For Teresita Aragon, Monday was almost a religious experience. Toothbrush in mouth, she slides past the curtain onto her balcony still wearing night-boxers and muscle shirt, their faded gray matching the sun-beaten wood of the deck. Fog-wet wood, an inbetween kind of damp.

Set on high, balcony with a view over the whole valley, she was princess of fogs, everymorning inspecting her domain. Today’s was weird, a translucent fog almost what you’d get from whipping an egg, filling the bowl between the hills. The sun, creeping up over the east side of the valley, colored the clouds with a light pink wash; opposite the weak sun, on the tops of the hills, was a whole spectrum of light, all shaded with green where it hit the trees.

Re-entering, glancing at her bedroom, still dark: bed and chair and dresser. A Gorman poster hangs kinda half-hearted, tacked to the wall; the night breeze had ripped one corner from a yellow push-pin. A ‘welcome to our family’ from the corporation, but the Santa-Fe thing was no-way her. Now she had some money, hey, time to buy some things? but still she didn’t know what.

The tv flicks itself on pursuing some digital agenda: since she watched that one Xena special, it’d got a Lucy Lawless bug. Big fan, her set. Getting into running gear, stretching, she watched. A promo tie-in for the new Lawless/ Cruise media event. Plot was, they took over the Net. Sure: like they hadn’t already; you checked a phone number and some grabbot got you then probably changed your data company. They showed clips: big network control center Cruise rappelling down; terminals, room-high displays showering sparks like independence day indoors. Only one man, looked like, could save the world and get his woman too. After the clips Lawless finally came out and Tere stops in mid-stretch. She wore what musta been a thousand-dollar soft green cashmere suit and contrasting blouse maybe silk; the suit did something, matching against her red hair, a miracle, and when Tere breathes out again,
Lucy pauses at her chair, bends back, and sits, legs crossed. Flawless, like Olympics: a perfect ten.

Grace. Lawless mustabbeen born with grace, because even if she took classes, Tere would never have it.

At least the green in her running shoes matches her shorts and looks seriously good against her skin; picking up a radio headset in also-matched neon green, with wicked cool bright purple antenna, she’s out the door, getting some pace, heading down Capitol of Texas Highway.

Fast run; downhill was easy, body flowing past long lines of cars, trucks: yellow Beetle gunmetal Mercedes robins-egg blue Miata, jammed together impatient for a change of light. When she runs the cars fade, only her and the track, dipping below highway grade, then just before the temple, going under and across and she was heading back the other way.

Clean. Sheila told her running was clean because you didn’t need anything but your shoes, it was you alone. Like a line of really tight code, classic clean lines. If running was language it'd be swift and powerful: C, Sheila said.

Moving left, uphill: a test; music could set a rhythm. “Radio! Gimme a beat!” But all the soulless thing gave was EmmyLou Harris, singing ‘bout how she didn’t want no song full of heartbreak and desire. Her neither; hmmm . . . radio had presets, they said, but static from the heavens musta fried its little brain into retro-mode. She’d ask Dan, ‘cuz he knew hardware stuff.

After Great Hills Trail it’d be a clear flat run, but she really wanted some edge. EmmyLou had got to the bosom of Abraham . . . if she made her move now, before it churned out Gospel or worse . . . “Radio: disco!” and it went off again; with a thousand stations, someone somewhere in some god-forsaken town would be playing something with a beat. And topping out the hill, she got Meredith Brooks, who needed a lot, real bad. She empathized, but all a girl really needed was a good data-link.

Morning breeze blows cool over her body; pacing herself, noticing things: she picks out a sweet scent, jasmine on May breeze, from the Arboretum, entry all pink marbles and gold lettering. Passing, a Mexican grounds-crew planting pansy displays: purples, yellows and reds. She smells mulch: wood and
earth and cow, lots of cow. Country smell right here in high-money high-tech edge-city Austin.

Heading down Quarry Lake Drive, last lap and the damn radio broke the song and all her rhythm: overtalking her music, “Good morning; you are receiving this call from the office of Miguel Altos. A voice message follows.” And with digital certainty it did, Miguel’s compressed urgency: “‘Teresita: 8am Monday you are on point for the network; conference at 7:30. For you to be on time would be as a personal favor. Try, Teresita.’ Message ends.”

There was that Monday thing again: she shoulda had Mondays off. Contract said, three days a week, she had to be physically in the office, which she figured, meant ‘TuesdayWednesdayThursday’. But some higher power made it, Monday had to be one of them days. So Mondays: reminding her there really was a personal god, who was out to get her. Foster-dad Jimbo had it half-right.

NetSoft headquarters took the whole Stone Quarry area: buildings, lake, forest; would take over the apartment complex too if they could. What with it being a Monday, she makes a choice, takes office time for a lap around Quarry Lake: like a ten foot drop, she guessed, before you even hit water. Then murk. Lakes sparkle or gleam, right? but here it was, just taking the light, filtering it through layer on layer of algal green-browns. She never ran at night, because what would it be like, if she fell? Who knew how far down you’d go?

Passing the edge of the FirstUSA complex: they put maybe a half-million into a recreational area but the signs said ‘posted’ and ‘no trespassing and ‘employees only.’ Which not-USA left her the woods. There shouldn’t be any woods; the whole area was good hill-country limestone and how trees could grow from it? But anyway, the trees were mostly cedar. Back home Bastrop had real soil and real trees: loblollypines. Your basic cedar always looked shredded, like animals, really big wild animals, used ‘em for sharpening their claws. Chris who was Australian but he studied in Italy, Chris called the lake and forest “Inferno and Purgatorio.” Maybe the company had-got a deal on the matched set.

They hadn’t put in paths, and it slowed her down: not roots, cuz how could there be roots? but the limestone itself was uneven, like a quarry dump site. She couldn’t guess why the powers-that-were had kept it: scary at night, too dark for picnics in
the day, also the woods needed birds, especially early morning like this: even just mockingbirds, and it was really strange she’d never seen one. Lydia said it was the fiber-optic cables, giving off poison radiation. Lydia was a graphics designer.

Netsoft corporate hq was three stories, clad in silver-green glass with black-glass center core. Entering, hit by Austin standard temperature, colder than hell, she takes the stairs, two at a time, down to the employee locker rooms. Showering gave her back warmth, and she got to put the IR lamps on full as she changed. Everyone else used the locker rooms at noon; all the secretaries and stuff doing aerobics; some sort of girl-bonding she didn’t get into. In high school they made you wear that perky lycra crap but with small chest and narrow hips, she looked like her little foster sister which was not good if you were sixteen and trying to get a date.

Besides, she was professional staff: Miguel said, her first day: don’t mix. She tried. Tere takes a pair of newly pressed linen slacks from her locker, then a cotton dark-blue front-button blouse. Silver at her neck, ears; she buttons the shirt cuffs, tightens a tan leather belt at her waist. Simple silver buckle: looking good was half of it, and she always looked good. Getting a Liz professional look was eating her paycheck, but damned if she’d ever be anything but perfect.

Taking the elevator up to the grand entrance, Tere looks back, inspecting from above the loading dock facing the back of the building. She called it that but it wasn’t really, it was just where the old quarry-master had cut a ramp, into the raw stone. A path for the ascent of wagon after wagon of limestone, now it just led to the drowned quarry.

Which was gonna lead to quarry-stories: her first all-nighter, coding, Dan came over with coffee, told her about the geek who fell asleep playing video games. Seemed he went sleep-walking; Dan said he’d walked right down the ramp, into quarry lake. They never found his body so maybe he was still walking, lost, asleep or just couldn’t find the ramp up again, that’s what Dan said.

A beep forced her back: the elevator had waited patiently for her to get out; now it was starting to Take Measures. Pushed out, into the foyer before she was ready: that was her.

But then she got stopped, a glint stopped her, light off
marble; light where everything was virtual. It was the IRL 3D display cube; In Real Life always showed off with some ‘site of the day’ which today looked like v.Louvre, and you could see the Venus de Milo and Winged Victory better than in her art history book, ‘cuz here you could walk around ‘em. She’d always wanted to check out Venus’ butt, see if Golden-Age Greeks know about cellulite but guess not: “these women define the ideal of feminine beauty” like the book said, and ideals don’t get lumpy.

The page display stopped, cycled back to the beginning. Had to love IRL: output scaled from thumb-size for bubble-glasses to this kinda thing, and any size you looked there wasn't a one jaggie. IRL compression was edge, even if you needed Net4 speeds, for even a prayer to run it.

Just leaving: oh yeah: page displays don’t glint but this one had, like Venus winking at her. Walking ‘round, looking, closer then shifting: they’d started doing things with light. Layering the image, translucent or opalescent: it wasn’t like a picture any more, it was like something in front of her and the light changed it. Like that Monet guy with his cathedral and, like crossing realities, this thing was doing it too.