

### *Chapter 1.3*

energy sink

A modest townhouse on the outskirts of Lockheed Martin's twenty-nine district. Montana region—North America.

Imogen slept all day again.

After being awake just an hour she's finding it hard to maintain awareness. Slipping in and out while watching feed dramas, catching thirty seconds of plot for ten minutes' nap.

She started getting sick around the same time as her husband. Chronic fatigue hardly seems noteworthy after being around chronic pain. Imogen knows that there are worse things than being tired.

A strong coffee sits cold on the table within arm's reach but untouched.

On the feed another love story goes awry.

white glow

In the dairy aisle of an all-night market Imogen struggles to read the expiration date on a liter of milk, eyes burning.

She approaches the bored kid behind bulletproof glass up front.

"Excuse me, can you tell me when this milk expires? I don't have my lenses."

He takes it from her through the slot, glancing at its label before swiping the carton.

"You've got a week. It's the seventeenth."

"And a pack of caffeine filters."

"We're out of caffeine, regular?"

"Ah, just give me some caf pills and a pack of that coffee-flavored Wrigley's."

spread thin

"What kind of shit is that?" Imogen demands of her home feed station, tapping 'Accept' again.

'Error in field \*Physical Values [43879gj.tar.kru]'

"You're a fucking dick." She sips at an espresso, still glaring at the floating display. "I already know it works dicklover, look out a goddamn window."

After scrolling up, re-checking the columns, she tries 'Accept' once more but it can only error.

"Log out," she tells it, slowly getting to her feet. "Infotainment, local news."

Imogen collapses onto the couch, watching the news a moment before drifting off.