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<Rabbit Hutch City>

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Feet were shuffling out of the hutch doorways in neon haze. Before rest of the city had come alive, the inhabitants of the hutches were already at their positions on block corners, marking their territory, waiting for the calls to come. They were a motley bunch, men and women, some in ratty jeans and jackets, others in heavier, older clothes, old torn suits, abandoned haute couture. The big and the old stood apart from the young hutchers, and both groups regarded each other with stoic coldness.

The young paced about and sometimes yelled at people as they passed the street, or hurled curses at the silent buses and

rail lines that raced by.

Starline was among the young ones, snapping short clips of cars and rail lines as they came barreling down 9th and Crackles, over the bridge, into the city proper with its whalebone-arch skyscrapers and green campus oases. Fine mist was coming in from the bay and distorted headlights as the flew by.

She was a sallow girl, grown like a yew tree, all wiriness and arms that seemed more like thin sticks burnt brown by the sun. Still, she had the look and vigor of a hatcher, the hood of her sweatshirt thrown back to show a wild mane of hair, and people waited for her to finish taking her clips before passing in front of her.

She could feel the optical sensors in on top of her retinas fighting to keep up, the minute motions for capture, pause, cut, trim, apply filter, making the software lag. All the while a man's tinny voice was yelling in her ear.

"Starline, listen to me, I can't keep the Promark off our backs anymore. We're getting forced out whether we paid or not."

"Morning to you too, Grant."

"Don't 'Morning' me, I've been awake since shitting 3am. Where are you?"

"I'm working right now."

"Get over here, you gotta help me."

"Just tell Promark we'll pay interest if he's getting this pissy."

"Did you hear me? We are losing our home—"

"We'll make do. You, me, and Kol. Like we always do."

"How? How this time? I have two kids. I'm not gonna take them back east."

"Then you don't have much of a choice, do you?"

"I thought maybe if we went to Promark together we could, combined, we could ask him to make an exception for us. We've been good tenants—"

"Grant?"

"Yeah."

"Have some dignity."

"Oh, it's easy for you, isn't it? Well guess what—"

She muted him and concentrated on the footage.

As fast as each clip was captured it was rendered and released for sale, her preset filters making cookie-cutter art forms. Her storefront filled up quickly, lots of artful GIFs of slim black and silver bodies caught in moments of power and speed framed against the cityscape. She checked her metrics. Total mentions were high, but aggregate purchases were low.

Really nice shot.

Loved this!

I was kind of hoping for something more like last week's,  
but these are good too.

By 10am her storefront had filled up with a decent number of receipts, her bank dispersing the money to her license holders and fee collectors. The basics, the necessities. Her stomach rumbled. Every little smell was a distraction. A grease stain on another hatcher's lapel smelled like pancakes and bacon, the hands of another like fruit and toast. She turned off her sensory amplifiers and concentrated on other things. The colors and smells of the world faded into a kind of static background noise, and she let herself wander across the news.

Something in her feed, nestled between comics, captioned images and news footage caught her eye.

Welcome to our pitch page! The Kill Jackson Sar-Rackham  
crowdfunding venture is a project dedicated to, obviously,  
killing Jackson Sar-Rackham, son and heir of Emilia Sar and  
Lawrence Rackham. We believe that Jackson Sar-Rackham is a  
cancer upon this city, and we seek to do everything in our power  
to excise him.

Jackson Sar-Rackham is guilty of, amongst other crimes,  
initiating the tear-down of the 134th street hatches,  
"renovating" Moonfall Station into a gated living complex, and  
pushing for an increase in the venal offices offered by the

Machine Expedition. Through this he has purchased positions for himself and his sycophants throughout the city, and has done nothing to stem the current problems of mass destitution and unemployment. All his life he has done nothing but bleed this city and its inhabitants dry and we have had enough.

We are asking for 1.5 million dollars to cover assassin costs and security expenses, with every cent afterwards going towards making his death as painful and horrifying as possible. Every stretch goal we hit will guarantee a more fitting and painful end.

#### Reward Tiers.

Donate the base amount and you will receive our humble thanks and a certificate of participation, signed by every member of Team Kill Jackson Sar-Rackham, as well a picture of the body, printed on high-quality gloss paper.

Donate 10,000 dollars will get you your choice of finger or toe bone (Limited 0/10 fingers remaining, 3/10 toes remaining).

Additional costs may apply for fabrication and transference.

Up ahead, a billboard Sar-Rackham's face with his All-American pearlies shining down on the hutchers was covered in sloppy spray tags. According to one enterprising tagger, Rackham alternatively liked to eat shit and give shoutouts to someone

named Wexter. Making their page context sensitive against the guy's face was pretty scummy, but it made her laugh. She paid the team a little more than base for the certificate and a photo of Rackham's body. An investment, she rationalized.

She blinked through the rest of the feed and leaned back. A man in a suit appeared before her.

Hi, I'm TK Hardrad. For 25 years I've served the great people of this city, and no one hurts more than me when I see hard working families out on the street while leeches are sucking 'em dry.

Can't pay fabricator fees? Who can live on gunky paste and water? Is the fleet the only option available to you? If you've been the victim of an illegal contract termination or AI replacement, TK Hardrad may be able to help. Our lawyers specialize in Cascadia labor law and Provision 87 rulings. When your back's to wall and you don't see a way out, we'll be there.

"Block." she said. The man evaporated into wisps and sparkling air.

The hour droned on. Food trucks ambled by in slow procession, the lunch and dinner van drivers already bleary-eyed. Some hutchers took off wordlessly, on foot, on bikes, or catching the buses. Her friend list slowly updated as the dots that represented them spread throughout the city interior.

Caterer's assistant. Grape picker. Delivery to the Lorraine Township. Laundry Pickup? Will pay in pizza. Attendant Mourners needed, must be capable of wailing. Day-long gigs. A popup told her that more jobs matching her criteria had become available.

Security at Tom's Bottle Hall. Trash compactor AI companion. Ichor courier. All painful.

Starline bought a cup of coffee from a passing waffle van and got a decent twitch going. The side of the cup claimed it was from a Colombian license, but there were no certifications to prove it was.

Other hutchers were doing the same, biting down on energy tabs and a candy-colored assortment of concentration drugs picked off of students and lower level workers from the campuses over the bridge.

Her first call came in. Specifically for her. Four miles away, 300 dollars flat, at an indeterminate schedule. Special-Needs AI Care. Her face felt red. She relisted the job as open, flicked her eye, and was back to the boards.

A few other hutchers felt otherwise about babysitting an idiot robot, and took off scrambling, some on bikes, some on scooters, others splitting a lift on a cab, still others booking it on foot and taking to every back alley and shortcut to be the first ones to the bell.

Her coffee ended up a sludgy mess that made her gag. She poured the rest down the gutter and kicked the cup away. Still nothing.

More hutchers took off. She flicked through her feed to something trending. An effete British gentleman's voice came piping through an earbud.

I'm in sunny Cologne today to discuss the new security crisis that has seemingly captured the collective imagination of the internet. Some have taken to calling it the second 1848, a year of unprecedented chaos, strife, and political instability.

Joining me now to present their opinions are Diego Shang, security developer for the H4 Group, and Olivia Oleyn, head of policy development at Cambridge think tank OakMast. Thank you both for joining me today.

"My pleasure."

Now, before we even proceed, I'd like to address the elephant in the room, so to speak, these Robin Hood figures that have sprung up in the Western United States and here in Germany. Olivia, if you could take us away.

"If you're referring to Andracall Zeri and Lucy Bell, then I think I would have to challenge that assertion to begin with. These people are more in line with classical terrorists than any kind of folk heroes from medieval England. I've read their work



and they strike me as being as if not more dangerous than any foreign terrorist organization."

Well that may be. Diego, anything to add?

"Calling this the second 1848, I feel, is grossly misleading. We don't live in the kind of world that the revolutionaries of 1848 were fighting against. That was a fight of liberty against tyranny, of people who were essentially slaves against an unenlightened nobility. What people like Andracall and Lucy want is nothing short of total anarchy. What they want cannot be done. Remember Jupiter, after all. Remember their failure."

Anarchy? Well that's not what they seem to claim, in a recent post they submitted to Teqi Shidai News they claim to be enforcing their goals through the only means left to them, and I quote, 'violent opposition.' They seek fair remuneration, bodily rights, and the removal of the EGMW from our solar system.

"See? Violent opposition. More proof that these people have lost all sight of reasonable resistance. They weren't raised in a society of oppression, but one of freedom. If they are dissatisfied, then it is only because their insane sense of entitlement has made them so."

Lovely. We're about to start taking callers, as you-

Another eye flick and Starline's call bot was already on

it. She could hear herself being connected.

"Oh, hello, looks like we've already got one in. That was fast. What's your name, darling?"

"Starline." her voice was modulated.

"Well, Starline, what is the nature of your call?"

"I'd just like to comment on those two people you mentioned, Zeri and Lucy."

"Yes?"

"I've read their philosophy and they call for a lot of things, most of all the ejection of the Machine Expedition here on earth."

"Yes, the Expeditionary Government of the Machine Worlds, for those just tuning in."

"Well I don't know if I really agree with that."

"Alright."

"See, I was trained as a researcher. I worked with the Expedition after they came to Earth. Long years, fun years."

"So then you feel these people are radicals."

"No, I agree with their methods but disagree with their goal."

"Could you repeat that?"

"Like I said, I worked with the machines and I say they should be gone. I think we should destroy them. I think the

people of High Jupiter should come down and bring ruin to them."

"Do you mean to destroy them?"

"If they intend to fight back, then yes. Yes I do."

There was silence on the other end. The panic of the editors and live producers could be felt through the line.

"You are-" Diego said. She cut the line and her proxy connection. A police drone hovered overhead, oblong and cephalopodic, sniffing the air like a shark smells for blood. She waved at the drone and it waved back with one of its spindly, flopping octopus limbs before jetting away.

Another hour passed, and two hutchers nearby started fighting.

"Hey fuck off, man, I need this."

"That was mine and you damn well know it. It wasn't yours to take."

"Shit, I'm so hungry. This is the 5th job you got today, just let me take it."

"Piss off before I crack your head on the sidewalk."

The first man threw a punch and knocked the other on the jaw. He spat out some blood and answered by with his own blow to the chest. It devolved into a brawl and continued on, both beating themselves bloody, until the police drone returned. Its tendrils lashed out and draped themselves over the fighters, and

a high voltage passed down to them.

Moments later, a black car arrived and two officers stepped out. They quickly put the hutchers into the car and sped off. The police drone hovered for a bit, then again went on its patrol.

Another job queued up for her. No one had taken the AI care position. A sample video was included by the poster this time. She opened it and was greeted by a woman's soft voice.

"Hello. My name is Veanna, and I'm looking for someone to assist in taking care of the Machine envoy appointed to me. His given name is Bradley, he's a- he's a kind soul, he really is-

Starline skipped ahead. Instead of the woman's voice there was unintelligible babbling, a mix of words, animal sounds, and mewling babies. Something shattered.

"Bradley-

She skipped further ahead.

"My name is Bradley. I need help. I need help. I need so much help. Please, will you help me? For just a dollar a day you too can be part of Saint Luke's- No, my name is Bradley. I am not a saint- I will kill you if you come near me. If you touch me."

"Bradley-

The pay had gone up. 100 for the day, with a guaranteed five days commitment, plus a hundred dollar completion bonus for

600. The numbered lingered. She tapped her foot in rapid motion.

She accepted the job, sent a quick message stating that she'd be there in 15 minutes, given the traffic, and took off on foot.

#

Starline drove out to the country with Kol and Georgie. Georgie was the name Kol had given his scooter, a half-mind vehicle the buzzed loud and hissed at other vehicles as they passed them. She sat behind him and clutched at his body as they passed between rolling hills and valleys.

The air was dry and dusty and seemed to catch every ray of the sun and hold it down for a moment. Thin clouds over the mountain far ahead tried to form and were ripped apart by strong headwinds.

"How much further?" Starline asked.

"Not much. A few more miles, at most." Kol said.

"We can't go in the front."

"No, it'll have to be the back."

"And the clothes?"

"They said they'd provide them."

The villa was disconnected from the main house and viewing platforms and looked over a long field of grapevines and troughs of water. A few scraggly trees jutted out from the earth in

gnarled trunks, but it was otherwise uniform all the way to the mountains.

A man in a fine suit was waiting for them when Kol pulled up into the long driveway leading to what seemed like a garage.

"You'll have to take it this way." the man said, and pointed them further down another dirt path that curved and fell away the further it went out. "You'll find your clothes and rules there."

As they went down this path, they could see one of the great harvesting machines in a neighboring field, an oblong factory on wheels that also watched them, curiously, as they drove by.

After parking, another man, also in a suit, was there to greet them. He motioned them towards a small wooden shack where many bundles of clothes were neatly folded. Some simple white linen tunics and wide-brimmed hats were waiting for them by the side.

"You'll need to remove any implants. Ocular attachments, any kind of external stimuli are not allowed on the premises."

"Why?"

He huffed and brushed aside Kol's question.

A case was provided for Starline's oculars, while Kol's auditory and tactile sensory upgrades were more casually put

aside.

"Change now." the man said.

Stripping off their clothes and putting on the peasant garb, which hung loosely over their bodies, the man directed them to walk back up the hill.

"That'll take 20 minutes, and there's not a damn tree for shade."

"You're welcome to quit." he said.

Starline tapped Kol on the shoulder and they started walking. The march back up was longer than the drive, and the both of them were red-faced and sweating by the time they reached the villa. The same man who first directed them was still there, sitting under a parasol. He had a pair of baskets ready.

"Take one for each, go out into the field. You can't miss it." he said. The baskets were of heavy woven rattan, and itched.

They continued into the fields. The villa was a thin crescent shape with a long central bar ending in a half moon. The path Starline and Kol took did not bring them close enough to make details, but the dark shapes of people could be seen lounging on the side.

There were other workers in the field. 20 or 30 spread

across, their wide brimmed hats covering their faces. An overseer strummed a guitar and looked at them as they settled in. The vines were thick and the grapes were plump. Small skittering robots darted between their feet and looked up at Starline with eyes that caught a part of the sun and blinded her.

After an hour the overseer stopped strumming.

"All right, let's move. Closer to the villa." he said. Starline looked at her fingers, which were already stained purple.

Nearing the villa, she and Kol could see the people on the balcony more clearly. All of them were suited, some were staring intently, others had drifted off into their own net connections. Servers in loose, finely tailored smocks carried wine around smaller baskets and offered them up to the guests. All the while it was hot, and flies gathered in droves.

After another hour of picking grapes under while the people of the villa watched, lunch was called. The overseer set out a long blanket and another pair of workers arrived from the villa with cups and bowls. A third and fourth soon arrived with a bucket of water and a large pot of noodles.

Starline got up and started to walk towards the villa.

"Where are you going?" the overseer said.



"I need to take a piss." she said.

"No one goes to the villa. Go behind the tree." he said.

"Are you serious?"

"If you want to get paid, you go behind the tree."

Kol gave her a piteous look and she grumbled as she went behind the tree. When she came back, the rest of the group had split into the same cliques. Kol was alone and waved to her. A smell wafted over from the villa: charred meat, wine, cheese being just barely burnt over a fire.

"How much have we made so far?" she asked

"Well, it's 15 an hour, we've been here five hours--"

"Goddamn."

"Hey, we needed this. Grant's pulling a double shift. I appreciate you coming out with me."

She drank her water.

"You don't seem happy."

"I was thinking of bashing Promark's head in with a rock."

A worker came running from the villa with a note in her hand. The overseer looked over it and raised his hands.

"We will have music while we work."

Four more workers came from the villa, each carrying an instrument. There was a flute, another guitar, a drum, a violin, and an assortment of dogs with them, scruffy jack russells and

yorkies, and a young child for each.

The band took their positions at the edge of the cluster of workers and started playing. The children and dogs ran and played between them. Some of them picked grapes, others wrestled in the dirt. There was little laughter, and under the hard sun, even running became strenuous.

"In time with the music." the overseer said.

Starline and Kol shrugged and tried to keep in time with music. One of the children grabbed Starline's hands and danced with her a moment, though the glare was too harsh, and she had to break and raise a hand to shield herself after her hat fell off. Eventually the overseer started bellowing something out in Italian, or possibly french.

"With me now." he said. He yelled out a simple verse and the grape pickers repeated in turn. This went on for a full hour until every part of themselves felt worn out and raw. Their throats hurt, their legs and arms were burned red, their hands were stained purple, a layer of dust covered everyone so thickly that they seemed like relics that had been left in the attic too long.

By sundown the people on the balcony were thinning out. The children and the dogs were resting under one of the scraggly trees and threw grapes out into the field.

"Enough, day's over. Pay has already been forwarded to you accounts. Give your clothes back at the villa and go home." the overseer said, his bombastic accent gone.

"What do we do with the grapes?" someone asked.

"Keep them. Throw them. You did your jobs."

There were showers back at the villa, though only for a few seconds. Starline could still feel the dust deep in her hair, and Kol still had the greasy patina of sweat over him.

When they walked back to the garage and mounted Kol's scooter, they could see lights turning on by the villa. Faint music was being carried on the wind.

"Are you tired?" Kol asked.

"Yeah." Starline's eyes drooped. "But we can't sleep here. We'll lose our spots back home in the morning."

"Damn." Kol said. He shivered. As they passed the villa, the same harvester bot looked at them with the same intense curiosity, having worked unceasingly throughout the day as it would into the night.

#

Starline knocked on the door twice, then three times. It cracked open and a pair of beady eyes looked at from a dimly

lit room.

"Sup, Star."

"Martha."

There was a brief shuffling sound. The door opened and all 5-foot 1-inches of Martha was standing in front of her, holding a small brown paper bag. The smell coming from the room was rank.

"Fertilizer. I make my own now. Better than the fabricated stuff."

"You should patent that, get out of this business."

"I do it for love."

"That's what they tell you, that's how they get you. Where's this going?" she said. The package had heft to it, despite the softness underneath the brown paper wrapping.

"East Harmon, 1153, House number seven."

"Number seven, gotcha."

After refusing an offer to stay and smoke, she departed down the streets. Martha's house was on the edge of the hutches, by a bohemian street of coffee shops followed by more coffee shops.

She pinged Kol for a ride when she reached the corner.

"Maybe wait for a few minutes?" he responded.

The sun was hot, but the air was clear for the time of day.

She looked up the address and formed a route for Kol.

Mecklenburgh was the connector to East Harmon, a gate town. Mecklenburghers and East Harmonites, names that sounded like they belonged in a medieval compendium. The 42 was the rail line that cut through the bay with an underground tunnel and rose up to the center of the Mecklenburgh. She brought up a map of the city. The arteries of buses, trains, the auto-lanes for AI cars, the veins for foot and bike paths, and her own special routes, the green ways, through construction sites, backyards, garages, eco-preserves and hub spaces.

A long route opened up to her. There was a green line that ran straight through Mecklenburgh and into East Harmon, by her own bike path. L&56, the edge of the Hutches. Running down the street was like passing through a time portal, the world transmuting from rotted brownstone and iron shutters to glass storefronts and palm trees. Logos bombarded her, and she knocked herself in the head as part of her filtering plug-in stopped working.

One moment she was walking down the sidewalk, a blink later she was strolling in a field of daisies with a snowy peak in the distance and a tagline telling her to taste the crispness of Tannhauser American Blonde. Other pedestrians walking nearby were incorporated into the ad. A portly man was given a

Bismarckian mustache and pickelhaube. A tan woman pushing a cart was given a pair of large breasts and blonde pigtails that clashed against the streaks of green dye in her hair. A chipper lady kept yelling in her ear.

Guten tag, fraulein! Life is rough in the city, yah? So much work, so much running, running, running. And so hot under the midday sun-!

"Block." she said.

When Kol came zipping up with Georgie, the air was becoming stale and dusty. People were coughing.

"East Harmon? This is a rush job?"

"Not really."

Zeri pushed Georgie on at a quick pace. The little scooter cut corners, sliced through the cramped spaces. All the tangled roads and boulevards were nothing, Georgie was like the wind, wild and untamable as any machine could hope to be, its half-mind joyously at one with the desires of its master. We're at point A, Georgie. How fast can you get me to point B?

The smell of the restaurants and of city life gave way as though held back by an invisible wall, replaced by lilacs and seawood. Scrubbers were hard at work overhead, like long, white plastic eels, catching every little piece of particulate and holding it in themselves until called back to base. There were

still walls on either side, but up ahead they could see greenery and the sound of water.

Emerging on the other side they were in the green zone of Mecklenburgh. A sign overhead welcome people into the town with the words "Harmonious Living".

Some of the residents of Mecklenburgh walking along the sidewalk paused to stare as Georgie zoomed by. Starline craned her head to catch their looks. Some of the houses she could look into, huge foyer windows that made one think of a colony of exhibitionists.

There was sculpture, art, mandatory full simulation rigs, some of them playing, scenes from westerns, space operas, and mundane romances. There were sleek cars in every driveway, some classics from when gas was still in fashion.

Reaching a quiet intersection, Kol leaned back to yell in her ear.

"I used to live here. I ever tell you that?"

"A few times, yeah."

"See that house?" he yelled, and pointed to a big cubist nightmare with a lawn shaded by tall elms.

"Yeah."

"It used to be a set of apartments. Real shithole. I hated when they tore it down. That building had been standing for

nearly 150 years and they tore it down. What a waste."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be." he said. A moment later he stopped Georgie.

"What's wrong."

"Road's cordoned off. Georgie's a little nervous on these roads."

"You're not coming with me?"

"Hey, I got you this far. It's not a bad neighborhood."

Before leaving she stopped to hug Kol, who after a moment chose to hug her back.

"Get out of here." he said, and he and Georgie took off as a pair of police drones hovered into view. Not approaching, just hovering and watching.

Walking alone, she reached the opposite end of Mecklenburgh. It was where the people of the campuses and the embassies lived. The gates into East Harmon were open, flanked on either side by a pair of gargoyles stolen from another part of the city. At one point they'd welcomed visitors to the city's largest park. Further up ahead, a long, white highway was patrolled by featureless, silent vehicles. She took the first step into East Harmon.

It was the automated world. Every surface was coated in a material that allowed electricity to flow into those machines



designed for it. Because of this, there was a thick hum that subsumed all over sounds. Starline coughed as she dashed between rows of hedges, the sound seemingly muffled by the lack of anything else but rushing air and power.

The houses were alien in construction, many of them with sweeping facades, smooth curves that made them look more like the abstract sculpture of giants than homes. Except for one.

Her own house, a house she remembered so much more vividly than even the dingy apartment where she slept, was nestled between a sand dune and a cluster of weeds.

She checked her ad blocker to make sure it was real.

It was the delivery spot. She knocked on the door twice before it opened automatically, showing no one there to greet her.

"Uh, I'm here to deliver this." she said. There was a voice from further in the house.

"Is that it?" a woman in jeans and tshirt ran down from the stairs. She was an energetic woman, unnaturally white teeth.

"Are you from-?"

"Martha's."

"Awesome. Well come on in. Come in."

The inside of the house was a mix of the eclectic and the popular. Small vinyl toys, cat scratches everywhere, a few

discarded boxes of chinese food, a stack of unmailed packages next to a large, monolithic fabrication machine.

"It's really alright. I just need you to authorize my payment and then I can be out of your hair."

"No, really, stay for a while." she said. "You want a drink?"

Star could see the woman's glass liquor cabinet. A number of bottles with illegible names were on display.

"If you don't mind."

"I'm Lucy, by the way."

"Starline."

She took a seat on a high chair in the kitchen. Stainless steel, marble, and rare wood made it feel like a high-end furniture store. It was all too perfect.

"Did you see the outside of the house?"

"What?"

"I have a little program set up. It changes the appearance based on what people want to see."

"Interesting." she said. Lucy handed her a small tumbler of whiskey. It burned going down. Lucy started unwrapping the package.

"It really is nice, the little system Martha has set up."

"Yep. Well, older methods still have their place. Wouldn't

want a crackdown in this part of town. Revoked fabrication rights. What a mess."

"Yeah."

There was an awkward silence between the two.

"I am jealous of you, you know. You get to be free, no real rules, no having to come into work on Mondays, just living the dream. I wish I could do that." Lucy said.

"It's got its ups and downs."

"No responsibility. God, have to wake up at 7 in the morning just to get to work on time. Bullshit."

"Hmm."

"And you know, there was a movie I used to watch. Real old thing. It was about these kids who ran away from home, from Ohio to Los Angeles. I remember thinking, that looks like the most fun thing in the world. They spent their days on the beach, sometimes their nights, too."

"I've spent nights on the beach."

"Really?" Lucy said. Her eyes lit up.

"It was alright. A little sand would get in your pants."

"Oh." Lucy said, her voice deflated.

"Well, can you authorize payment?" Star asked.

"Oh, sure, sure." Lucy said. They opened a small connection between them and the digital signature was signed.

"You know you could stay, chill for a while. I gave Martha a big order, you could take some if you like." Lucy said. She flashed a kind of innocent smile at Star, and she felt herself become weary. Her legs hurt from walking, and a glass of water had appeared before her, from when she could not remember.

Star looked around the house. It was large, with space that left room to run, to leave things around. Small robots cleaned up after her footsteps, and there was a strong desire in her to lay her head down and go to sleep. But looking at Lucy, her body, her fine clothes, the smell of flowers and incense pumped throughout the house, the sensation that just beyond the door there was a world that constantly watched and waited.

"No, I think I'll go." she said. "But thank you for your offer."

As she left, she could feel the eyes of East Harmon on her. She checked her account. The payment for the delivery was sufficient, and she walked easier. The police drones from the edge of Mecklenburgh hovered nearby, and she hurried along.

But, before she fully made her way back to the hatches, she snapped a few pictures and clips, including one of Lucy's house, whose imaging software made it appear as a pixelated, unrecognizable blur.