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Day 1

#normal

Sterling Teacher hated this life.

#slogan WHEN YOU'RE DOWN . . . WEAR BLUE REVELATION!

#normal She had hated it ever since she was a small child.

#slogan GINKGO TREE FARMACEUTICALS: YOUR HEALTH.

#normal She knew she was not like other people.

#slogan FREE TRIAL-INDIGO SEX LABS.

#normal And she hated the people she wasn't like.

#slogan GOVERNEQUALITY NORTH HARBOR. GARBAGE REMOVAL IS ON US.

#normal The stream of popshow above, around and below them, across walls, ceilings, sidewalks, trees, on glass, water, grass, skin, on food and toilet paper-it didn't bother other people. #ital They liked it. #normal Or maybe they could ignore it. Sterling did not have that talent. She suffered from a morbid sensitivity to popshow, which in her lifetime had still been called advertising, and everything about it: the flickering lights and colors, the endlessly repeated images, its fatuous humor and moronic sentiment and especially its sublime confidence in its own power to shape her behavior. She could not stand being taken for granted.

#slogan FUNNY FACE GUM . . . BETTER GET SUM.

#normal If popshow had been a person she would have killed it long ago. Instead, she reserved to her stubborn, fanatic, and ultimately malignant self the study of its slow destruction.

#slogan DON'T YOU WANT YOUR FIZZY SAMM'S?

#normal North Harbor was a small city on the Atlantic seaboard. It was also the country's largest producer of popshow. There were ten major popshow agencies in the

downtown area, and Sterling had been inside seven of them. In six, she had engineered enough damage to result in a significant loss of revenue.

#slogan LOLLYWORLD ON-THE-BAY. LOLLYWORLD-ON-THE-BAY. LOLLYWORLD-ON-THE-BAY.

#normal The seventh had been last week, and she was still not over it.

#slogan MY SOUL IS NOT FOR SALE.

#normal "That's a new one, huh?"

Three years of work down the fucking toilet. All because George Mack wanted his Lollynut.

#slogan FREEDOMCHANNEL IS EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW. DIRECT TO YOUR TAP-TAP. LATEST WAR AND WEATHER.

#normal Why the fuck didn't he keep a box of Lollynuts at his desk? How could he just wander away from the security station? She had a good mind to get him fired.

"Sterling, hey." It was a man she worked with, named Cleveland. He pointed to an image floating across the elevator wall. "It's different, huh?"

#slogan MY SOUL IS NOT FOR SALE. #normal She had seen it, of course. She saw more popshow in one day than the brain of Cleveland Eddy, student brand advisor at the University of North Harbor, could process in a lifetime.

"It's interesting, don't you think? Using a black girl. Interesting choice."

The child in the picture was indeed darker than most of the population of North Harbor. "I like it," Cleveland said. "What do you think it's for?"

"How old are you?" Sterling said.

He answered reflexively, "Thirty-nine."

"You're thirty-nine years old, and you don't know what that ad is for?"

"Tell me."

"It's for a product you can't live without."

Cleveland Eddy just looked at her. Then, maddeningly, he smiled.

She had surveilled the building every night for six months. She had hacked into the company's tapnet. She had decrypted digital signatures and cloned keycards. She had memorized fifteen floors' worth of security schematics. Not to mention the expense, which was considerable. All to be damn near busted by a semi-retired jerkoff in the employee kitchenette.

#slogan DELICIOUS! GOLDEN! LOLLYNUTS NOW WITH BLUEBERRIES!!#normal-she wanted to throw something.