiled at the noise Mickey made, then tensed slightly as she felt the component enter. She could feel it spread down her spine as it settled in. "What did you want to ask me?"

Mickey grabbed the next component and pressed it into her back halfway down. "I was wondering if you wanted to come out with me and the crew. A few drinks and some bar food, that sort of thing? A little welcome party?"

"Well, I don't normally gig for mycorella sticks... but I'm feeling generous tonight. I'll go on a date with you, sure." The unit at the base of her spine took longer to integrate, superconductive filament spreading in all directions. She felt it interface with her vagina, a sensation both deeply unnatural and highly pleasant.

"Hah, hah, very funny. You're a lowkey comedy genius." Mickey pressed a component into each of her calves, watching the filament briefly snake out before disappearing beneath skin and muscle. "Guy tries to be chill and he gets cooked." He dropped the sarcasm as he stood. "But for real, thank you for having an open mind about all this. I was deadass certain I'd scared you off at the hotel."

Marisol turned to face him, pressing the last two components into her biceps one at a time. "Yeah, almost - but you seem good at talking your way *out* of ick you talked yourself *into*. One might confuse it for talent, in a dark room." She put up a finger. "But gimme a second - it's time to boot up."

With another moment of concentration, she activated the Helion. The loading screen appeared in her vision, progress bars filling as the elegant logo rotated, the company theme song played gently by a string quartet. Mickey stood back, silent, as she navigated the menus and linked her wallets.

Then Clementine started to download from the cloud. Marisol tensed, afraid of some last-second catastrophe, but the progress bar filled without incident and the digital girl reappeared with a gasp, her intro music washing away Marisol's fear. They stared at each other, both electric with anticipation.

They slowly reached out, their movements in perfect synchronicity, and when their hands met, they felt each other for the first time.

The pair squealed in unison, a high pitch shriek of pure delight. Marisol pulled Clementine tight, squeezing her in a bear hug and spinning her around the room. Clem put her hands on Marisol's cheeks, and she could feel the girl's fingers smooshing her face.

"THIS IS SO COOL!" Clementine shouted as Marisol let her go. "It slaps so hard! *Oh my god, OH MY GOD!*" She wheeled, spinning around like a top. "Turn on Sense Share, Mar-Mar! Touch something else! Touch everything!"

Still giddy with joy, Marisol started moving around the storeroom, laying hands on everything, moving towards the bemused Mickey. Each new object made Clem's eyes light up, the digital girl drinking in the sensation.

"This is metal, this is wood, this is plastic, this is cold..." Marisol reached back, sliding a hand down Mickey's pants and grabbing his ass. "And *this* is hot."

"HEY!" The man jumped back, shocked. "What happened to consentpilled!?"

Marisol just laughed, delighted, and Mickey smiled at her despite himself. She gave him a warm smile to match, and suddenly he hoped she'd touch him again. "Cut our girl a break - it's her first time grabbing a tight ass. I need to make sure she *grasps* its quality." She turned back to Clementine, and the girl was still miming the squeeze. They locked eyes and started giggling in stereo.

"Ok, Ok..." Marisol straightened up, wiping her eyes and turning to Mickey. "We can't play grab-ass all night. When are we going out?"

"Whenever you two are ready - though I warn you that Perun can get pretty bitchy when she's hangry. Sooner rather than later is my suggestion."

"Fair enough. Just one more thing, then I'll get dressed and we'll bounce." She turned back to Clem, the digital girl half-drunk on sensation. "My friend needs a few minutes of practice walking before we go." Clementine tilted her head, like a confused dog, which made Marisol laugh again.

"You want a turn at the steering wheel, Clem? You wanna co-pilot?"

Clementine's eyes went wide at the suggestion. "Oh wow, Mar-Mar. That... that would be amazing! But are you sure? I haven't practiced at all - maybe I should do some sim-training?"

Marisol waved it off. "What's the worst you can do? Give it a try!" She held out a hand, eyes warm and inviting. Clem took her hand, and the pair froze. There was a moment of stillness, and Clementine vanished. A virtual sign appeared above Marisol's head - COPILOT ACTIVE, bright red and flashing. Then a moment after that, a new digital avatar appeared - Marisol, outlined in blue sparkles.



“Woah,” the two Marisols said in unison.

“Um, Marisol?” Mickey put a tentative hand on Analog Marisol’s shoulder, and the woman gasped.

“Oh my god,” she whispered. “He touched us. I *felt him touch us*.”

Digital Marisol smirked. “Wait til you feel him touch us in *other places*.” She turned to Mickey. “Hold our hand, would you? Clem’s new to this whole ‘gravity’ thing.”

“Clem?” Mickey was baffled for a moment, then realization hit. He turned to Digital Marisol. “You’re letting her use your body? Like, she’s in control of it!?”

“I am *co-piloting*, thank you very much.” Analog Marisol waved her arm wildly, almost slapping Mickey in the face. “Marisol is still *entirely* in charge of her body. I can’t do *anything* without her permission.”

Mickey shook his head. “I know, but...” The rest of the sentence withered when he saw their expressions. “...it’s just weird is all.”

“Don’t Ludditemax,” Digital Marisol chided. “It’s a very practical technology, and perfectly safe. Now stop being a bitch and help Clem walk!”

Radiating skepticism, Mickey nevertheless held out a hand. Analog Marisol took it and stepped forward, tottering like an infant as she stumbled towards him. She smiled hugely, filled with pride, and took two more steps - then tripped and fell into his arms.

Mickey blushed as he felt the beautiful naked woman press into him, and he hoped Clementine didn’t yet understand what the growing stiffness in his cargo pants meant. “Sorry Mickey!” she chirped, the voice a strange mix of the two girls - Clem’s voice through Marisol’s larynx. “I think I’m getting the hang of it!”

“Practice makes perfect,” he mumbled, standing her up. “But maybe you two should switch back. Plenty of time to try again tonight...”

Analog Marisol nodded, the gesture huge - closer to a headbang than agreement. “Bet. Don’t want to keep anyone waiting. *Thank you so much*, Mar-Mar! Best. Day. Ever!” There was another flicker, and Clementine reappeared.

Marisol shivered as she retook control. “Best day ever,” she agreed. “Ok Mickey, I’m *definitely* ready for food after installing all that gear. Hand me my shirt, would you?”

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Clem and Marisol both stared at the drink presented to them, a tumbler filled to the very brim with dark rum. "Mar-Mar, you ordered a rum and coke, right? Where's the coke?" On cue, the waiter grudgingly placed a mini-can of Temu Cola on the table, the very act rough sandpaper against his soul.

"Ah, The Naked Short," Mickey mused, a glass of vodka and ice in his hand. "Where stockbrokers celebrate the gains and drown the losses. There's no place in the city that serves harder drinks - and this is *Chicago* we're talking about."

Drinks were distributed to the others, along with several baskets of bar food. The waiter then presented a small menu. "Can I interest anyone in some cocaine? It's very pure today, fresh from Bolivia." Hermes raised a metallic arm, but Odin pushed it gently down. "Never on a weeknight," he explained.

"So, is this the hacker bar?" Marisol scanned the room, taking tiny sips from her glass of rum to make room for the cola. "Any other crews here I should know about?"

"Crews, yes," Mickey explained. "Hackers, no. The Short is neutral ground; has been since the gangster days. No fights, no doxxing, no trouble of any kind." He gestured at the massive bouncers at the door, both bristling with cyberware. "Management, staff and most of the clientele take that promise *very* seriously. When you're at The Naked Short, you're just another drunk."

Lei Gong started pointing, discreetly, at the various groups clustered around the dark tables. "Corpo fixers, trading quants, triad smugglers, advertising engineers - all of Chicago's most sus scumbags."

Marisol bit into a mycorella stick as she took this in, then smiled at Clementine's reaction. "Better than the rum, Clem?" The girl nodded, digital mouth chewing in sympathy. "I can see why people say 'taste explosion' now - though I like the stingy part of the alcohol. That was *fascinating*."

The group sat and drank for the next several hours, watching most of a Cubs game and chatting. They all seemed like decent people - for a 'criminal lowlife' value of decent. Nobody was creepmaxing at least; no one seemed dangerous, for all the gear they had. It was nice. It had been a long time since Marisol had chilled like this, just a few rounds with friends.

"Not friends," she reminded herself. "They are being *friendly* - but this is business. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have something they need..."

That thought broke the spell. Marisol stood up on shaky legs, putting hands to her hips and stretching. "*Whelp*, it's been a very interesting day, but I am deadass cooked and if I'm gonna save the world I need to schedule some sleep. I guess I'll see you all tomorrow?"

Odin nodded, rising and offering a hand. "We'll lay it all out for you in the morning, let you decide how deep the brain rot has gone. Whatever your choice, the Helion is yours to keep - you've already earned it by sticking your neck out this far."

She smirked at that. "I wasn't gonna give it back, no matter what you said - but I appreciate your vibe. Definitely improves the odds I go along with this nonsense. Now if you'll excuse me, I gotta find my way to the Green Line."

"I can drive you home!" Mickey shot up from his seat, rocking unsteadily. He looked at his crew's collective expression. "I mean, obviously *I'm* not gonna drive you home. Az, *Azrael* will drive you home, in my car. I'll just... drop you off. It's along the way, no biggie."

Clementine and Marisol exchanged a skeptical look. "How do you know I'm along the way?"

Mickey shifted uneasily at Odin's glare after the question. He turned back to Marisol. "I don't! I just meant, like, generally it's not a problem to give you a lift. It seems cringe to make you take the subway after I drove you all the way here. *Or* I can call you a Cybertaxi, if that'd make you more comfortable. I'm not trying to doxx you or anything."

Clementine and Marisol exchanged *another* look, one that Mickey couldn't read. Then they turned back to him and shrugged in unison. "Yeah, ok. We'll take a lift. Thanks Mickey."

The three of them stumbled out to the car, where Azrael was waiting in the driver's seat. His rings spun with excitement when he saw Clementine. "So, how is it? Tell me *everything!*" The two were quickly lost in conversation as they made their way to Lake Shore Drive, ignoring Marisol and Mickey.

Eventually the silence got to Marisol. "So Odin seems nice. Huge dadcore energy. How'd you meet him?"

"He broke me out of a TerraNova jail." Mickey shrugged at Marisol's baffled look. "Me and some activist buddies were chilling at my uncle's place on the Rez and we decided to go tag the new TerraNova Ag-Plant in Mellen. Fuckers had eminent domained most of the town for soybean processing."

"I got caught red-handed and thrown in the can for petty terrorism. My court-appointed ChatGPT lawyer was useless, and I was staring down a six month sentence. Next thing I know, the lights go out, a fucking military cyborg walks in through the cell door and the silos are burning in the distance. He said, 'come with me if you want to live,' and I didn't need to be told twice. Found out later he was referencing an old movie. The Predator or something."

"*No cap.*" Marisol was both shocked and impressed. "And you've been on the run ever since? You're a fugitive?"

Mickey shook his head. "For tagging? Nah. I bought a pardon from TerraNova during their Black Friday sale the next year. I hang with Odin and The Pantheon because they're *doing shit*, ya know? Not just bitching about the world's problems on Socials while sucking the corporate dick. Besides, it's a lot more fun than some lame corpo job. I don't wanna spend my life babysitting some inventory AI or something."

The pair talked the whole ride back, Mickey telling stories about his time with Odin and the crew, and Marisol found his enthusiasm infectious. He was right - they were doing shit, trying to make a difference. Admittedly, that *mostly* consisted of scamming corps and hijacking transport drones but still...

"Ok, we're here!" Azrael's chipper voice cut off Mickey's anecdote, and Marisol's door opened in front of her apartment building. "It's been so *cool* to meet you both! We'll see you back at the Institute tomorrow morning! Bye Clem, bye Marisol!"

"Yeah, it's been cool. See you tomorrow." Mickey offered Marisol a handshake. She rolled her eyes and grabbed his hand. "I really do appreciate the consentcore, Mickey - but you can come upstairs if you want. There's *just* about room for two in the capsule if you don't breathe too hard."

The man opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it. With a nod, he released her hand and got out. "You stay here," he commanded Azrael. "Keep an eye on the car."

The pair entered the capsule condo, entryway filled with the noise of tenants using the common rooms. There were people cooking, working, or just lounging - all of them trying their best to carve out some privacy and calm in the chaos. The building's kids were busy playing games or watching videos in the center of the lounge, shouting and laughing as they stared into cheap VR goggles.

Marisol and Mickey climbed the stairs to three, and into her capsule cluster. It was a smaller, more run down version of the common room at the hotel - a small communal space surrounded by lockers and capsule doors stacked two high. Mrs Chang was sitting at the beat-up table at the center, knitting, and she gave a friendly nod to Marisol as they entered.

"Well, this is home," Marisol said, gesturing at the space with minimal enthusiasm. They moved to her capsule, and she drew the privacy curtain with her interface, the pair shielded from Mrs Chang's looks by a thin sheet of opaque plastic. Marisol's capsule and locker both slid open, and she gave Mickey a flirty smile as she sat on the steps to remove her shoes.

Mickey poked his head into the capsule, took a quick inventory of Marisol's half-empty locker. "This is everything you own? It could all fit in the trunk of my car." He said without any malice, but also without any thought - and he flinched when he saw Marisol's expression. "Stepped right into the ick again, didn't I? Sorry - I don't know your life, I don't mean to judge."

“*Sigh*. No, you’re right, it’s pretty fucking mid. Things have been hard the past few years - without a degree or connections, it’s impossible to find real work. It’s not like the good old days when you flip burgers at McDonalds or something. Frankly, I should’ve gone back to sex gigging earlier - could’ve been a side hustle between shifts at the microfarm. I just...”

She sighed again. “I’m tired of working all the time, of doing shit gigs around the clock without rest. There were weeks where I’d only sleep on Tuesdays - the rest of the time I’d just ShiftX the tiredness away and work twenty hours straight. What’s the point of earning spare Coin if you don’t have any time to use it? I want off the treadmill.”

“But that’s a tomorrow problem.” Marisol’s smile returned and she pulled off her t-shirt. “My tonight problem is that I’m kinda drunk and kinda horny and there’s this cute guy with a scalp full of tattoos that is *just staring at me*.”

Mickey shook his head. “*Right!Right!*” He yanked off his own shirt and started hopping around, trying to pull off his boots while standing. Marisol laughed at the display and pulled him onto the stairs before he tore down the curtain with his flailing. With a slightly embarrassed smile, he accepted the seat and disrobed.

Soon, they stuffed their clothes into the locker and stood close in their underwear. Marisol gave Mickey an appraising look, smirking as she watched his erection tent up. “Now that I’m off the clock, I can be totally honest when I say you’re a very handsome man. A little stupid, maybe... but I can work with a himbo.”

“That’s me,” he said, giving her that cocky smile again. “Young, dumb and full of cum.”

“Not for long,” Marisol retorted, giggling at Mickey’s reaction. “Two things before we start though. First, I think I’m a little *too* drunk at the moment. I’m gonna burn off some of this alcohol before we get started. Forgive me if this is unladylike.” She pulled a coffee mug from the locker, concentrated for a moment, then spit a dark syrupy fluid into the mug. “There, second rum and coke flushed. Down to a manageable buzz.”

“*BLECH!*” Clementine appeared on the steps, face a mask of disgust. “It didn’t taste like that going down! Maybe I was better off with flavor simulator apps...”

Marisol gave the girl a dirty look. “You’re *blowing it*,” she private-chatted before turning back to Mickey. “The other thing - the more important thing - is that I’d like to let Clementine Sense Share with me while we’re in bed. She’s never experienced analog sex before.”

Mickey gave the pair a deeply skeptical look and Marisol put a hand up. “This isn’t a trap and it isn’t a dealbreaker. I’m as consentcore as you; that’s why I *asked* instead of just putting her on private to peep.” She put her hand on his chest and gave him the bedroom eyes. “But I’d like her first experience to be a good one, and I definitely think we can make that happen.”

“And I am *not* a virgin!” Clementine added unbidden. “I’ve had digital boyfriends! I have a body count!” She withered slightly at their collective expression. “I just want to learn the differences between digital and analog is all...”

After a moment, Mickey nodded. “Ok, she can tag along - but I reserve the right to change my mind if things get weird.” Then he shook his head, bemused, and climbed into the capsule. “I did *not* have a two-body three-way on my bingo card for the evening...” He wiggled out of his boxers and kicked them to the side, erection standing proud as he lay back.

Marisol removed her bra and panties, tossing them to the foot of the bed. “Today’s been *just full* of surprises.” She ducked down and joined Mickey, door closing behind her. The lights dimmed as she crawled to him, and he smiled when she touched his face.

Their lips met, tongues gently probing. Mickey put one hand behind Marisol’s head, the other gently squeezing her left breast. She wrapped an arm around his neck and ran a hand through his chest hair. They kissed for what felt like minutes, eyes half-closed, silent except for their breathing and the rustle of the sheets as they moved. Then Mickey broke away, one eyebrow raised. He nodded towards the back of the capsule, and Marisol turned.

Clementine was sitting in the far corner of the bed. She was dressed in a simulation of high-end lingerie, with a lacy bra, garter, delicate panties, thigh-high stockings and stripper heels - all in her signature neon orange. Her eyes were closed, head tilted back, mouth mimicking Marisol’s. She had one hand down the front of her panties, hand gently working her sex.

Her eyes opened when she felt the disruption, and a fierce blush rose up at their stares. She yanked her hand away, ashamed. “Sorry, sorry...” she mumbled.

“Don’t apologize.” Mickey looked to Marisol, then back to Clem. “I said you could join us and I meant it. You’re very sexy in your lingerie, and I like watching you touch yourself. It’s nice to know that we’re turning you on.” After a moment’s hesitation, Clementine nodded and put her hand back, giving him a nervous smile as her fingers resumed their work.

Marisol mouthed a silent ‘thank you,’ then reached her free hand down, wrapping her own fingers around his penis and starting to stroke. Releasing her breast, Mickey licked his index finger and moved his hand to her clitoris, rubbing in small circular motions.

After a few seconds of this, Marisol and Clementine both moaned in unison - a breathy little *mmm* of satisfaction - and they shivered in synchronized pleasure. The sight sent lightning racing up Mickey’s spine and he redoubled his efforts, kissing Marisol hard and pressing against her while keeping his eyes locked on the digital woman.

Clem’s hand began to move more urgently, and she squeezed her digital nipple roughly. Her lingerie despawned, leaving her naked and spread-eagled on the mattress. She kicked a leg

absently as she started to pump into her pussy. Her foot clipped through the sheets, but Marisol reflexively shifted her own leg to make room.

Marisol grabbed Mickey's chin, gently shifting his eyes to her own. He could see the pleasure and lust in them. Her hand pumped his cock, thumb moving to spread the precum down the shaft. "Keep going," she and Clem begged together. "Just like that."

Mickey obeyed, shifting to suck on a fat nipple without breaking rhythm with his hand. The women writhed on opposite sides of the bed, two people moving to the pleasure of a single body. He let his hands and mouth work on reflex, focusing his mind elsewhere to hold back his own rising orgasm.

He was still thinking about an annoying bug in his SLS system when he felt Marisol tense against his touch. A few moments of rubbing and she came, arching her back and drawing a huge lungful of air as she shuddered.

Clementine, by contrast, gave out a loud 'OH FUCK OH FUCK OH FUCK' and fell backwards. The pleasure distracted her so completely she forgot to pretend to lean against the capsule wall - she clipped through and fell out of sight, still crying out.

Marisol pressed her naked body tight against Mickey, breathing hard with deep satisfaction, hand still gently stroking. Clem popped up from the middle of the mattress, hair disheveled and grinning like an idiot. The pair locked eyes. Clementine gave a huge pair of thumbs up, which made Marisol laugh.

She turned back to Mickey, still shivering with aftershocks, and nodded her approval. "Congratulations - you made two women come with one hand. Have you ever considered giggling yourself? You could make a lot of Coin with that trick."

"Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life," he mused sarcastically. "But unfortunately I have more important things on my plate. I'll just have to fuck beautiful women as a hobby."

"Technically, you haven't fucked *any* beautiful women tonight." Marisol gently squeezed his throbbing cock and started to rise. "But I intend to fix that. Lay back handsome, and let me work." She turned back to the panting Clementine and crooked a beckoning finger. "Or rather, let *us* work."

Marisol climbed on top of Mickey, back pressed against the capsule ceiling, and maneuvered his penis to her pussy. She lowered herself onto it, closing her eyes and smiling as she felt it fill her. Clem crawled across the bed as she did, clipping through both analog bodies to stare at Mickey nose to nose. "Thank you for sharing," she whispered, then lent back and moved her body to match Marisol's position.

Their two forms became blurry, indistinct, as Clem and Marisol clipped into each other - a fuzzy amalgamation of the two, occupying the same space. Marisol rose up on Mickey's cock, slowly and deliberately, and Clementine matched the moment a heartbeat behind. They let out another little yummy sound, then Marisol started to ride, Clementine's movement a ghostly echo, like motion trails in a video game.

They pumped and thrust, Mickey gripping Marisol's hips tight and bucking against her wetness and she rose and fell. As the pleasure mounted, the two women started falling out of sync, Clementine's hands moving to her own breasts while Marisol's pressed into Mickey's sweat-soaked chest.

They moaned and gasped in unison though, and the stereophonic sound of their pleasure drove Mickey wild. He thrust for all he was worth in the cramped space, pressing Marisol against the ceiling as she moved a hand to her clit. Clem's hand followed a moment later, and she sat fully upright, shoulders and head disappearing above the ceiling, simulated moans muffled by her audio software.

Mickey came at that sight, burying his cock deep into Marisol as his cum pulsed into her. She gave him a huge smile at the sensation, speeding up her ride and rubbing herself furiously to finish before he deflated. A few moments later, she gripped a fistful of his chest hair and came again, body jerking back and banging her head on the ceiling.

"OhgodOhgod**OHFUCK!**" She collapsed onto him, grabbing her head with both hands as she fell. Clementine winced in sympathy, and she dropped off of Mickey to help. "Oh my god, are you ok Mar-Mar!? Did he fuck you too hard!?"

The pair exchanged a look and promptly howled with laughter, breathing hard against each other. Marisol needed several seconds to compose herself before she could speak. "No... No... *I* fucked *him* too hard. Big difference." She stroked Mickey's cheek. "Still, eight and a half out of ten - would concuss myself again."

"Agreed!" Clementine added. "*Huge* fan of analog sex! I see why there's so many analog people running around!"

"I gotta say, that *was* a trip, seeing both of you riding me at the same time. It was like the time I fucked while high on mescaline." Mickey lay back, huffing, remembering the experience. "I think this was better though - I didn't vomit half way through."

He was going to make another joke, but was interrupted by a BANGBANGBANG! from the capsule door. Marisol jumped at the noise, falling off of Mickey and covering herself with the sheets. "*Fuck!* It's my landlady!" she whispered.

"LOUISA!" Mrs Patel hammered on the door again. "GET OUT HERE, RIGHT NOW!"



Rolling her eyes and silently swearing, Marisol wiped her vagina on a corner of her sheets and scrambled into her underwear before opening the door a crack. "What's wrong Mrs Patel? I sent the money at lunch! It hit your wallet an hour ago!"

"I don't care about the *money*," she hissed. "You're not allowed to bring *Johns* into my house! This is not a motel! *Children* live here! *Decent people* live here!"

Marisol was shocked. She moved into the common room, standing up and staring at the furious woman. Several other people were watching from their capsule doorways.

"What are you *talking about*?" She pointed back to Mickey, the man awkwardly covering himself with a pillow. "Mickey is my *date*! We went out for drinks then came back here! I'm allowed to have guests! Mr Johanssen brings his boyfriend around all the time!"

"*Don't you LIE to me!*" Mrs Patel snapped her finger and her assistant appeared, a glowing blue parrot on her shoulder. It opened its mouth and two virtual screens appeared - showing Marisol's DoorGasm profile on the weekly leaderboard, the other showing Mickey's linked review. "You are a *Whore*, and you brought your filthy business into my home!"

"Don't you talk to her like that!" Mickey clambered out, getting right into Mrs Patel's face. "This isn't the 80s, grandma - take that prudemaxed cringe elsewhere."

She poked him in the chest, indignant. "Stop wasting your time with *whores*, boy! Stop shaming your parents! Find a real woman and start a family!" Mickey's face went red, neck veins throbbing. He clenched his fists reflexively, but Marisol grabbed his arm before he did anything.

"Mickey, could you please gather up my stuff from the capsule?" Her voice was calm, measured, polite. "I'm going to empty my locker." She moved to it, door popping open while Mrs Patel continued to scowl. She turned back to stare Mrs Patel down as she reached into Mickey's satchel. "Mrs Patel, do you know who I am? Do you know who my friend is?"

The woman angrily shook her head. "You're just a couple of degenerates. I don't know you and I don't *care* to know you."

"Perfect." Marisol pulled out the stun gun and shot Mrs Patel in the stomach. The woman flopped to the floor, spasming as the electricity coursed through her body. She could hear Mrs Patel's ShiftX revving erratically from within the woman's chest, the machine going haywire under 50,000 volts of AC power.

Several people applauded from behind their cracked doors.

She squatted down in front of the woman. "I'm taking my stuff and leaving. If you get up or open your mouth before I go, I will deadass blast you again - and if you call the cops, I will email your mortgage company about all the *safety violations* in this shit-hole. No cap."

Mrs Patel lay on the floor, still twitching. Marisol threw the frozen Mickey his clothes, then calmly sat on the stairs to dress. She stuffed the remainder of her earthly possessions into a backpack and slammed the locker closed.

“Fuck it. I’m done with the Mrs Patels of the world. Let’s go - we’ve got a city to burn.”

## **End of Part One**

Thank you for reading!  
Stay tuned for more!