Meek and Obedient You Follow the Leader Down Well-Trodden Corridors, Into the Valley of Steel

Slideway doors part for me in aluminum curtains of courtesy made technological sneer. Scanners caress my left eye, softest invasion, feeling the iris; somewhere, somehow, a computer chuckles softly to itself and shakes hands with a cohort as they trade another ten bits of some human's silver and another piece of a human's soul.

The slideway fares went up again today.

Weight over my clavicle reminds me to keep moving, head down and trudging, good boy. Shoes not too worn, clothes not too flashy or too dirty. Down-downtown, underneath the towers of industry and capital made pillars of money and sin. The bag I carry on my back is large but not unusual; the utilitarian clothing I wear not out of place. Here, we Morlocks trundle to and fro without speaking to each other, in fear of camera and of mike and of mighty Eloi paycheck-cutting wrath.
The iris in my left eye is not my own. It is plastic.

I make it into the food court beneath the Reserve Bank Spacescraper. Thousands of people, rushing, rushing, to and fro, up and down. Escalators, elevators, duramex tile underfoot a nondescript grey matte shedding scuff marks with the determination of the designed servant into nanobot channels in between. During the short nighttime lull, the floor will seem to creep slightly as the nanogrout slowly flows the daytime grime across the floor to dispose of it into the walls.

Next to the faux French bistro number four there is a utility closet. The door will not open without the touch of my right palm, identity speaking to another machine which tracks my movements. Suspicion, everywhere, a human near the precious cleaning supplies. Comforted by its theft of me, it grumbles back on its track and closes behind my back, lulled by the skin vein pattern on my hand that I bought from an organlegger in the slideway station underneath the Medplex district. The flesh there has begun to decompose and I strip it off my hand, wiping my own pink newborn skin down with a moist towelette stolen from a rack.

Open the bag.

Inside, the fruits of many a day and many more nights. Black plastic cylinders, hard to find in these paranoid times; ripped from colorful plastic boxes bought in drugstores carefully spread throughout the city. Small bits of electronics taped to them, single LEDs and tiny buttons chipglued to their outer shells. These into belts around my waist and chest; hundreds, ready, all.

Larger packages, easier to find. Hanging from my belt loops. Rings dangling.

Coils of climbacord with selfsetting pitacks.

Gloves.

Mask.

Shoes removed, replaced with gripsole boots in Utility Industrial Yellow Stripe - stolen from a pole-climber's truck those weeks before. I could run up walls with these. I know; I've tried, in those few far off spots where there are no cameras to see.

The lunch hour is almost past. I check my watch. The closet I have chosen has one prime advantage; it has two doors. With my tools readied, I open the rearward one and step out into the maintenance corridor. I know there are eyes here, but unless I have made more mistakes than I have thought, I should look mostly like a maintenance worker, stepping from a maintenance closet. The supervisory AI may try to contact me to determine what I am doing, but of course I cannot respond; that should waste enough time.

I set off down the narrow grey-paint cinderblock hallway to the bouncelift at the end.

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FEDRES:TOWER1/PHYSSEC ALERT - General query all subframes - bouncelift seven alpha in upward use, identify occupant. Security Subroutine ((theta nine)) sends.

Occupant unknown. Physplant Subroutine Liftcon sends.

Occupant unknown. Security Subroutine AccessCon sends.

Occupant unknown. Security Subroutine EmployeeTrack sends.

Occupant unknown. TowerAdmin Subroutine VisitorSched sends.

Occupant unknown. Physplant Subroutine ContractorTrack sends.

Occupant unknown. TowerAdmin Subroutine LesseePersonnel sends.

URGENT::SECURITY ALERT:: - General security alert, intruder warning bouncelift seven alpha. Still rising, indicated destination Tower level One Seven Seven. Lockdown in effect levels One Seven Five through One Seven Nine, sector Alpha. City security notified. Security Subroutine ((theta nine)) sends.

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The door won't open for me at the top. That's to be expected. I don't exist.

Driver's licenses weren't good enough. Fingerprints weren't good enough. Passwords? Even when you could get someone to use a relatively strong one, if it was strong enough to be effective the human brain can't remember it - so they had to write it down. Physical tokens? Stealable. The start of the century, computing was offering humanity so much, and our paranoia and greed was threatening to take it all right away again. The the planes hit the towers, and the shit hit the fan, and it all went into the toilet. Laws, rules, regulations, investigations, purges, surveillance, violations, you name it. Sarbanes-Oxley, DHS, FBI, NSA, AT&T, a partridge in a pear tree and Tom Swift and his Secret Microphone - all of them were out to fuck us at the drive through.

Two-factor authentication? Not enough! Three-factor authentication? Better, but which three? I don't even know who invented the damn things, but they're called Mitsui-Klein Encapsulations. Everybody calls them MitKlein Bottles. They're in our heads.

Three factors. One? A password, or passphrase, or something you think of and keep to yourself. Your secret code. The second? A codekey held by the organization or system you wanted to authenticate to, just like certificates of old. The third? The MitKlein Bottle. Once in your head, implanted, it would 'read' the mental image of your secret phrase when you thought about it, integrate that with its own unique molecular signature, and combine it with the signature of the codekey being broadcast from whatever you were trying to access. If all three matched - bam, here's your ATM receipt, thank you for playing, your tickets will be waiting at the station. If not, forget it.

The MitKlein Bottle was tiny, expensive and couldn't be transplanted - it was placed under the scalp and used nanotech to 'crawl' inside the braincase - but was guaranteed non-harmful. Sure seemed that way. They've been in people's heads for forty years, nobody's had anything go wrong yet. No green stuff leaking out. No gibbering. They've been upgraded a few times via MRI fields when new methods have been invented, but that's about it - ten minutes in a tech booth and you're good.

I hate them.

I think I'm an anachronism. Taking a package from my right pocket, I begin to pat its contents around the non-responsive door to the bouncelift. The scanner next to the door is constant-on, lurid red laserlit accusingly trying to read my eye's pattern even as it refuses to open the door to me. Somewhere, a computer is trying to figure out who I really am even as it refuses to do what I asked it to do - to simply open the fucking door.

They tell me I'm a throwback because that makes me angry.

The rough quadrilateral of putty is almost complete around the doorpanel, now.

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FEDRES:TOWER1/PHYSSEC ALERT URGENT URGENT Bouncelift seven endangered. Occupant sabotage of egress barrior in progress. Estimate seven seconds to violent event. Evacuate bouncelift area Seven Alpha, levels one seven five through one seven nine IMMEDIATELY. Query: external security force ETA. Query: Occupant identity checks. Security Subroutine ((theta nine)) sends.
Occupant optical scan complete, left orbital. Result inconclusive: Subject Devlin, Phyllis. Age: 67 standard years. Status: Deceased. Right orbital scan incomplete. Security Subroutine AccessCon sends.

HarborGrid Tactical Security enroute. Volantor ETA on deck pad level One Eight Five, nine minutes seven seconds. HarborGrid Street Security in place, lobby level, moving to block access to bouncelifts; additional units responding, varying ETAs to support Tactical at lower levels. Security Subroutine QuickResponse sends.

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Yeah. Up here is good. it's only fifty steps from the blown bouncelift door to the inner atrium wall. The fire axe gets me onto the observation balcony, even as I hear the doors locking down the hall behind me as the damn computers start to panic. I can stand here at the railing and look down the hundred and twenty floors inside the building to the mezzanine deck below, crisscrossed with walkways. This will do.

Pull the first cylinder from my belt, tap the button five times, gently. Wait for the light to glow red, blood red. Arm back. Throw, watch it sail off the balcony, into space, spinning end over end into

nothingness as it moves off towards the far inner wall. I can see people clustered at windows, there; they must know I don't have a gun, their pet computers must have told them.

Fools.

Wait for it.

I can't really see when it happens; there is a faint sparkle, that's all. I can feel it in my skull, though. A slight tickle, no more. There is nothing, for a moment, and then it starts - a slight sussuration, a confused mumble.

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PRIORITYPRIORITYPRIORITY - Electromagnetic pulse detected inside Tower One atrium, approximate epicenter level One Six Two, west wall. Scan records indicate loss of approximately niner-seven humans to detonation. Repeat: niner seven humans lost. Emergency Subroutine OverrideTerrortrack sends.

URGENT URGENT Identify subroutine URGENT identify subroutine and authorization. Security Subroutine ((theta nine)) sends.

Authorization Homeland Seven Seven One Three Five. Subroutine granted supervisory status. Emergency Subroutine OverrideTerrortrack sends.

OBJECTION: Emergency subroutine is not familiar with ongoing operation, standard procedures or sensor interpretation - no human casualties have occurred! Simple Mitsui Klein scanner interference is registering! Security Subroutine ((theta nine)) sends.

Objection overruled. OverrideTerrortrack sends.

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Ha haaaa, they're figuring it out. They're trying to get out of their little feeding box offices, and the doors won't open for them. I can see them panicking, trying to imagine their wife's face for the umpteenth time, pressing fingers to their scalps. It won't help you, you sheep! You don't exist anymore! YOU'RE HUMAN NOW! YOU'RE NOT IN THE SYSTEM ANYMORE!

Throw another ID bomb down the hall towards the oncoming Tacticals. Watch the chaos as they scatter to avoid it; listen to the further chaos as their equipment 'hears' its humans 'vanish' and panics, going inert to avoid being picked up by random users. Curses and shouts float down the corridor, music to me. I place a pitack on the floor, stomp on it and feel the setting charge slap my bootsole as the pitack is driven into the duramex tile. Looping climbacord, I slip it around the vestframe's ringloop and jump off the deck, the dewinder letting me slowly rappel down the inside wall. As I pass, I throw ID bombs in windows, alternating with smoke grenades for confusion.

Thousands of free humans will come out of this building. MitKlein Bottles dead in their skulls, they won't exist to the modern world. Regular EMP blasts wouldn't do it, they're shielded - but there is an attack. I found it. it took years. Years of work. Then more years to figure out how to deliver it.

Disposable camera flash capacitors. Chip transmitters. One LED.

Do you know how long it takes to buy four hundred disposable digital cameras, with flash, without returning any of them for processing, in this suspicious surveillance society without anyone noticing?

Let's just say it takes a certain consumer zen.

Another ten floors. Another hundred freed slaves. The evacuation of the building is in full swing; I can see hordes of people making their way to the lower floors, out onto the mezzanine, heading for the main stairs down to the slideway station. Helpful autodins are rolling in front of the crowd, with it, the AIs guiding those humans they still can see and acknowledge back into the warren. The rest of us, abandoned, up here in the sky.
Meek and obedient, you follow the leader down well trodden corridors into the valley of steel.
But it won't save you. I will. I'm coming for you. All of you.

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Title taken with full acknowledgement and gratitude from the lyrics of the song 'Sheep' by Pink Floyd.