

NUMBER 13

A MICRO-STORY BY DECLAN GRAVES

"I love you," Betty Sue cooed, fleshy tentacles wrapping around the sleeping human infant number 13, in family unit 5074, North America, Eastern Coast Region, New Jersey.

"I don't know what we would have done without you, Betty Sue." Sharon stroked the rainbow-hued iridescent fur; the Milk Maid's elongated body rippled in pleasure. "The Milk Maids single-handedly saved humanity."

Baby number 13 sucked contentedly on the plasma-infused, protein-based growth hormone fluid from the Milk Maid's arching tentacle.

"I mean, everyone said humanity was screwed. What with global warming, rapidly declining birth rates." Sharon arched an eyebrow at a rebellious strand of blonde hair fallen from her perfectly coiffed bouffant. "Seriously, who has time for these needy things?"

Betty Sue lowered number 13 into the cradle, gently dabbing a dribble of golden plasma from her puckered lips. Articulated joints retracted into an insectile carapace; a soft hiss of mechanical air pressure escaped with closing metallic vents. Amber eyes with slanted pupils gazed down at number 13, wrinkles creasing the corners of her biomechanoid orbital flesh.

"Thank the gods that trillionaire bitch made it all happen!" Closing the closet door, Sharon scrutinized her perfect image.

"Because of her, no more messy babies in the bellies; it's all Bio-Incubation Pods. No more nursing either! We've got growth hormone plasma for that. If only they could live in a tube till they're twenty, but the needy bastards need touch. But it had to be real, fleshy touch, so she created the Milk Maids. You perfect bio-mechanical hybrids from who knows where!"

"Don't wait up!" Sharon called out.

Looking down upon number 13, Betty Sue softly cooed a lullaby in her native tongue, "milka terra, tirera gwana."

Number 13 opened her once-green eyes, now insectile-amber, and giggled.