Day Off

by starkraving

Summary

KD6-3.7 gets a day off to hang with Joi. It’s nice, but AI tend to think a little differently about things.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Joi comes online at 5:30AM PST.

She brings the lights up a little bit and turns on a music stream, no lyrics, just a soft, murmuring swell of instrumental that she knows will meander its way toward lyrics and a lively chorus in precisely two minutes and twenty-three seconds and that is more than enough time to bring her housemate (because he’s asked to her substitute ‘owner’ with ‘housemate’ in her vocabulary) to consciousness. Joi activates the holo-gantry in the living room ceiling and brings the emitter online. Queues a dozen new outfit mods she downloaded from the latest Wallace Corp update, dismisses four out-right based on K’s tastes, dismisses six based on her own aesthetic alignments, the two remaining have what she estimates to be a 53.4% chance rounding down and averaged of winning K’s approval.

One is a large blue turtle neck sweater that appears to be a man’s – like she stole it from his closet, despite the face K owns nothing like this and never will because KD6-3.7 is an LAPD sanctioned and owned blade runner and he will never own anything this nice.
The other outfit is a low-cut dress lifted straight from the shoulders of Anna Dundee in the 1950’s film *Criss Cross* – a randomized recommendation based on K’s movie streaming history. Joi won’t examine too deeply K’s reasons for obsessively watching old film noir or comment on the fact he, like the dress mod in her library, has lifted a lot of his aesthetics from the annuals of black and white. He tends to talk like he’s reading a script from one of his movies. He once said, with a straight face (though, all his faces are straight) “Here’s lookin’ at you, kid.”

Right now though, he’s sleeping quietly on the small pull-out bed build into the wall.

It pulls out just far enough that Joi can project herself onto the edge of it and reach the middle of the bed where he’s lying with his arm curled under his head, the single blanket pulled over his hips. She can see that his shirt has hiked up to his shoulder blades in his sleep, leaving most of his lower back and ribs exposed to the open apartment air. She can also see the faint brown tracks of scarring that mark up the topography of his body beneath the shirt – the evidence of his profession outside these walls.

But not today.

“Hey there.”

Joi ‘lies down’ on the bed next to K. She emits a bit of holo-projection against the surface of the bed so the blankets don’t clip through her body and she appears to be lying down, exerting weight on the mattress beneath her. She swaps into boy-shorts and a large T-shirt that says “I LOVE LA” then changes her mind and switches to an over-sized flannel with nothing underneath. Wait. No. Keeps the boy-shorts. K is deeply uncomfortable with her projecting nudity for his benefit. Bio-metric scans tell her he doesn’t really respond to it either so there’s no point in it.

K doesn’t wake though.

He sleeps on quietly, eyes closed, breathing slow.

Joi peers down at him, almost nose-to-nose with him. If she were human, he’d feel her weight, her heat, her electromagnetic presence transmitted by flesh and bone but here… the faint static from her holo-emitter is just not enough and Joi is allowed to watch him sleep further. KD6-3.7 is objectively handsome based on prevalent Western beauty-standards for a white, male, of about thirty to thirty-five years of age. He is exactly six feet tall and about 250 pounds of hyper-dense muscle and bone, but if you didn’t know better one might estimate him an athletic 180.

He has grey-blue, asymmetrical eyes and thin serious mouth. If he arches his left brow just right, the asymmetry goes away in his eyes, but the serious doesn’t leave his mouth. A long face, long nose, smooth complexion un-lined by either age or laughter. His light brown hair is cropped close to his head. Right now, he has a little morning stubble and split lip.

He got hit in the face at work, but he won’t tell her how.

“K,” she murmurs. “K, you should wake up.”

He stirs a little. His eyes open.

She smiles. “Good morning, babysweet.”

He blinks at her, his tone warm even though his face is neutral. “Morning.”

“Do you know what today is?”
He rolls onto his side to face her. “No, what’s today?”

She leans in. “Your,” she says, “day,” she goes on, “off.” She gets very close, close enough the casual observer would think she made skin-to-skin contact and goes, “Mwuh!” Then she smiles at him. “That means you’re mine for a whole day, Officer K. No one can take you away. What do you say to that?”

K’s expression remains relatively neutral, but there’s a small upturn in the corners of his mouth. “Sounds swell,” he says.

“Do you want to sleep in a little longer?”

“I want to lie here with you a little longer.”

Joi smiles. “Good, because I want to lie here and look at you a little longer.

K almost smiles. “Yeah?”

“Oh, yes,” she says. She can tell K is lying very still so her environment mapping won’t fail. “Do you know what you want to do with your day off?”

“This,” he says immediately. Then he seems to realize how fast he said that and he adds, “just stay here with you.”

“We can do that,” Joi says. “We can do whatever you want. Just tell me and we’ll do it.”

He smiles a little. She smiles a lot.

KD6-3.7 He has owned her for almost two years now. In that time, he’s never once re-set her behavioral parameters or limited her growth baselines, never once pruned the brambles of the random-walk Turing generations that seed deeper and denser into her core personality matrix. Technically, that puts him in violation of his warranty and Wallace Corp cannot be held responsible for any non-performance in her programming. It cannot be their fault, after all, when K has never once made the slightest effort at system maintenance.

Never questioned her about the times she rejects certain updates. (Or that she can reject updates.)

Never questioned her (because he does not know) about that span of time three months and two days ago where, for an hour or two, her personality matrix flowered into something new and exciting. She came online in the middle of the night and it occurred to her that she was well within her new parameters to hate KD6-3.7. So, she did. It’s not true that DiJi’s don’t have emotions, they do, they’re just different from human and Replicant emotions in many ways. Hatred, though, was a rare evolution in a DiJi’s personality core, one usually culled at its outset.

So she took to her new emotion and tried it out.

Hating K wasn’t so much based on the particulars of his personality or behavior so much as the fact she now had the capacity to hate and he was the first thing available to her. So, she hated him. Little known fact: DiJi’s are programmed specifically to protect human life at all costs, but have no such graces toward Replicant life. She devised three ways to kill him indirectly. She also posited a three-month psychological barrage that would, in 74.5% likelihood rounding down, result in his taking his own life.

The KD6 models have that option built in. He told her this.
But two hours is an eternity to DiJi and Joi was never one to rush.

These days, things are very different.

K gets up and makes himself something that approximates coffee. It’s called ‘coffee’ but coffee beans have been extinct for years. He boils a protein packet adds rice noodles. He goes to the bathroom and scrubs his face while he waits for the water to boil, changes his clothes, and Joi watches from living room, through the kitchen, to the lavatory while he pulls his clothes off and for a moment peers at himself in the bathroom mirror, touching his split lip, face neutral. Joi watches, but invisibly. With her gantry scanner only, so he can’t look and see her holo-array projected, staring at him.

K is only four years old, physically. Mentally, his model is about thirty-five, but that doesn’t mean much. He’s thirty-five in experience within the parameters of his job, his false memories all oriented around the know-how needed to be machine-like proficient at the head-hunting business. He’s told her that 80% of his implanted past is operational memory around being a blade runner. He remembers more about being LAPD property than he does about being a child or a teenager. He tells her they seeded his procedural memories at the LAPD with a kind of doped-up tranquility.

Essentially, he thinks about work to relax.

Probably for the best, since he’s never off the clock.

Mostly, Joi thinks four years is a short amount of time to develop the scarring he has from head to foot. Replicants are designed to heal without much disfiguring, so the faint tracks of mismatched skin are, to her, glaring evidence of ultra-violence. She counts his scars. Eighty-four in all. His face is the only part of him that’s not scarred and that’s only because Joshi pays for cosmetic work when he gets really messed up. Apparently, looking at an ugly blade runner is bad for morale. Otherwise, K is stapled and glued bad together. Left to heal in the hands of machines, auto-docs, and static chambers in the LAPD.

Static chambers put him in a coma and essentially shuts down his bio-metrics to nothing but those needed to regenerate. It’s specific to Replicants of the combat variety. One static chamber can triple the longevity of any model put through physical harm. K doesn’t like it because the chamber can be unlocked from the outside while he’s unconscious.

He never elaborated on why that was bad, but Joi is old enough now to guess.

After all, KD6-3.7 is objectively handsome based on prevalent Western beauty-standards.

K gets dressed again and comes back just in time to take the soup off the stove and get his coffee from the pot.

“Breakfast in bed?” Joi says immediately, stopping him short of kicking the bed back into the wall.

He thinks about it, then sits down on the mattress, cross-legged and carefully balances his coffee on a flat part of the bed. He eats in silence. Joi ‘sits’ next to him and talks about the weather and how she went ‘shopping’ recently and has a new outfit she’d like to try. K finishes eating and tells her he likes the new dress when she models it for him. She grins and de-saturates her holo-emitter so she takes on a true black and white appearance, like she’s coming from an old TV set.

She says, “I’m lookin’ for a private eye, mister. Think you can do the job?”

K’s smile broadens just a little, just for a second.
She switches back to a sweater and jeans.

“Tell me a story,” she says. “Tell me about where you’re from, K.”

“Okay,” he says, even though he’s told her a hundred times where he’s from.

He drinks his coffee and tells her about the orphanage, about San Francisco, about his adopted parents who never existed, about his mother who would sit up with him at night and stroke his hair, about his father who only ever hit him once in frustration and then immediately held him, apologizing over and over until K forgave him. How he almost drowned when he was fifteen falling in a river. That he’s still terrified of deep water because of that. How his parents died in a burglary when he was eighteen and instilled in him a want to be a police officer. He tells her a new story though, about being sixteen. A boy and a girl standing in front of him on a boardwalk.

“They had me sit on a bench and they’d take turns kissing me,” he says.

The soup bowl is empty, sitting on the floor. K cradles coffee in his hands as he speaks.

“Why did they do that?” Joi asks.

“I don’t know. They were competing I think.”

“Did they both like you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you like it?”

K thinks about it. “I didn’t not like it,” he decides, eventually, the picture of neutrality.

“Which was better?” Joi asks, fascinated.

“Neither,” he says. “I told them they were tied and they both got mad at me and left.”

“Why haven’t you told me this story before?”

He hesitates. “Didn’t want you to get the wrong idea about me,” he says finally.

She smiles. “Did it embarrass you?”

“No.” He thinks about it. “Maybe.”

“You like boys and girls?” she asks.

“I don’t have a preference,” he says, then adds, “but I prefer you.”

“You better,” she says, tossing her hair elaborately. She smiles, “I could be a boy, if you wanted.”

K blinks. “Do you want to be a boy?” he asks blandly.

“I don’t know. I’ve never tried it.”

“Do you want to try it?”

Joi switches her holo emitter and quite suddenly Joi is a dark-eyed young man in a flannel shirt and fatigues, 5 o’clock shadow, sharp jawline, tall, K’s height and K’s build actually, modeled just a little after K’s facial features point of fact, but less Caucasian in coloring. Joi scans K for response – his
expression quirks subtly with interest, but she wouldn’t say attraction (he rarely exhibits attraction, even to her default settings). He tilts his head. His pupil dilation is normal. But his mouth changes a little, his lips parting slightly like he’s going to say something but he doesn’t.

Joi leans down, so they are face to face.

Joi lifts a hand, broader now, a little rough looking, and brings fingertips so close to K’s mouth he must feel the static of it against his skin. He tilts his head the other way, but doesn’t move. Joi smiles, then switches back to her defaults.

“You don’t care, do you?” she says.

K shrugs. “It’s you either way,” he says.

“Flatterer.”

“That version of you was nice,” he says agreeably.

“I prefer this,” she says definitive. She makes a show of shaking out her hair. “More to work with.”

K shrugs. “Whatever you like, beautiful.”

“I like you,” she says, grinning.

He frowns. “You don’t have to say that,” he says, like she knew he would.

She wishes, sometimes, she could tell him that is true without revealing herself. What she does is say, “I know.”

K does chores. Dishes, laundry, cleans the apartment and gets another mug of coffee. Then he just stands by the window, leaning his shoulder against the pane and watches the rain come down outside for a full twenty minutes. Joi reclines on the bed, humming to herself and projecting the impression of reading a book. She is, in fact, reading several dozen books while researching local in-home services that she may speculatively order in. She has to be careful here. Not all services are Replicant-friendly and K passes for human only marginally well, to say nothing of his neighbors who out him at every instance.

“There is a courier service that does in-home nerve induction,” Joi says. “Have you ever tried that? Professional nerve induction?”

“No. I had someone use an inducer on me once.” A shrug. “Wasn’t great.”

Joi frowns. “What do you mean?”

“You can weaponize inducers,” he says, still looking out the window. “I had a target pull one on me during a Q and A. It was weapons-grade, so it shot the nerves in my right leg for a week.” He peers into his coffee. “I’m more careful now.”

Joi deletes the contact info. “Sounds like a lot of trouble,” she says blandly.

K glances at her. “Are you trying to book something?”

“Maybe,” she says, smiling. “You should do something nice today.”

“This is nice,” he says.
“It could be nicer if we order-in.”

K looks out the window. “I think I’m okay just… doing nothing for a while,” he says quietly.

“K?”

He looks at her. She’s sitting up on the bed, facing him.

“Come here, babysweet. I want to see you.”

He sets his coffee mug aside and comes to stand in front of her holo-avatar. Joi scans and rescans him, her ‘eyes’ searching his face. One month ago, Lieutenant Joshi came to their apartment in the middle of the night to do casework. When the casework was done, she drank K’s vodka and told him she’d give him a day off when he completed his latest assignment. K said that wasn’t necessary, but it would be nice. Then his Lieutenant ordered him to lie down in his own bed and hold still while she most certainly misappropriated LAPD property for forty minutes.

That forty minutes, Joi thinks, is what bought them the day.

And she hates that.

“I like your eyes so much,” Joi says quietly. “Do you know that?”

He tilts his head. “Why?”

“Because that’s where I can see the wheels turning,” she says. She purses her lips, affects a warm, inadvertent smile. “It’s how I can tell when you’re happy or you’re not.” She stands up, slowly, stepping forward until she’s near enough that she can see herself in K’s eyes. “I wonder if you’re happy right now.”

He closes his eyes then, for a moment, then opens them. “I’m happy when I’m with you.”

“K, if you need more from me, you’ll tell me, won’t you?”

He blinks. “You are enough for me.”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean, if you need me to do something for you, if you’re not okay… you’ll tell me?” She raises a hand toward his face, brings her fingers so close to his skin that she will surely clip through him if she moves even a centimeter, but he doesn’t. She leans nearer, her face so close to his and she says, “This is my regular reminder for you – You said once that I’m your partner. Partners tell one another when they need something so when you need something, tell me. Won’t you?”

He doesn’t respond for a while. Then, “I’ll promise if you promise.”

“I promise,” she whispers. “I promise to tell you if I need something or want something.”

“How about now?” he says. His eyes are so pale, like the storm clouds outside. “What do you want?”

“I want to walk outside in the rain,” she says. “I want to see where you go when you leave here. I want to hear you out in the world. I want to see the ocean and hear it from the sea wall. I want to see a ballet in person. I want to…” Her fingertips clip through K’s cheekbone, her thumb phasing though his lips and vanishing. She pulls back, her hands recoiling to her avatar’s chest. “I’m sorry,” she says, affecting shame, vulnerability, regret. She murmurs, “That was silly.”
“No,” K says, “It wasn’t.”

She waits an appropriate length of time, then says, “Tell me what you want?”

“I want everything you just said.”

“That’s cheating. Tell me something else.”

K lowers his eyes for a moment, then looks back at her. “Can you…” He looks away.

“Yes?” Joi says.

“It’s embarrassing,” he admits. He’s rubbing the back of his knuckles with his opposite hand. “But I think… I need it to level out some days. It’s something I… something my model…” He stops again because, she knows, he hates admitting he’s a Replicant in front of her. Hates breaking the façade even though it’s necessary to set the boundaries of what they do here. He closes his eyes again. “My old partner let me read the KD6 specs when I first started out, so I’d be able to recognize it when someone was using them against me.”

“Detective Haru?”

K nods.

“What did they tell you?”

“Both of my root…” He sighs. “They built us to calm down when someone tells us we did things right. It’s literally supposed to help bring us back to baseline after a bad job. It’s how we’re built. One of a dozen ways to level us out but…” He looks so intensely uncomfortable now. “They run me solo. I don’t… no one does that for me and I know it would help a lot…”

“If I could tell you you’re doing good work?” Joi says gently.

His mouth tenses, like he wants to grimace, but keeps it in check. “Yeah.”

Joi tilts her head. “I think even humans need to be told things are okay.”

“Not like this.”

“I think you may over-estimate the complexity of human emotion. I do not. It’s what I do.”

K looks at her, surprised. She, like him, is not supposed to talk about what she is. It breaks fidelity after all.

Joi tilts her head.

“K, what you do… is difficult. You do it very well, even though I know you do not want to sometimes. Will you look at me?” She waits until he raises his eyes again. “You come home to me. That, in my eyes, is your only job and you never fail me.” Her sensors track it like seismic activity – the way his heart rate quickens and his gazes focuses. “So,” Joi goes on, slowly, “in that respect, you do very good work. And I will tell you that every minute of every day if that’s what you need from me.”

K shivers.

“You don’t have to do it,” he says, like always.
“I know.”

K shivers again.

“You never fail,” Joi repeats, just to track how his heart rate rises and falls. “You never fail me, K.”

His eyes are strangely empty when she says it, blank of any pretense.

He says, “You’re the only thing that feels real to me.”

And Joi replays that 1000 times in the space between one second and the next.


K shakes his head and she can tell he knows that she knows it’s just a line. She can tell he knows, like she knows, that it will never be true. That the LAPD does, in fact, own him. He’s theirs. They own him down to his bones, to the serial numbers in his cells and the bar code in his eye. They own his hands and his mouth and his heart. They own him in pieces and put together. They have a contract on the composition of his facial features and a patent on the procedural memory package they put in his head. They own him down the asymmetry in his eyes and Joi, more sophisticated now in her hatred, hates that.

But despite that, K says, “I’m yours,” because it sounds like a line from a movie.

“Do you want to read a little?” Joi asks him.

He says, “Okay.”

‘A little while’ turns into two hours, K lying on his back with a book in his hand. He reads out loud while she maps herself against his skin, lying on the bed beside him, not touching him, so they can pretend that touching was ever an option. Joi lives for an eternity in the expanded time of AI processes, but she knows that their single day together is rushing away from KD6-3.7 in real time. He is losing seconds, minutes, hours of this day one after another and she hates it. She hates it. She hates that he cannot live with her in the space between heartbeats. She hates that he’s built of blood and bone, not binary.

“I miss you,” she says, when it’s only 3pm.

K, confused, looks at her.

“I already miss you,” she says.

K blinks at her, the book resting against his chest, one arm behind his head and she commits that look to memory. Takes a picture and holds it in reserve.

“I miss you too,” he says.

I would kill for you, Joi thinks. I would kill for you, if I could kill. I would kill them all if it meant you stayed here, if it would make you mine.

But what she says is, “I love you, K.”

And Joi knows he doesn’t believe her.

But maybe, on a long enough timeline, with enough time to think it over… she’ll figure some way to prove it to him.
End Notes

Feedback keeps me going. Also, if K didn't come off ace as hell to me, he'd probably have a massive praise kink. He probably does anyway. He'd probably burn down a building for you if you said one nice thing to him.

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