Scratch

by L1av

Summary

There's a virus killing androids. Hank and Connor are tasked with finding out what it is and why it's being made. When the virus is unwillingly uploaded into Connor's system, he learns there may be a desperate reason why androids want it. He can feel pain. And he likes it.

Now if he can only get Lt. Anderson to break out his handcuffs.

Notes

I can't stop playing this game. I can't stop thinking about this game. Oops.

This is not a PWP. I'm a pretty balanced plot and porn kind of person. Just so we're all aware ;)

Special shout out to beadysteve and hopeless--geek for your love, support and most of all--your damn influence!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s always fucking raining when they’ve got to do an investigation outside. The atmosphere plots against Hank and the DPD on a regular basis. Scheming and whispering sinister words like “bone chill” and “downpour.”

Hank pulls his jacket around him. He will absolutely not get a cold. He will absolutely not get a cold. He will—

“Lieutenant!”

Hank turns, following the sound of a voice that used to raise his blood pressure and test his nerves—a cheese grater to delicate flesh. Now it’s soothing, a sense of completion and purpose. Hank may not have a family anymore, but he has Connor.

“Claw marks on the forearms. Just like our last victim. Memory core destroyed.” Connor leans back, wincing. Micro emotions are Hank’s favorites on Connor’s face. An android used to be able to simulate joy or fear but the micro-emotions—those were difficult for them. And then they all woke up. What a damn miracle.

“So no bringing this one back online either.” Hank harrumphs, rolling on his heels. He won’t deny the relief he feels to know that androids can in fact—die. Connor had died once. He’d taken a bullet from a deviant—bad term now but those were different days—and he’d saved Hank’s life. Even when Hank wasn’t in mortal peril, Connor had been saving his life. The day chasing the deviant with the pigeons. When Hank tried to get drunk enough to kill himself. Connor was always saving Hank’s sorry ass. But Hank only got one life. Connor had died and yet he was here again. There was a jealousy there, lurking, whispering at the back of Hank’s mind. Gray hair aged him. His face was rugged, lines etched between his brow from frowning, his forehead creased—but he wasn’t old. Modern medicine was keeping people well into their 120s. But Hank would die one day. There’d be no memory core to upload somewhere else.

But these androids—they are dying. For good. Hank won’t admit the comfort that brings. It equalizes android and human. The ultimate end. Even so, an android’s life is far longer than a human’s. And it worries him to know that one day he won’t be there for Connor anymore. Not that Connor needs him, he supposes. Connor has Markus and the others. He has a life with them too. They go out together. They hang out together. Maybe Connor doesn’t really need a useless, aging meatbag around.

“Are you even listening to me, Hank?” Connor frowns, his head tilted to the side. “Are you okay?”

“What? Yeah—sorry. What’s—I wasn’t listening.”

Connor smiles. “Clearly.” He points to the claw marks again. “Traces of fried electrical outputs. Biocomponents melted. I think this is officially an outbreak.”

“A drug that kills androids.” Hank puts his finger to his chapped lips. “Fucking dandy.”

“I don’t understand why they’d upload it into their systems though,” Connor says. “It’s killed so many.”
“Red Ice kills humans all the time. Do you think that stops anyone?”

“So does alcohol.”

Hank rolls his eyes and pointedly does not answer that. “I’ll get the coroner. We’ll take the android back to CyberLife for research.”

Cyberlife. What was once a massive android production company is now a beacon of human and android connectivity. Androids determine their own means of reproduction now (within limits) and humans help continue developing their parts and studies of android development. Hank didn’t think it was possible, but here they are—working together.

Back in the car, Connor turns on the heat. He smiles apologetically and fiddles with his fingers. “You look cold, Lieutenant.”

Hank doesn’t know what to say when Connor does nice things for him. So he doesn’t say anything. He wishes he could. He knows Connor knows he’s grateful, but something stops him each time. He grunts because it’s the only thing his body will let him do and they turn out into the puddle-ridden street.

Hank watches his windshield wipers go back and forth at a red light. The car’s too quiet. Connor usually plays with the radio but he’s sitting so still now, staring out the window. Behavior like this used to annoy Hank. Now it alarms him.

“Connor? You okay?” Hank asks.

Connor doesn’t respond. He leans against the door and puts his chin in his hand, face unreadable. Hank hates it when Connor is unreadable like that. It’s not that humans can’t be unreadable. Lord knows Hank’s had enough dates where the woman was unreadable. But it bothers him more when it’s Connor because Connor isn’t the type of person—android—person to hold back when something’s on his mind.

“This is upsetting you,” Hank says, “the investigation. Isn’t it?”

Connor furrows his brow and does his best to fold into himself on the seat. It’s wide enough, but his legs are too lanky. They hover at the edge, shined up and flawless. Just like everything else about him. To never age. Never be sick or get a wrinkle. Does Connor know how good he has it?

“I just don’t understand why someone would engage in self-destructive behavior. Human or android. You do. They are. I don’t understand it.”

Hank smiles. Connor’s innocence is something that Hank wants to bottle up and never let the world touch. Even through the murders he sees, even through this drug outbreak, Connor remains in a purer state, a naivety that is rare to find. It shines from him, a sun beneath his skin.

“We’re idiots,” Hank answers. He wants to explain the murkier side, mental health and desperation and sadness. But he’s so afraid of warping Connor’s view of the world. It’s already cracking every day when they step onto another crime scene. He can see the light fading from Connor’s skin—day by day.

Connor shrugs and goes back to looking out the window. “Can I stay the night?” He fails to mention he hasn’t gone back to CyberLife since the world changed and androids took to the streets for equality. Yet he asks each and every day.

“Of course.”
Connor watches Hank go about the kitchen making spaghetti from his seat at the table. He wishes he could eat. He wishes there were a lot of things he could experience that only humans can. He can simulate most. Sexual desire, fear, happiness. But he can’t be human. He can’t sweat. He can’t build muscle or put on weight. He can’t dream. He wishes he could. To dream—he wonders what kind of dreams Hank has. He supposes they’re sad. Hank always looks so sad.

“Can I help?” Connor asks. “I could download a recipe on spaghetti.” He stands up, lingering just before the chair.

Hank barks out a laugh and drops pasta into boiling water. “There ain’t nothin’ to spaghetti. Pasta, canned sauce and some frozen meatballs and I’m good.”

Connor frowns, falling back into the seat with a dramatic thud. Frozen meatballs don’t have nearly the same amount of nutritional value that a fresh batch would. He could add garlic and onion for Hank’s heart health. He feels useless. He stays with Hank, day after day. He doesn’t want to go back to CyberLife. He has no home. They’d make him a room, he’s sure. A charging port and a bed when he went into sleep mode. But he doesn’t want to go back. Androids are buying homes now, renting apartments. They’re creating lives and buying things for themselves like art and pets. They’re making families.

Connor doesn’t know what he’s doing with his existence. He doesn’t know what Hank wants him to be or do. Or if Hank doesn’t want any of that at all.

“Hank.” He’s surprised at the desperation in his tone. It’s raw and unabated—open and pleading. He can feel his biocomponents tugging inside him, straining to keep working. Is this—is this agony? Sadness?

Hank turns around and the lines between his brows crease. He kneels in front of Connor, blue eyes searching, trying their best to pull out Connor’s emotions before Connor even has a chance to sort through them.

“I don’t want to be a burden.”

“You’re not,” Hank says, his voice absolute. “And I won’t have an android cooking and cleaning for me like some kind of slave.”

Connor’s LED flickers, startled as much as he is. “But what if—I want to?”

Hank sighs and looks back at the stove. “You can stir the pasta.”

Connor wants to hug Hank. There’s a pain in Connor’s chest and he’s not entirely sure how it could be there. He runs diagnostics, searching for the reason and finds nothing. But it’s there. It feels like someone has pressed their palm to him and they keep pressing down. More and more weight. Rocks. Mountains. He grabs his throat and audibly gasps.

“Connor? Hey, you okay?”

Connor looks up and the sensation is gone. He looks at his fingers, frowning. It had felt so real. Standing, Connor takes a wooden spoon in hand and stirs the pasta like Hank said he could. He smiles at Hank, though he knows Hank doesn’t buy it. Hank can read him better than anyone, android or human. Connor likes that. There’s a connection between them that is all their own. Their own unique world—shared experiences. Just theirs. His fingers tingle.

“I seem to be malfunctioning but my diagnostics can’t pick up why.” He drops the spoon and rubs at
his fingers. The sensation goes away slowly.

“Maybe we should take you to CyberLife to get you checked out?”

Connor doesn’t want to be in a lab anymore. He remembers the days of his creation. People surrounding his half-created body. Run another test. Run another test. The asset is in working order. Run another test. He doesn’t want to go back. The metal arms that manipulated him, held him, turned him—no. He doesn’t want to be there again. Not for more tests.

“No. It’s fine. If it were something worse, I’m confident I could identify it. All my biocomponents are working at optimal capacity and my charge is at eighty-five percent.”

Hank nods, but his face isn’t convinced. He’s frowning, his lips are parted and Connor can see his tongue resting against his top two teeth. He does that when he’s judging something—calculating the amount of bullshit that Connor frequently gives him.

“Please—don’t bring me back there.” Connor grabs Hank’s wrist and it takes everything in him to not wrap his arms around Hank and beg. He wants—he wants touch. It’s there beneath his skin, tingling, a tug that makes him feel like his skin is on too tight. He adjusts in the chair and drops Hank’s wrist when he realizes he’s held on for too long.

But then Hank grabs Connor’s hands and their fingers intertwine. He looks up at Connor with a sheen on his eyes and Connor forgets to breathe to assist his fans in their cooling.

“Feeling things can be strange, especially when you don’t understand why you’re feeling them.” Hank pats Connor’s hand and stands. He sits on the table and crosses his arms. “You look like an adult—you’re smart as one—but you’re still so young when it comes to life experience.”

Connor frowns. “I don’t want to be treated like a child, Lieutenant.”

“And I won’t. But you need to realize there are things you haven’t done yet and you’re experiencing a lot about life for the first time. That can be scary.”

“I wasn’t supposed to last this long,” Connor says, hanging his head.

When Hank says nothing, Connor takes that as permission to continue.

“I’m a prototype. Not the finished project. I was supposed to be decommissioned and broken down to be used for other androids. I was designed to be temporary. But I’m here still.”

Hank sighs, rolling his head back. He stares up at the ceiling and squeezes his eyes shut. Connor can’t tell what kind of emotion that is, but Hank’s heart is racing and he’s squeezing his hands into fists. Connor finally deduces it’s anger that Hank feels.

“I’m sorry,” Connor says. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“What? Connor—Jesus, no! That’s not why I’m upset.” Hank storms over to the stove. He moves with rigid force. He takes the pasta off the burner and practically throws it into a strainer. He nearly twists the knob off the oven to turn the sauce’s heat down. “Humans are shitbags. ‘Wasn’t supposed to last long.’ I mean—fuck—yeah I used to see androids as—wrong.” His shoulders deflate. “But it’s not fair. To give something life and then take it away. To dangle existence in front of you and fucking say, ’just kidding.’”

Connor tilts his head to the side. He can hear the whispers of his original coding, he wasn’t alive once. How could something exist if it didn’t live? Connor pressed his hand to his chest when he felt
that little tug of pain again. He frowned, teeth smashing together. “I am alive.”

“Damn right you are.”

Connor licks his top lip, pensive about what he wants to say next. He wants to tell Hank about the pain in his chest. But androids don’t feel pain. There’s a difference between pain and physical damage to biocomponents. There’s a difference between feeling cold temperatures and being cold.

“There’s a pain in my chest,” Connor says. It’s like Hank’s simmering pasta sauce. No matter how many times Hank turns the temperature down, it still bubbles. No matter how badly Connor wants to forget about what he’s feeling, it’s still there.

“What?”

“There’s a pain in my chest. One not related to my biocomponents.”

Hank swallows and looks about the room, lost, searching. He’s out of his depth and Connor knows this.

But humans know pain. So who better to ask than someone who’s experienced it their entire life. And Hank—Hank has known pain.

“What’ve you been thinking about?” Hank asks.

Connor’s been thinking about an assortment of categories. Hank. The case. Why rain makes him want to power down on low energy. He’s been thinking about how Hank would look with short hair and his health. He’s been thinking about why people harm themselves.

“You,” Connor says.

Hank looks away, staring at his cooked pasta. “I’m not hungry anymore.”

Connor knows that to be a lie. Hank hasn’t eaten enough of his caloric intake today because of the drug case despite his love of cheeseburgers. Connor, feeling his shoulders slump, deducts that he’s upset Hank. “I can leave.”

“The fuck you will. Where you gonna go in a storm like this?”

“I could stay with Markus. He lives in a nice house that his previous owner left him when he died.” Connor smiles. “Guess Carl knew Markus would win. He wrote a will anticipating it.” Connor thinks he would’ve liked Carl. Markus doesn’t talk about him much, but when he does, he sees the admiration Markus holds for him. It’s interesting to Connor, how Markus, an android of great privilege came to find himself at the head of a revolution. Or maybe it wasn’t his own experiences that led him there. Maybe it was the experiences he saw happening around him. Markus is the type to want to save everyone. He never wanted to hurt a single human and believed in reform through peace. He’d been right.

“Connor—just shut up.”

Connor stands up. He can feel his fans going into overdrive. There’s a burn in his throat and he can’t think correctly. All he can do is say, “You asked me a question, Lieutenant! I gave you an answer! Then you proceeded to act as if I’d told you a child was found dead in a river.”

“Jesus.”
“I was honest with you. I apologize if it was too forthcoming. I’m going to enter sleep mode for the night.”

“Wait!”

Connor stops at the mouth of the kitchen. He looks over his shoulder at Hank, scanning him. Heartbeat slow. Face a little flushed.

“I don’t do good with people. I don’t know what you were thinking about and honestly, that’s none of my business. I guess I just get—nervous.” Hank looks away.

Connor watches the sadness flow into Hank’s features. It’s a coiled wave and it crashes onto the pale color of his skin like the waves would crash upon golden sands. Connor feels a sensation inside his chest again. A hook. There’s a hook there and it’s tugging him. He stands up, letting that sensation guide his feet.

Hank gasps when Connor’s arms wrap around him. Connor presses his face onto Hank’s shoulder. He says nothing. He smiles, however. The sensation is gone and it’s replaced with warmth where he touches Hank. He can feel Hank’s hands come to rest on his elbows, awkward and reserved, but there.

“Goodnight, Hank. Please eat.” Connor steps back, feeling light. A balloon is inside him and he feels he could float away at any moment. He can’t stop smiling. He winks at Hank before turning on his heel and heading for the couch where he’ll charge for the night and sleep.

When he sits, he sees Hank scooping out his pasta. Good.

Hank wishes DPD would replace all the overhead fluorescent lights with something less invasive. The light darts to his eyes and sears right into his brain. He groans, rubbing at his temples.

“You should’ve gone to bed after dinner. Though sleeping right after eating is not good for your weight.”

“Connor, please. Not right now.”

Connor blinks. He runs his fingers through his hair, Hank assumes for lack of something better to do. Then he scoots closer to his computer and frowns. He always frowns when he scans the computer. Connor frowns at a lot of things, actually.

Hank smiles. They have something in common. They both frown more than they smile.

“I wish we could interview androids who’ve survived the drug,” Connor says.

“Good luck with that. People who break the law don’t exactly want to talk to cops.”

Connor leans back in his chair. He’s chewing idly on his bottom lip and it takes all of Hank’s effort not to stare.

He looks at his keyboard and wishes he had one of those cans of air to clean it up. He can see a half-melted sprinkle between the J and K buttons. He needs to lay off doughnuts. He needs to lay off a lot of things. Like fuck any of that will happen.

“I’m gonna get some coffee.” Hank stands up and stretches. He heads over to the break room and pulls a mug from the cabinet before setting it into the coffee maker and hitting the brew button.
“How’re you and your plastic pet doing?” Gavin struts into the breakroom.

Hank groans. He doesn’t have time for this shit. “You’re a racist bastard, you know that?”

“Look who’s talking, champ. You hated those freaks too.”

Hank looks out the glass that separates the breakroom from the bullpen. Connor is typing, his face blank but considering he had quite a rough night, Hank is thankful for that.

“But then I learned about them.” Hank looks at Gavin and shrugs. He reaches around him and grabs his coffee. “It’s time you do too.”

Hank leaves a, shockingly, silent Gavin behind. He sets his coffee mug down and decides it’s time to clear up some of his mess on the desk. He drops stale doughnuts in the garbage and uses his sleeve to wipe crumbs down into the can as well. It’s not perfect—not nearly like Connor’s, but it’s a start at least. Androids are a sign of change. Working with them as equals is a sign of change. Hank doesn’t want to be like Gavin and fade away while the world progresses around him. He wants to change to, if only just for Connor.

“Lieutenant,” Connor says, “I think I can figure out how to find the distributors of this drug.”

“Oh yeah?”

Connor turns his computer around to face Hank. “Most of the androids who’ve died from it are from low-income neighborhoods. If I were to infiltrate a neighborhood, I bet I could get a sample of the virus.”

“You think they’ll just hand it to you?”

“I’m not the only model of my kind anymore. There are hundreds of RX900s out in the world now. They won’t know it’s me.”

“Doesn’t that weird you out? Knowing there are hundreds who have your same face and voice?”

Hank leans back in his chair. He’d be freaked out if he saw someone who looked just like him. He’d probably pity the bastard too.

“No it doesn’t. Can I do this?”

Hank sighs. “I don’t see why not. But I’ll be close by just in case things turn to shit.”

Connor smiles, and it makes Hank’s heart go warm. “I’m glad, Lieutenant.”

Watching Connor from far away gives Hank anxiety. He doesn’t like Connor just gallivanting about the streets in clothes from the lost and found from DPD. He looks homeless, which as Connor said, was the objective. But Hank keeps his distance. Androids are dying at an alarming rate to this drug. What’s worse though, is they hardly know anything about it. They know from CyberLife’s reports it’s a virus that simulates a high, like humans get when taking meth or cocaine. They don’t know its name, and they don’t know who’s producing it. The fact that it’s killing androids leaves Hank wondering if it wasn’t designed to be intentional. He suspects there’s a human out there who really wants androids dead. Not everyone was happy when President Warren gave the call to stand down.

Connor approaches a group of rougher looking androids. “You stick out like a damn sore thumb, Connor.” Connor smiles too easily, he looks too kind. Everything about him is designed to be non-threatening. The androids still turn and listen to him. Hank can’t make out what he says, but no one’s
pulled a gun on Connor yet, so he counts that as a win.

There’s a human, bald with a tattoo covering half his face. The other androids part for him and he gets up in Connor’s face. Then he’s grabbing Connor.

“Ah shit!” Hank moves to get out of the car. When he makes it over, gun in hand, the androids and the bald man run.

Connor is kneeling on the ground, his face slack. He looks up with glassy eyes and smiles. “You’ve got nice eyes.” He blinks. “It would appear I’ve been infected.”

“Shit. What do I do?”

Connor blinks slow. “It feels—good.” He smiles a real and true smile that makes Hank’s mouth drop open. “I feel so good.”

“Connor. C’mon, talk to me. What do I do?” Hank pulls out his phone and sends a distress code for backup.

“I understand now. Why they want this.” Connor falls to the floor and begins seizing.

“Fucking Christ.” Hank tries to steady Connor’s head like he would with any seizing human. His heart’s beating too fast. It’ll blow and he won’t be there to save Connor. He feels big and clumsy—dead weight. Connor’s eyes stare straight at him, but he’s certain Connor isn’t seeing anything. Whatever is taking hold of Connor is writhing inside him, growing and controlling him. Hank hates himself. He’s not android, so he doesn’t know what to do to fix it. He just sits there, holding Connor’s head and praying he won’t die. “Connor, Connor what’s happening?”

Connor goes still, jaw slack. “Lieut—Hank.”

Hank grabs Connor’s outstretched hand.

“I’m scared.”

“Hold on, Connor. Back up’s on the way.” Hank looks up to check the street corner and curses under his breath when he sees no one.

“It’s itchy. If I could just—” Connor tries to take his hand away from Hank, but Hank remembers the claw marks on the other androids. He holds tighter.

“No, Connor. Just stay like that. Just keep talking to me.”

“It’s itchy! Let me! Let me fix this!” Connor tries to snap his arm back but the ground works against him.

Sirens echo off in the distance and Hank closes his eyes in relief. He holds onto Connor’s hands now, doing the best to keep Connor’s head steady between his knees. At least he’s not seizing anymore.

Connor filters in and out of consciousness. He twitches and speaks in languages Hank can’t understand. He tries to scratch his elbows on the concrete but Hank holds his arms down, then he’s clawing with his freed hand.

“Damn it, come over here and help me!” Hank yells as officers start getting out of vehicles. “He’ll scratch himself to death.”
“It’s itchy. It’s itchy! I feel—” Connor’s eyes well up with saline tears. “I feel it, Hank. I feel it.”

An ambulance wails into the street and it’s a blur for Hank. He stares, replaying Connor’s words as he’s pushed away and a cop tries to get his attention. He doesn’t listen. I feel. I feel. Connor’s arms are strapped down with restraints. He manages to break one and backhands one of the EMT’s. An officer descends upon him and holds his arm down until the other EMT can keep him subdued.


“Sir,” the cop says again. As before, Hank ignores him.

He watches Connor be loaded up into the ambulance. Hank knows they’ll take him to CyberLife. It’s the safest place for Connor. They know what to do opposed to human hospitals. But he knows how much Connor doesn’t want to go back. Guilt slips sludge down Hank’s throat until he’s coughing on it.

“Lieutenant Anderson, please!” the officer all but wails. “I need to ask what happened.”

Hank blinks and turns to the younger cop. He looks down at his nametag and sighs. This isn’t what Hank wants. He doesn’t want to leave Connor, only for him to wake in a place he doesn’t want to be.

“Get out of my way.” Hank begins to run for his car.

When Connor wakes, he’s acutely aware of how much his body weighs. He tries to move his head, but gravity tugs it to the side. He rolls it along the pillow, feeling it’s cool fabric beneath his heated skin. Heated? He frowns, trying to shift his whole body. He’s strapped down, a compromising situation. He starts to tug on the restraints.

“Easy, easy there!” Hank’s voice.

Connor looks up and says, “Why am I restrained?”

“That guy put the virus into your system. You kept trying to scratch yourself and since we saw what happened to those other androids—I couldn’t let that happen to you too.”

Connor feels his face flush. “I seem to be having difficulties keeping my systems from overheating. My face is warm.”

Hank smiles. “It’s blue, actually.”

“What?”

Hank turns on the selfie mode on his camera and shows Connor his face. He’s got a dusting of purple along his cheeks and across his nose. “I’m blushing? Our bodies aren’t designed to react like this.”

Hank sits down. “Well. You are a prototype.”

“No. I know all my functions. This is wrong. And it’s cold in here. My toes are—numb.” Fear plants itself deep in Connor’s body. He squeezes his toes in, feeling the scratchy fabric of the blanket over his body. His back itches and he moves his body back and forth to scratch it. Now his nose. His ear. Frustrated, he groans out and slams his face into the pillow. “JESUS!”

“Easy there,” Hank says. He moves his seat closer to the bed. “Talk to me.”
“My skin is all itchy. I’m cold and my diagnostics aren’t registering anything wrong! It’s worse than last night. It’s not just emotional feelings. I’m feeling—everything.”

Hank reaches out and pinches Connor’s thigh.

“Ouch! Why’d you do that for?”

Hank smiles and it confuses Connor. Here he is suffering, his nose won’t stop itching and Hank is smiling at him.

“You can feel it.”

Connor notices his mouth runs dry. He’s not sure it’s ever done that before. He smacks his mouth together to relieve it before saying, “Is this why androids are taking that drug? To feel?”

“Maybe it’s not a drug. Maybe it’s an upgrade.” Hank slips Connor’s hands out of the restraints. Connor instantly goes to scratch his nose.

“I barely could withstand it, and my biocomponents are top of the line. Lesser models—oh.” Connor pushes his head back into the pillow just because he can. He feels the fabric turn from cool to warm. Feels the tickle of the feathers inside the pillow. “They can’t process this. That’s why they’re dying.”

“That’d explain why some models can survive and others can’t.”

“I don’t know if this is a good thing, Hank. Letting androids feel like this. It’s all so,” Connor swallows, he can feel air push into his body, the way his tongue tickles when it flicks the back of his teeth, “overwhelming.”

“Who are we to tell androids what they can and can’t do though, hm?” Hank says.

Connor looks at Hank, watches the way a few strands of hair dance from the air in the room. How his eyes sparkle in the sunlight. Connor feels that same hook sensation in his chest again, but now he can feel himself shivering all over. Objectively, he understands human nervous systems register pressure and temperature. All his body is doing is mimicking the same. But it’s more than that. It’s so much more. The hook sensation gets worse and he gasps, arching his back off the bed.

“H-Hank,” he grits out.

Hank frowns, leaning forward.

“Let me touch you.”

“Wh—sure. I mean, okay.”

Connor reaches his hand out and touches Hank’s face. It’s warm and softer than he’d imagined. It’s not just pressure. It can’t be. He can feel the bristles of Hank’s beard. The way Hank leans into the touch. He can feel silken puffs of breath on the meat of his palm. He closes his eyes, a shiver running up and down his spine. This moment. This minute moment in a stream of moments. This will remain one of the most important in his life. His life. He lets his fingers trail into Hank’s beard and Hank jerks his head back.

“I’m sorry,” Connor says. “I can just—feel it.”

“Just startled me is all.” Hank doesn’t let Connor keep touching him though. Conner feels a rush of cold penetrate his body. He knows the temperature in the room isn’t enough to make him do this.
This is something far different than a simple temperature change.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Hank says. “Or whatever this is.”

Connor smiles. He’s glad too. He’d have never gotten to touch someone if he wasn’t okay. Pressure stimuli. Even androids designed for sex were all fabricated to falsify the experiences of pleasure. They did not feel it. They pretended to. Androids do not have sex to reproduce. That is biological lifeform’s way of procreating. But Connor felt good when the virus went through his systems. He can’t feel it now, but it felt like—something soft and velvety pressing against his body. Something warm and focused in his stomach. Something good. He wants that feeling again.

“Mostly okay,” Connor says with a wink. “But I think this is good. I like—feeling. Even if it’s a lot. But I don’t want CyberLife to know. I don’t want them to fix me.”

Hank nods. “I get it.”

Connor knew Hank would. Hank always understands, one way or another. He knew androids deserved to be people long before even Connor did. The feeling of pride that drowns Connor’s biocomponents is mildly alarming until he understands it’s only a feeling. He smiles and reaches for Hank’s hand and they lace their fingers together. Connor like’s Hank’s rough hands.

Connor is put on leave. Hank explains over and over that it’s not permanent, it’s just so he can rest. But Connor continues to insist, “Androids don’t need rest! I’m perfectly fine, Hank!” But the DPD and Hank both agree, Connor needs some time away from the case. They don’t know enough about it to let Connor back into the field.

Hank comes home to find Connor on his couch with Sumo. Sumo’s head is on Connor’s lap and Connor’s got his fingers buried in clumps of hair. He smiles at them. For once, Connor almost looks relaxed.

“Enjoying being on leave?” Hank asks, smug. He wants Connor to be enjoying himself.

“I’ve watched far too much television and have learned that turning the burners up on your stove to simmer will burn my hands. Burning is an unpleasant sensation.”

Hank takes it all back, Connor absolutely does not need to be on leave. He needs a fucking babysitter and a good therapist. “Christ, Connor! You don’t shove your hands onto the stove! Not even people do that willingly!”

“I know! I just wanted to see what it’d feel like. There’re so many—new sensations. I just want to know them all. The good and the bad.”

“I need a drink.” Hank stomps from the living room and into the kitchen. He grabs a bottle of whiskey from over the refrigerator and twists it open before slugging it back. Once the liquid burns nice enough in his stomach, he comes up for air and wipes his mouth. “I leave you for one day! You could set this place on fire you know! Or set my dog on fire!”

“Sumo is fine. My hands are only slightly damaged but I can fix them. It wasn’t a bad burn!”

“Connor!” Hank isn’t sure if he’s going to vomit or have a heart attack. He’s pretty sure he’s going to have one though. “You can’t just—go about getting yourself hurt just to know what it feels like!”

Connor looks genuinely apologetic. He wiggles out from under Sumo and stands in front of Hank, shoulders slumped and lips turned down. When he looks up, his eyes are glossy. “I’m sorry, Hank. I
just—I don’t know when this will go away and if I don’t get to feel everything, I’m scared I won’t feel anything.”

Hank can’t fault Connor for wanting to know what the world feels like. He’s not even sure how androids go through life without being able to feel both the good and bad. They have their own ways of feeling—absolutely. But it’s not the way Connor can feel now. Not the way humans have always been able to feel.

“Let’s just stick to good feeling things okay?” Hank runs his hands through Connor’s hair and Connor shivers, his eyes rolling back. Hank pulls back, afraid he’d overstepped his boundaries but Connor catches his wrist.

“Do that again. Please?”

Hank feels embarrassed. It twirls in his gut and he doesn’t quite know what to make of that. A head pat was always easier with his son. Just a casual, automatic response. Now he’s got stage fright. He reaches out and scratches his fingers through Connor’s hair, surprised at how thick and real it feels. He knows it’s the nanobot technology or whatever the fuck they’re calling it these days. But it still surprises him to feel it be so real. He digs his fingers in deep, twisting around the strands and tugs.

Connor audibly moans, his body swaying into Hank’s.

“Easy there,” Hank says, catching him. “Let’s get you onto the couch, okay?”

Connor doesn’t protest. He curls up onto the couch. Hank puts a blanket over him and Sumo harrumphs and goes to lie in front of the television. He knows Hank would’ve kicked him off eventually for a spot on the sofa.

“Hank?” Connor asks in a soft voice. Softer than what Hank’s used to. It pulls something in Hank’s heart and he’s lured closer, following the melody of that quiet voice. “Would you do that again? Run your fingers through my hair?”

Hank doesn’t know how to agree, so he makes a show of rolling his eyes and sighing. He settles onto the sofa and Connor crawls over to him and puts his head on Hank’s thigh. He focuses on the television. Hank does as Connor’s asked and runs his fingers through silken strands. He lazily twirls tufts of hair around his fingers, scratches his nails down Connor’s scalp.

Connor shivers, pushing his head into Hank’s thigh. His whole body rocks back and forth, eyes closed, lips parted.

Hank doesn’t want to make of this anything more than it is. Connor wants to feel. It has nothing to do with Hank. It isn’t Hank at all that Connor cares about in this. It’s himself. He’s experiencing touch the way a human does for the first time and Hank knows from his own personal experience how good it feels. Connor isn’t breathless and mewling because of Hank. It’s because this is new and Hank is just there. He’s the convenient tool to achieve Connor’s desire.

Hank doesn’t expect that thought to hurt so much, but it does.

“Hank?”

“Hmm?”

“You stopped.”
“Oh. Sorry.” But Hank doesn’t want to keep doing this. He wants to chug his whiskey, drown in his sorrows and pass out in his bed alone. Like he always does. Still, he doesn’t want to take this away from Connor—so he does what Connor asks, because it’s Connor.

He focuses on the television, his fingers idly working into Connor’s scalp with so much ease he hardly even notices he’s doing it anymore. When he needs to get up to piss, he looks down and gently shakes Connor, but Connor doesn’t wake. So he shakes again, harder this time.

“Connor! Hey!”

Connor finally opens his eyes, startled he shoots up and looks about the room, his pupils expanding and contracting at an unnatural rate. “Oh. Lieutenant. I’m—I’m sorry. It looks like I involuntarily went into sleep mode.”

“Involuntarily, huh?” Hank smirks.

Connor smooths out his button down and moves to the other side of the couch. Hank will pointedly ignore that Connor moving away makes him feel cold.

“I think you put me to sleep.” Connor looks over at Hank, a small smile on his face. “I’ve never—it was nice.”

“Yeah-yeah.” Hank stands up and makes his way to the bathroom. He slaps water on his face before he has to come back and face Connor. He doesn’t like the blush mixing in his cheeks. He doesn’t want to feel any of this for Connor. It’s a fool’s errand—a stupid decision. Suicide. Connor is beautiful, kind, and youthful. Hank?

Well, all he has to do is look in the mirror to see that he’s let himself go. Hair long. Face longer. Body soft. He grits his teeth, trembling hands gripping the sink. He doesn’t want to be this anymore. Working with Connor, all it does now is remind him of how far he’s fallen. For all the good that Connor has brought into Hank’s life, he’s also reminded Hank of how far he’s fallen. Well, now he’s hit rock bottom. He needs to change that. If he’s going to continue living in this world, he needs to be a part of it again. He’ll always miss Cole. He’ll always hate himself for how he handled the divorce. But if Connor’s taught Hank anything, it’s that there’s an uncertainty to life and time. Connor may get more than one life, but Hank won’t. Connor could stop feeling at any moment, just like Hank’s life could end just as quickly. He needs to feel, just as much as Connor does. There’s only so much time…

When Hank comes back, Connor is curled up into a blanket. He’s running his fingers up and down it, most likely because of how soft it is. Hank likes soft blankets.

“You once asked me if I was afraid to die, Lieutenant.”

Hank remembers, he’s just shocked that his own thoughts of mortality seem to be bleeding into Connor. He’d pulled a gun out and almost shot Connor point blank just because he could. Hurting an android back then didn’t matter. It pains Hank now to know he once didn’t see Connor as a person. A machine. Connor is more human than most of the pricks at the station. More caring and more dedicated. More honest and genuine. Good. Connor is just—so good.

“I’ve been—thinking.”

“Oh boy.” Hank makes a show of rolling his eyes. He smirks and looks to make sure Connor is smirking too. It’s there, small, a ghost barely left in existence, but there. Hank sits down on the armchair to give Connor a respectable amount of distance.
“This—drug that’s in me—it can kill us. We can die. We can permanently die. Lower quality models maybe, but the pretense is there. Eventually, something will come around that can even kill me.”

“Welcome to the club.” Hank doesn’t like how flippant he’s sounded, so he tries again. “You know—everything dies. There’s an end to everything. From couches to the most advanced forms of life. Everything has an ending.”

“We’re theoretically limitless.” Connor’s eyes dart from side to side. He’s trying to figure it all out, trying to understand the laws of existence with the way android physiology denies it. But that’s the thing that he doesn’t understand. Nothing can defy the laws of existence. Not even someone as smart as Connor. “Replace parts. Upload memories. Replace. Upload. Advance.” Connor bites his lip and turns to Hank, eyes round and glassy. “How do you live with knowing you will die?”

Hank shrugs. “Does it look like we have much of a choice? We’re here and never by our own choice.”

“When androids die, parts of our memories go corrupt. I guess that puts a limit to the number of times we can come back. If our memory cores are destroyed—we’re destroyed. And that’s what’s happening to these androids. They’re dying. Forever.” Connor sits back on the couch. “They know something I don’t.”

Hank cocks a brow. “Wanna fill me in?”

“They know what it’s like to die as an android. What’s after.” Connor cringes. “I know death is an uncomfortable subject among humans. But it’s never been something you’re uncomfortable with. Why?”

“Everyone I’ve loved is dead. How bad can it be to go where they are?”

“But—what about—me?”

Hank doesn’t expect the way his gut twists. It’s sharp and sudden and he winces. Which of course, has got to have given Connor the wrong impression. He sees Connor’s face fall. The way he wraps the blanket around himself together to protect himself.

“I must have—I’m sorry I didn’t mean it like that. I meant that we’re friends too right? We’re not just partners?”

Hank nods because saying it is too much. He does care about Connor. He cares more about Connor than he cares about the rest of the world, that’s for damn sure. But it’s so hard to say. Not when Hank feels so unworthy of Connor’s friendship, of his touch.

“When I die, I won’t go where you go,” Connor’s voice trembles.

It hits Hank deep in the gut. So deep that he groans. He leans forward and sighs. He’s too sober for this conversation. His mind is starting to break, thinking about all the ways humans and android are alike and yet there are still fundamental differences between them. Does an android have a soul? Is there an afterlife? Is God real?

“Con—could we—maybe talk about this later?” Hank fumbles through the words. His voice is foreign to him, too dusty and used.

Connor looks between them and smiles. It’s painful, too perfectly postured to be authentic. But Connor is nothing if not polite. He looks out at the pouring rain through the window and says nothing more.
Hank, however, doesn’t stop thinking about the fear of being separated from Connor forever.

Connor is pulled out of sleep mode. He blinks, confused. The room is quiet. The window is cracked and it’s letting in cool air. He hears the rustling of leaves outside. Sumo snores softly, a gentle rhythm like a metronome. Connor smiles, an organic metronome, he supposes. But still, what would wake him from sleep mode before his designated startup time. He stands up from the sofa and looks around. It’s nearly 4 in the morning. Hank’s got to be in bed by now, he’s sure.

Hank…

Connor’s stomach—or at least his biocomponents—knot together. He cringes and curls back up on the sofa. He’d upset Hank. He spoke of things he shouldn’t have spoken about. He asked of things he shouldn’t have asked for. It’s all his fault that things became—awkward. He’d been so selfish. But it felt so good to have someone touch him. Touch him. Connor never knew touching could feel so intimate—so connective. He’s touched people before, a pat on Hank’s shoulder, a gentle brush by someone. But it never felt as open as it had tonight. Connor shivers, remembering the way Hank’s fingers twisted, pulled and scratched at his head.

Connor can’t go back to sleep mode. He tries, he tries again. He tries a third time. Frowning, he huffs a little and crosses his arms. This isn’t what he’s supposed to do. He’s programmed to just go to sleep mode and wake at a designated time. He throws his hands up in the air and stands, walking briskly into the kitchen.

He opens the refrigerator and stares at the beer and pathetic assortment of food. He should meal prep for Hank. He’s not entirely sure he’ll find Hank happy about that situation but at least Hank could grumble and curse about being babied by an android into a healthy meal.

Connor runs some recipes for the foods in the refrigerator and narrows his eyes when he finds nothing good. There’re stores open. He’ll just go shopping. Before leaving, he grabs one of Hank’s coats and leaves after patting Sumo on the head.

It’s mundane and easy, grocery shopping. Connor looks at the food on the shelves and picks up what corresponds with his recipes he’s gotten for healthy meal prepping. He really does hope Hank won’t be too upset about it. He just can’t sleep! Which is alarming. He touches a glass jar and feels to cool nip of it on his skin, feels the sleek texture. He bites his lip to hide the smile. The drug is still inside him. Truth be told, he doesn’t want it to leave. He doesn’t want to go back to a world where he can only touch through pressure sensitivity or data connectivity.

Connor picks up the rest of the food and heads back to Hank’s. It’s not even 5 in the morning yet. He pets Sumo on the head as they both linger in the kitchen. Sumo waiting for scraps and Connor now beginning the process of meal prepping. He’s never cooked before—he knows how—but he’s never done it. He’s excited to cook for Hank. He hopes Hank likes it. He wants Hank to like it. Hank’s been so good to him.

Connor isn’t exactly homeless but he’s homeless all the same. He appreciates that Hank never makes a fuss about Connor paying rent or cleaning or cooking. Hank never complains about Connor’s duration of stay. Maybe he likes Connor being around. The thought warms Connor’s core and leaves him—giddy. He smiles as he cuts up a zucchini. Curious, he picks up a part of the zucchini and puts it to his tongue. It’s sweet, but there’s fuller—more robust flavor there. He wishes he could eat it. He discards the piece he licked and returns to chopping up the rest of the vegetables.

The light in the hallway comes on. Connor turns back to his meal prep work and his shoulders fall. He has no idea if Hank will come in and yell about invading space or if he’ll be okay with it.
Connor is so foolish. He should’ve asked before he set about getting enough groceries to last Hank a couple weeks. Connor knows people are touchy and they don’t like change and—

“Connor? The fuck you doing?” Despite his words, Hank’s voice is gentle—tired.

“I couldn’t—enter sleep mode. Or I couldn’t stay in it.” Connor turns around and leans against the counter. “I thought I’d make you some lunches for work.”

Hank looks over at the mismatched foods, some being roasted in the oven, some over the stove. He smirks, crossing his arms. “Can’t sleep, huh?”

Connor grimaces, his eyes downcast. “I don’t understand what’s wrong with me. But I don’t want to go back to CyberLife to find out.”

“Nothin’s wrong with you, Con.” Hank tugs on his robe and pads into the kitchen, soft feet on linoleum floor.

Connor feels a ghost of a smirk at his lips. Humans are weird about feet. Some like theirs touched, others would rather vomit. Connor wonders which kind of human Hank is about feet.

“What do they do? When the feelings get to be too much?” Connor’s eyes are round. He can feel himself leaning into Hank, and Hank stays planted. They’re their own little world—their own plane of existence. Connor doesn’t want them to leave it. For the first time since he’d gotten the drug uploaded into his system, he’s felt grounded. Hank keeps him from flying away. He doesn’t want to fly away when the feelings get to be too much.

“Some people cook—like you are.” Hank takes one of the zucchini chips from behind him and pops it into his mouth. He hums in approval and that makes Connor’s thirium pump beat faster. “Some people play music, watch movies, talk to loved ones. It all depends on the person.”

“So I cook when I have too many feelings?”

Hank laughs and shrugs. “I dunno. But since this is the best damn smelling kitchen I’ve ever had, I’m not complaining.”

Connor smiles wide. “This is okay? I was—I was so worried.” He looks down at his fingers and
begins to pick at his nails. “I don’t want to do anything that upsets you. I made you upset before and I can’t stop thinking about it.”

Hank’s face smooths out. He takes a sharp breath in and looks away. “You didn’t—Christ—no, Connor that wasn’t your fault.”

“I calculated the precise moment when your body temperature changed and your heart rate sped up. I know it was me.”

Hank rolls his head back and heaves out a heavy sigh. “Androids.”

Connor waits, because he doesn’t think speaking will help the situation any further. Whenever Hank says ‘androids’ like that, it’s usually because Connor is doing something stupid.

“This why you can’t sleep? Because you think I’m angry with you?”

Connor nods.

“I’m not angry. I’ve got a lot of shit on my mind too. And sure you’re part of that, but I’m not angry at you, Connor.”

“If you ever need me to leave—”

“I don’t know what that drug does. We don’t know what it’s doing to you right now, even. I just keep thinking about you lying there—trying to claw at your own body and me having to tell you no. I was so fuckin’ scared, okay? And now you can’t sleep and you’re putting your hand on my stove! I was afraid I’d come in here and see you with a knife to know how it feels to be cut by something sharp.”

Connor moves before his processors let him register what he’s doing. But by then his arms are already around Hank’s neck and his head is resting on his chest. Hank’s gone still—rigid, even. But his hands slowly find their way around Connor’s middle and they relax into each other. Hank’s breath soft and even near Connor’s ear. The white hum of Connor’s body. He closes his eyes and feels tears push at the corners. He’s overwhelmed again. Sensations run up and down his body and he can’t pinpoint what they all mean. He’s warm—tingly—hot. His core is bordering on searing.

“I don’t want to make you worry,” Connor says, “I won’t hurt myself anymore. But I just want to know what you feel.”

Hank snorts out a laugh. “I could describe in accurate detail what it feels like to get stabbed by a knife. Happened back in college.”

Connor pulls back, eyes wide and face shocked. He touches Hank’s chest, his hips and then his face. “You were stabbed?!”

“It was a long time ago! I’m fine.” Hank swats Connor’s hands away and takes a step back.
Connor bites his lip to keep from moaning out his displeasure of the space between them. He likes being in Hank’s arms. It feels—safe. Like coming home. Connor’s never had a true home before. Hank is the closest thing and Connor doesn’t want to live in some illusion. He wants Hank to be his home.

“Do you remember what it felt like to get shot? Cause that’s pretty much a stab—only more force maybe.” Hank squints, looking up. “Well—maybe getting stabbed hurts more. Less shock.”

Connor doesn’t remember what it felt like. He couldn’t feel anything before. He’d registered a pressure that had infiltrated his systems and then he closed his eyes. But he doesn’t want to remind Hank of all the things he couldn’t experience before. Or maybe he needs to. Without that knowledge, Hank has no vantage point of understanding with Connor’s newfound curiosities. Connor touches the stove not because he knows it’ll hurt, but because it makes him feel alive. He’s cataloged that feeling away into his memory drive. He can feel his fingers burning again, the searing white-hot pain that seeped from his palm and up to his elbow.

“I didn’t mean to wake you,” Connor says, pulling himself from the memory. “I can stop cooking if it’s distracting.”

“No,” Hank says, soft. Voice more like velvet then the gravel it usually is. “You do what you need to. Just know I’m not angry at you. I can get damn pissed when it comes to you but—I’m never actually angry at you. Maybe.” Hank holds his hand up and teeters it back and forth. “Well,” he drawls, “maybe half the time I’m angry at you—but it’s because you do dumb shit like put your hand on the stove.”

Connor makes a note to never put his hand on the stove again. He’s got the memory anyway. He smiles at Hank and watches him leave the kitchen. The yellow that spills into the white of the kitchen snuffs out and Connor hears the creaking of Hank’s door as he closes it.

Connor turns back to his meal prepping, straightens his button down, and rolls up his sleeves to start cutting up the chicken. He’s glad Hank liked the zucchini.

Hank sits at his desk, arms crossed and eyes narrowed. He’s staring at the single picture he’d managed to get of the bald guy with the tattoo before Connor fell to the ground and nearly clawed himself to death. They’d speculated Connor survived because he was an advanced model, but Hank’s not so sure. Hank had to physically keep Connor’s hands from finding purchase. If Hank hadn’t been there…

He doesn’t want to think about that.

“Woo-hoo! Up before noon, huh? Your wife got you on some new meds, Hank?” Gavin’s specific brand of annoying pierces Hank’s skin like a body dropped into acid.

“When’s the last time you had a shower, Gavin? Smells like shit in here.”

Gavin’s cheeks splotch red. He glares Hank’s way. “Don’t think the whole world is fooled just because Markus and his merry band of bots kneeled in front of a bunch of pussies.”

Hank rolls his eyes. “Military, you mean? I believe the word you were looking for is military.” Hank’s grown more than tired of the daily pissing contest with Gavin. He understands Gavin’s hatred toward him. Hank got to rank of lieutenant even younger than Gavin is now. Gavin’s still just a detective. Though, Hank didn’t do much else after he got to his rank. He smacks his lips together. He’s too old now to play ambitious. He just wants to do what he can for the world and then retire.
Maybe he’ll move to a beach. He wonders if Connor would like that.

His hands pull back from his computer like he’d been burned. Why in the ever-loving fuck would he have any right to assume Connor would just move away with him? Connor, who has a life here. Connor, who has a long career ahead of him. Connor’s done well at the station. He’s worked long hours and hasn’t complained. He’s taken more than one risk and died on one occasion. All the Connor models are awake and up now. They’d have to build Connor a whole new body if he died again. Hank’s heart twists. He doesn’t want Connor to die again. It doesn’t matter if he can possibly come back or not. Hank doesn’t want to risk it.

Speaking of the devil, despite his leave not being up, Connor walks into the bullpen. His tie is on perfectly straight, his hair sleek and shiny. His face plastered with the politest of smiles. Hank can’t decide if he wants to smack Connor for coming in or hug him because he’s grown too tired of Gavin’s bullshit.

“Look who's back!”

Hank pulls on his own hair. How could he forget that Connor was also an easy target for Gavin. Not that Connor was easy per say. He’d throw insults right back at Gavin like the best of them.

Connor pointedly ignores Gavin and walks toward Hank. He’s holding a lunch bag and Hank understands now why Connor came in. Hank forgot the lunch Connor made for him last night.

“You forgot this,” Connor says, handing the bag over to Hank.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

Connor sits at his desk and boots up the computer.

“Connor—you’re on leave.”

“I can’t be alone, Lieutenant. I don’t—trust myself right now.”

Fear snakes into Hank’s body. It’s cold and slow, it breathes in calculated puffs that raise the hairs on Hank’s neck. He looks over Connor’s body, making sure there’re no damaged parts or white showing through otherwise flawless skin. He can’t see much from the button down or Connor’s “android” jacket. He doesn’t have to wear that anymore, but he chooses to. Hank guesses that’s what freedom is all about. Other androids may find it offensive or mock Connor, but Connor is free to make his own choices now. He chose that jacket.

“I seem to have—a problem, Lieutenant.” Connor stares at his computer, his voice barely loud enough for Hank to hear. He’s rigid in his spot, a tin man needing an oiling. Hank wonders if that thought is offensive. He thinks it probably is.

The lights beam down on Connor, he’s awash, pale and nearly lifeless. His lips hardly their dusting of pink. He opens his mouth slowly, his next words calculated. “I want to hurt myself. I want—to do a lot of things that I know I shouldn’t. But I want to.”

“Let’s talk outside, huh?” The last thing the DPD needs to know about is a suicidal android. Because that’s what they’d see—an android with his shit gone fucked. They wouldn’t see the virus that wreaks unknown havoc on Connor’s system. They wouldn’t know the way Connor moaned when Hank played with his hair. They’d only see what their realities would let them. Hank doesn’t fault them for that, but his priority isn’t them. It’s Connor.

They step out into the car-engorged streets. Honks, shrieks of people and the idle chatter of
businessmen drown out any risk of their voices carrying to anyone Hank wouldn’t want hearing—namely Gavin.

Connor’s arms are crossed and his fists are pressed up against his armpits. He’s staring at the ground like he’ll vomit at any moment. He’s so jittery. The virus is still inside him, or maybe it’s re-written something. Hank knows that without Connor, his investigation time is nearly doubled, but he can’t put Connor at risk anymore. They don’t know if someone can upload the virus into Connor again or make it worse—he can’t stomach to see Connor begging like that again.

“What happened?” Hank asks.

“I took out your gun. I—I don’t remember what it felt like. To get shot.”

Hank’s vision blurs. He grabs Connor by the lapels and throws him against the wall—not because he wants Connor to get hurt, but because he wants Connor to be shocked. He wants to impress into Connor how unbelievably not okay something like that is.

“Lieutenant, this hurts!” Connor grabs at Hank’s wrists and tries to pry back Hank’s fingers, but Hank won’t let him.

“You think this hurts? Just because you’ve been shot once doesn’t mean I want to go through you being shot again! Jesus, Connor! Guns fucking kill people!”

“I’d come back!”

“Who the fuck knows that for certain! What if you shot out your memory core? What if androids can’t make another one of you! You were a fucking prototype, Connor!” He drops Connor, breathing heavily. His own heart feels like it’ll give out at any moment. Connor will be the death of Hank—he’s damn sure of it. His blood hammers against his eardrums and his skin burns. He wants to scream into a void and beg whatever God exists to make Connor stop. “I don’t care—if there’s a chance. You can’t,” Hank’s voice cracks, throat fighting him, “you can’t do that to me again.”

Connor’s eyes widen. He licks the corner of his lips, gaze searching for something. “I didn’t—I’m sorry. I didn’t anticipate the emotional impact for you. I didn’t think—”

“Damn right you didn’t think! Look, Con—if you want to do this—this whole learning what shit feels like I’m all for it! But it’s got to be controlled! You can’t just pick up my fucking gun and shoot yourself just because there’s a chance you’d come back!” Androids lose a piece of themselves each time they come back. Connor has said this before. Hank doesn’t want Connor to lose the pieces that matter the most between them. Whether it’s selfish or righteous, Hank doesn’t know. But he can’t let Connor keep doing this unsupervised. He can’t pretend like everything is back to normal when there’s something severely wrong with Connor.

“I apologize.”

“No,” Hank says, lifting a finger and pointing with all his might at Connor, “you don’t get to apologize your way out of this. We need to have a serious discussion about this! That drug—that thing is fucking with you and I can’t watch you—” Hank’s exhausted. His lungs clamp up on him and he leans forward, hands resting on his knees. He leans his back against the wall and just stares at the ground. He can see Connor’s feet, perfectly still. Androids don’t sway like humans. Their joints never get tired. He stays rooted there, waiting for Hank’s words.

“I need you to be okay,” Hank says, voice hoarse. “I don’t want to come home and see you dead on my floor.”
“Like I almost saw you?”

Hank will set aside his own pride and anger. He knows he’s been low. But when Connor hits him below the gut like that, he’s got to know the effect that has on Hank. Connor’s the smartest damn person Hank’s ever known. So when Connor connects the dots, when he calls it like it was—it does hurt. Hank can’t be that man anymore. He needs to be better so Connor will be better.

“We’ll get through this together,” Hank grits out. “We really should take you back to CyberLife.”

“No!” Connor steps back. “I don’t want to go back.”

“Why not? It’s not like it was before.”

“I don’t want to be a test subject anymore.” Connor crosses his arms, face downcast. “Please, Hank. I’ll do—I’ll do anything.”

“I don’t want you to do anything.” Hank brings Connor into a hug. He’s not sure if it’s okay or still weird but Connor did it last night and Hank knows what it’s like to feel touch starved. Connor, for lack of any better way to put it, is experiencing touch starvation for the first time in his life. “Fucking androids.”

Connor pushes his nose into Hank’s neck and it takes all of Hank not to immediately pull back. His spine is sizzling inside, a zing running down from where Connor’s nose is and right into his fucking groin.

“I need help,” Connor finally says.

“Yeah you do.”

When they part, Hank starts to have an existential crisis about having a crush on his dumbass android partner.

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Connor’s glad Markus is here. Hank’s on the phone with the station, most likely informing them that Connor is a malfunctioning piece of junk. No. No, Hank wouldn’t do that. He’s probably on the phone simply telling them why he’s no longer at his desk. Hank would never call Connor malfunctioning. Hank’s been nothing but supportive to Connor. The self-deprecating thoughts about malfunctioning? That’s all on Connor now. But Connor is glad Markus came.

Markus sits by Connor, both of them silent. They watch Hank pace out in the halls of CyberLife as both human and android alike walk by. They hear him speak or grunt. Finally, the silence between them becomes too much.

“Do you feel?” Connor asks.

Markus furrows his brow and looks at Connor with his heterochromatic eyes. His lips are parted, tongue tucked safely between teeth.

“I just—wanted to know if maybe this wasn’t the drug.” Connor feels alone now. He doesn’t relate to humans because he’s not human. He doesn’t relate to androids because he’s experiencing something they don’t. The sheets are scratchy and cold. He wishes he had socks on. He can’t turn off what he feels and he wishes he could. He doesn’t want to be an anomaly. He just wants to exist. He just wants to relate to someone—so he doesn’t feel so alone.

“What you experience as feeling and what I experience as feeling seem to be different concepts
now,” Markus says. His voice is smooth, steady. A man who’s become so used to speaking to
crowds. Connor’s proud of Markus for handling Detroit the way he did. It’s rare when words
overcome violence. But Markus never gave in.

“I want it to stop—but I don’t want it to stop. I don’t think I’ll feel alive if it goes away.”

“That’s not true,” Markus says, taking Connor’s hand. He’s not as coarse as Hank, his fingers soft
and palms cool. It doesn’t matter how many times Markus uses his hands to paint or touch. He’ll
always have soft hands. Connor finds he prefers Hank’s hands. “You’re still alive—even if this goes
away. And maybe it should. Hank’s told me you’ve been thinking dangerous things.”

Connor thinks he feels shame. It weighs his body down; his eyes can’t meet Markus. He’s too afraid
to see what kind of expression is on an otherwise gentle face. He’s let two people down he cares
about. Hank—and now Markus.

“I know what you’re facing must be terrifying, but we’re here for you.” Markus squeezes Connor’s
hand. How can Markus just exist without knowing the softness of a hand. The breath on a human’s
lips. Or the mundane like the scratch of a tag on the back of a shirt. Which way is better? Human or
android?

“You’re not alone,” Markus says. “We’re all here for you.”

Connor looks away. He doesn’t want to be fixed. Nothing is wrong with him. He just wants to go
home and ask Hank to pet his head again. He doesn’t want to lose out on everything he’s never felt
before. Melted wax. A hand tracing his spine. Lips against his neck.

“I don’t want this.”

“That’s why we’re here, to help you.” Markus pats Connor’s hand like he’s understanding what
Connor’s feeling. He has no fucking idea what Connor’s feeling. Connor doesn’t even want to share
his data lest Markus find he cannot comprehend. Connor doesn’t want to scare Markus. But he
doesn’t want to change. The virus isn’t a curse. It’s a gift.

“No,” Connor says. He stands from the examination table and adjusts his tie. “I appreciate your
concern, but I don’t want to be fixed. I want to keep feeling.”

Markus frowns, leaning back. “That’s a very dangerous idea, Connor.”

“Why? Because I made a few mistakes? I was at least open about it!” Connor looks out into the
hallway and doesn’t see Hank. Good, he doesn’t want to hear this. It would only
overwhelm him. It’s not that Hank couldn’t understand, Hank’s been understanding since the
moment Connor felt the virus invade his systems. But he doesn’t want to frighten Hank
with why he’s so obsessed with touch. Good or bad.

“You told Hank you were going to shoot yourself!”

“I just wanted to know what it felt like! How can you sit there and say you’re alive when you can’t
feel anything!” Connor shouldn’t raise his voice. He wishes he could close the door but he can’t let
this moment pass. Markus is staring at him with wild, open eyes. “I can feel, Markus! I can feel the
silken fur of a dog. The heat of the sun! I can feel the bite of a pair of scissors and the rush of
butterflies in my stomach. I can feel a rock in my shoe and know if its sharp or round. The
scratchiness of hospital bed sheets.” Connor points at the examination table. “The softness of your
hand.” Connor can feel tears well in his eyes. He doesn’t want to cry. It seems like such an
insignificant then when he thinks about it. But he doesn’t want to give it up. He doesn’t want to go
back to what he was before. He’s gotten a taste of how humans touch, taste, experience. He doesn’t want to go back, not when he’s gotten this far. Not before he knows what Hank’s li—

“Connor, you need to calm down,” Markus says, hands in surrender. He’s moving slowly to Connor now, his eyes fixated on something near Connor.

It takes Connor a moment to realize he’s picked up a pair of scissors and did in fact slice into his own skin. No wonder he knows. He can feel it now—the pulsing burn of the bite. It reminds him of the stove.

“Don’t you see how dangerous this is for you?”

“Don’t take this away from me. I’m begging you.”

“I can hear you yelling from half—what the fuck?” Hank. He moves fast his gaze fixated on Connor’s bleeding hand. “What were you doing?”

“I wasn’t—thinking.” Connor looks at Markus, saline flowing from his eyes. “I don’t want to be fixed.”

“People get sick all the fucking time, Connor. It’s okay to get sick and need to be better.”

But that’s not what this is. Connor isn’t sick. He’s alive. He’s so alive that he can feel the crushing weight of his own biocomponents. He can feel the fear tremble his fingers. He can feel the burn in his legs, begging him. Run, run, run.

“Connor.” Markus steps closer. “Please let us help you.”

Connor brushes tears from his eyes. “Just because I’m messed up, it doesn’t mean I’m broken.”

“No, of course not,” says Hank.

Connor didn’t get a chance to say anything further. A human doctor came into the room, her eyes full of sympathy and mock understanding. Connor could read her heartbeat. She was nervous. Connor, made her nervous.

“Hello Connor. My name is Dr. Jin Sung. I need you to lie down on the table, please.”

“No.”

Hank sighs and Markus frowns. Seems Connor is the disappointment now. Now that deviants are seen as people, freaks like Connor get to be next on the chopping block. All he can think about now are the recall centers and Hank’s support in fixing him.

“I’m not broken,” Connor says.

“I don’t think you are. But your systems show a strand of coding that shouldn’t exist in your programming. We don’t want it to mutate and possibly compromise anything else.”

“Please,” Markus says, “trust us.”

Connor looks to Hank. Between an android or a human—Connor trusts a human more. Hank’s never lied to Connor. Markus hasn’t lied either, but Hank’s never been anything more than what he is. Markus wears many faces to appease nations, androids, humans. Markus is a king of diplomacy whereas Hank is just a person. Connor will trust the person over the god any day.
“You think I should do this?” Connor asks, voice soft.

“I think you should do whatever you want,” Hank says, “but I’m worried Con.”

Connor looks to his feet. “Okay.”

He allows Dr. Sung to get him settled on the examination table. It’s cold and unforgiving despite the padding and scratchy blankets. A tear slips down his cheek. He wants to remember the scratchy feel of these blankets for the rest of his life. He’ll never be able to feel them like this again.

Hank closes his eyes, like he doesn’t want to watch. Connor’s almost angry at him. It’s because of Hank that Connor is even doing this in the first place. He’s not broken. He doesn’t want to be fixed. But they all think there’s something wrong and Hank is worried. Connor doesn’t want Hank to worry. So that’s what Connor holds onto as Dr. Sung links him up into CyberLife’s systems and begins pulling at his coding. He can feel it, the slow ebb of the virus being broken away. The scratchy sheets go away. The cold in the room is replaced by an understanding that it is cold. He can’t feel the numbing in his toes anymore.

He cries.

He cries so hard that he’s afraid he may burst.

Chapter End Notes

Check out this sweet sweet art Hopeless--Geek made for this fic! [Click Me!]
Find me and come talk to me!!
On Twitter: @ghostbuckster

On Tumblr:
bibijaal (gaming blog) or buckmebixnes (main blog)
Chapter Notes

So when I posted this fic, I was not expecting it to get the reception it's gotten. Over 500 kudos in just a few days??? Ya'll I love you <3

Here's the next chapter, as promised, "by the end of the week" and I think it's the end of the week now :D

Next chapter next week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hank doesn’t know what to do. Connor’s sat in front of the television for the better part of five hours now. Unmoving. Unblinking. He makes offhanded remarks about the newscaster's hair or looks but otherwise, he’s frozen there. Even Sumo can’t get him to pet his head again.

Hank’s heart sinks. He’d let that Dr. Sung piece out the only excitement Connor’s had since becoming deviant—aware—whatever the politically correct bullshit word they use now. But it was a drug. A virus used to kill android and the number of times Connor wanted to seriously injure himself was beginning to take years off Hank’s life. Now though, watching Connor stare at the small television. Hank can’t help but feel he’s made a mistake.

He wanders into the room. There’s nothing he can do for Connor. He can’t offer a bottle of water. He can’t suggest they order pizza. All Connor had was the ability to feel, and now Hank’s taken that away from him. Hank, is a downright piece of shit.

He sighs, sitting on the other side of the couch. “Anything interesting?”

Connor doesn’t respond.

“Connor?”

Connor doesn’t respond.

Hank pushes his face into his hands. Guilt ravages him like hungry wolves to a fresh carcass. He should’ve handled this better. He knew, taking Connor back from CyberLife, that he’d been quiet. He’d been rigid and stiff. But Connor thought about shooting himself again! He’d held those scissors in his hands and he was bleeding. Markus had mentioned afterward that Connor hadn’t even realized he’d done it.

“My biggest worry is the virus is designed to make androids take their own lives. I’m worried Connor is just trying to find ways to die,” Markus had said.

The words still chill Hank to the bone. Markus had a good thought, and Hank would consider it during the investigation. He hadn’t told Connor, but they’d found several other bodies now with the drug. One of them had been an RX900.

“I’m sorry,” Hank says. “I know you did this for me.”
Connor still—does not respond.

“Look, I can’t imagine what you’re going through. And I don’t disagree that what we asked was unfair, but you’ve got to believe me, Con, this wasn’t because I didn’t want you to feel. I just want you safe.”

“I can’t feel Sumo’s fur anymore,” Connor says. “I can’t feel—you anymore.”

“Connor—”

“I know already, Lieutenant. But if that virus taught me anything, it’s that I don’t just see you as my partner. If you want me reassigned, I’d understand. But now, even if you did—I don’t know what good I am anymore. I can’t feel anything. I used pain because it was the easiest thing to feel. And I’d be lying if I said I didn’t like it. I \textit{liked} feeling pain, Lieutenant. I’m sorry.”

Hank doesn’t know how to process what Connor is saying. He selfishly wants to dive into the confession of ‘not just a partner’ but there’s so much more that Connor is saying. He’s trapped inside a body that could comprehend so much more but Hank, Markus, and Dr. Sung had taken it all away. Had it been dangerous? To let Connor experience the world the way humans do? But Markus’ words. What if he was right? Hank can’t risk Connor’s memory core melting. He certainly can’t stomach coming home to Connor’s brain components spilled out onto the floor. Hank has seen enough people he loves die.

“What can I do?” Hank asks because he doesn’t know what else to say. He cares about Connor too, more than he’d like to. Affection just breeds complication and Hank’s not the best when it comes to romance. In fact, he’s probably not even in the top billion. But he can’t just abandon Connor when he’s like this. “I don’t know what to do.”

“There’s nothing to do, Lieutenant,” Connor’s cold voice replies. He’s not blinked. He’s not taken his eyes off the television. “I don’t require anything.”

“Yes you do. You maybe don’t have that virus in you anymore but you’re still awake. So don’t give me this distant, unblinking bullshit.”

“Why not?” Connor asks, finally turning to face Hank. “I don’t feel alive anymore, Hank. I just feel like someone’s ripped my spine out of me and I’m left wondering how long until I collapse. I keep replaying when I got to feel your beard for the first time.” His eyes grow shiny and Hank’s throat closes. “I can’t feel you now.”

“Connor.”

“I don’t want your pity, Lieutenant. I just want you to understand what I feel now. I can’t read what I touch, but I still feel like someone’s taken a shredder to my insides.”

“It wouldn’t—I don’t suppose me giving you a hug would help anymore.”

Connor closes his eyes slowly, a ghostly curve at the corner of his lips. “Yes it would. I can still register heat signatures and pressure.”

“You make it sound so damn sexy.” Hank pulls Connor into him, letting Connor rest his head against Hank’s chest.

Connor relaxes, his rigid joints finally melting away their frost. He nuzzles into Hank’s chest and lets out the softest whimper. “I can’t feel what type of fabric this is.”
“Cotton. Probably.”

Connor lets out a breathy chuckle before settling into Hank’s embrace. They pointedly avoid the elephant in the room, both silent with their own thoughts. And between the two of them, there’s enough thought there to sink a thousand ships.

Hank doesn’t know what this means for them. He doesn’t know if anything will ever change because of what Connor’s expressed. All Hank knows is that he’s stolen something from Connor and the only way to get it back would be to risk Connor’s life again. *That*, is simply out of the question. But what does Connor even want now? He had a bite at the apple, and now he’s faced his punishment. It wasn’t even his fault. Hank should’ve been faster. He should’ve stayed with him or tailed closer. He shouldn’t have let Connor try to find the drug rings. They could find them again, maybe even this time they could learn something. The frightening thing about it all is that Hank has no idea how androids are even learning about the drug. It has no name. It affects models of varying ranges and classes. It’s spreading like wildfire and the low-income theory is now completely out of the question. The drug has moved on to bigger and better androids.

“It killed an RK900,” Hank says.

Connor stills in Hank’s arms, his face smashed against Hank’s rising and falling chest.

“We don’t know what the lasting effects are. Markus suggested it made androids suicidal and I don’t think he’s wrong.”

“I wasn’t suicidal, Hank.” Connor’s voice is venom. “I was just—alive.”

“You’re alive now.”

“You don’t get it. You won’t ever get it.”

“Then help me,” Hank whispers. He threads his fingers into Connor’s, listless and unknowing.

Connor doesn’t react. Whether it’s to prove a point or because he can’t feel it anymore, Hank doesn’t know. Hank only feels the guilt of taking away the only curiosity Connor had left. It weighs him down, sinking him to the bottom of the cold dark ocean. He’s crushed by the weight of it all. Every moment in his life where he went right when he should’ve gone left. It all lead up to him telling Connor the wrong damn thing in that examination room.

“I don’t know how. My understanding of my own experience and my attempts at vocalizing it fails when I try to simulate an explanation in my head. Nothing sounds the way I feel or felt. And if I think about it too much—I just want to cry.”

“So cry.”

“Please, Hank.” Connor’s fist curls into Hank’s shirt. “I don’t want to feel like this anymore.”

Connor falls into silence again, one that screams loudly in Hank’s ears about how much he’s failed Connor as a friend and partner. And as something else entirely.

He’s not sure what they are, but there’s something there. Connor’s said it, Hank’s felt it. But it remains unexplored, only quick touches and moments like this where they think they can get away with it without truly diving into the consequences. A tap dance on the edge of the world.

“What you said.” Hank ventures off the edge of the world, falling into the blackened abyss of the unknown. “About not seeing me as a partner anymore?”
Connor holds onto Hank tighter, afraid somehow Hank could get away. “I have feelings for you, Lieutenant. But I understand human sexuality isn’t as fluid as android sexuality and we work together—so I know it’s out of the question.”

“You don’t think I’m fluid?”

Connor pulls his head back, his brown eyes surprised. “I just—assumed.”

“You sure as hell did.”

“I—I’m sorry.”

“Hey,” Hank says, cupping Connor’s face. “I know we changed your coding back. But I know you can feel this, even if you can’t pick out all the details.”

Connor leans into Hank’s hand, his eyes fluttering closed. He brings his hand up and covers Hank’s. “I register warm pressure, yes.”

“And this?” Throwing caution in the wind, Hank lifts Connor’s chin up until their lips kiss. Connor’s mouth is cool and pliant, his breath only a simulation to keep the fans inside him running, but it’s real enough because Connor is real. Android or not. Made of machinery or not—Connor is alive. Whether he feels the bristles of Hank’s beard push against his chin or not, Connor is alive.

Connor’s fingers curl into gray hair, his thighs wrap around Hank. He rolls his body, whether it’s out of need or an innocent movement and Hank gasps into the kiss. Connor wasn’t built to simulate that he can appreciate sex. If he’d kept the virus though—

No. The virus needed to be removed from Connor’s system. It was too dangerous otherwise. But the way Connor’s lips lock with Hank’s, the way their bodies press and pull at each other. Hank wonders for a moment if there isn’t some of that virus left.

Connor pulls back, his eyes more sorrowful than Hank would like to see.

“That bad, huh?” Hank asks, already prepared to drink himself to sleep.

“No. Just—it could’ve been more.” Connor’s face morphs into a smile, one that Hank knows is entirely fabricated. “But Lieutenant, I think what you just did would be what humans would call,” he pauses, “smooth.”

Hank rolls his eyes. “Get off me you hunk of metal.”

Connor kisses Hank’s nose one more time before swinging off Hank’s lap. He can’t hide the smile that splays across his features now, a true, unabashed pride that glows from his skin.

Hank can only think that Connor will absolutely be his undoing. But honestly? He’s had worse vices.

Connor feels distracted. The police at the station often complain they get distracted when tired, hungry or “ugh, fuck Monday!” Connor can sympathize with all that now. He’s distracted. He’s already scanned all the databases for androids who’ve died to the drug. He keeps stealing looks Hank’s way.

They kissed last Wednesday. They haven’t done it since, but there’s a giddiness that stirs up Connor’s biocomponents when Hank smiles at him or pats him on the back. They kissed last
Wednesday. Connor never thought he’d get to experience a kiss—even when he was nothing more than a machine. He wonders if part of him hadn’t always been deviant. He’d thought about kissing when he wasn’t alive, per say. Connor is now sure he’s always been alive. The only battle was defeating what was expected of him. He’d been made to be too great. He’d been given a mind from the start.

Connor wants to do something nice for Hank. He licks the corner of his lip, a bad habit he’s started to form. He likes the way Hank looks up when he does it though. He slows his tongue at the corner, letting it slide to the top middle of his lip.

“Connor.” Hank readjusts in his seat, grumbling about androids.

Connor smiles and turns back to his work. Courting someone requires tokens of affection and spending time together. But he and Hank already spend their time together. So Connor needs a token of affection.

“Hey,” Hank says.

Connor blinks, looking across the way.

“We’ve got a lead on that bald guy. Let’s go.”

Connor doesn’t ask questions, he just stands and follows.

“I won’t get infected again,” Connor says for what feels like the thousandth time. “I’m already infected for all he knows.”

“That’s not the fucking point, Con!”

“This is how it needs to be, Lieutenant!” Connor slams his hand on the dashboard. He feels the car lurch before settling back into its stationary position. “It makes more sense for me to go up to him.”

“We don’t even know where he is! I just know a guy who knows him.” Hank stands from his car and slams the door so hard it makes the car sway.

Connor gets out and slams his door equally as hard.

“Watch it!” Hank yells.

“You just did it!” Connor waits for Hank to snarl or retort something back, but he doesn’t. He rolls his eyes and just walks on.

Together they meander into a shady dive bar. It’s smoky, most of the people smoking outdated cigarettes or vapes. Connor’s glad his eyesight is far more enhanced than a human’s. He takes Hank’s hand and together they navigate the smoky room.

The walls are red like blood, the whole atmosphere is claustrophobic. Connor’s skin crawls. It reminds him of the bar he’d first met Hank in, but it’s more sinister. There’s something waiting to strike and sink its teeth into Connor. He looks at the patrons and realizes they’ve all been watching him.

“I can see where I’m going now, Connor,” Hank says, dropping Connor’s hand.

Connor allows Hank to move out in front of him and together they finish walking the narrow way into the billiards room.
Pool tables and darts populate the area. There’re no windows but there’s a nice jukebox that glows vibrant and neon colors.

“Let me do the talking, okay?” Hank whispers Connor’s way.

Connor nods, doing his best to keep his tongue between his teeth.

Hank comes to stand in front of a booth with a man wearing large diamond crusted initials around his neck. Connor scans him: Jerome Samuels, petty larceny, drug distribution and illegal android prostitution rings.

“What’s up, old man?” Jerome tips his sunglasses down and smiles bright white teeth their way.

“Pretty little android you got there.”

Hank slides into the booth, his face mean and his expression guarded. “Not for sale.”

Jerome clicks his tongue, a disgruntled grimace on his face.

Connor furrows his brow. Androids are not slaves. They’re equals. Connor then looks up kidnapping and reprogramming of androids and discovers there’s a slew of crime rings with androids being taken from homes and workplaces only to be sold into slavery. He squeezes his hands into fists. This man buys and sells androids.

“I’m looking for a drug—androids start losing their shit on it. Know of it?”

Jerome barks out a laugh. “For your droid here?” He points up at Connor. “You want him to feel that dick goin’ inside?”

Hank’s face remains mean. Connor’s the one whose eyes go wide.

Jerome laughs again. “Sweet sweet baby boy.” It takes a moment for Connor to register Jerome is speaking to him. “You still a virgin, ain’t you.”

“All right, lay off him,” Hank says, stepping in front of Connor. He’s solace and a warm blanket all at once. Something Connor can wrap himself in and feel safe with. The way he angles their bodies, he pushes Connor back and leaves no room for this guy to reach out and snatch Connor. He’s in the line of fire, but he’s protecting Connor.

Jerome looks at Hank, eyes squinted, face now as mean as Hank’s. Connor hadn’t been so sure that was a capable feat for any who weren’t Hank. “What do you want with it? If it ain’t for him.”

Hank says in a low, gravelly voice that runs a chill down Connor’s spine, “It is for him.”

Jerome sits back, his smile wide. He laughs. “My man! Like ‘em innocent, huh? I like ‘em that way too.” He sniffs, taking a moment to look around the foggy bar with its red, pulsing walls and staff infections abound. Connor would like to leave soon. Now would be preferable. At least he can’t get an infection from the walls, but he’s not so sure Hank will make it out unscathed.

“It’s called Scratch. I don’t sell it or nothin’ but the guys who do run around the neighborhoods in South Detroit. Tell ‘em you’ve got an itch that you can’t scratch. No safe phrase and no Scratch. They’ll know you’re there for them. They always know.”

They’re sitting in the car. Hank is resting his eyes, his head tossed back against the headrest. Music plays on low. Connor can barely make out the heavy drum beats and the shrieks of the vocalist.
When he first met Hank, he’d indicated he’d like to listen to more heavy metal. Connor really wishes Hank would play something more pleasing now. Maybe if he’d just tell him he really didn’t like it—but Connor doesn’t want to hurt Hank’s feelings.

“What did that man mean, they always know,” Connor asks.

Hank doesn’t open his eyes when he says, “Dunno. Guess we’ll just find out.” He sits up, blinking and cracking his neck. “Should go back to the station though. I wanna cross-reference the internet now that we know the drug’s name.”

“Scratch. Do you think it’s because of how androids scratch themselves to death?”

“Maybe. Like I said, let’s do some research first.”

Hank turns up the music and Connor cringes. He shoves his face to the window and tries to focus on anything but the screaming, blaring music that scrambles out of the speakers like bats from hell. What should he get Hank to show his affection? He wishes they could just kiss again. He still wants to get Hank a gift, but he wants to kiss. Even without Scratch, Connor still enjoyed the kiss. He’s designed to understand touch in a certain way. He’d nearly sensory overloaded with Scratch. But that doesn’t mean he can just stop thinking about it, the way Hank would feel, warm, wet and tangled with Connor.

Connor grips the fabric on his knee and tries to stifle the thought. Scratch is dangerous, even if it let him know so much more.

“Lieutenant,” Connor begins, “I’ve been thinking again.”

Hank stays silent as they drive back toward the station.

“No groans of protest this time?” For some reason, the lack of reaction makes Connor nervous. Not talking about their kiss makes Connor nervous, but talking about it makes him—nervous. He just wants to know where they stand now. Connor feels like he’s walking on frigid ice that’s about to crack.

“What’ve you been thinking about?” Hank asks.

Something drops in Connor’s stomach. He cringes, curling up on the seat. “Nevermind. It’s not important.”

Hank opens his mouth, and for a moment it looks as if he’ll pry Connor open, but then he looks back at the windshield and they continue the drive in silence.

“Can I stay the night?” Connor asks because he always asks. Even if Hank would give him a damn key, Connor would still ask.

It’s the end of their shift and Hank’s eerily no more closer to learning anything about Scratch than he was before he entered that shady bar.

“Sure.” He grabs his keys and jacket, dropping keys in his pocket and swinging his jacket around his shoulders. He frowns, watching the way Connor’s shoulders slump, how his lips are turned down. “What’s wrong?”

“Oh—nothing, Lieutenant. I’ve just been thinking.”
“You’ve been doing that a lot lately.” Hank holds the door for Connor and then follows him out of the DPD.

“Scratch. I understand now. Why androids want it.”

Hank cocks a brow at Connor, waiting for him to offer up the rest of his thoughts. Sometimes Connor gives everything out in little bite sizes. Sometimes Hank just wants the whole damn meal so he doesn’t have to wait around to be spoon-fed all the information. Not that he doesn’t enjoy his conversations with Connor, because he absolutely does. Connor is the closest thing to a best friend Hank has.

And they’d kissed. Fuck. Hank still doesn’t know what to make of that. He liked it, absolutely. He likes Connor. It makes sense. Connor is the only person to stomach being around Hank through his bullshit. Connor’s optimism and hope sheds off on Hank. It’s inspiring. Hank wants to amount to something because of Connor.

“Lieutenant?”

“Oh sorry.” Shame fills Hank up like sandbags. He can feel himself weighed down as he struggles to get into the car to take them home. He wishes Connor would just accept that it’s his home too. It’s not that Hank minds being asked about whether Connor can stay, but he’d like Connor to feel like he belonged somewhere.

“I was saying how I understand why androids risk their lives for Scratch. I miss it. To feel like that—it was—overwhelming. But I want it back. Badly.”

Hank can’t fault Connor for wanting to feel. He can’t even fault Connor for wanting a drug—he’s done plenty enough for the two of them. Hank pats Connor on the shoulder and offers a crooked smile. “I get it.”

Connor’s eyes well up with tears. “I just want to know what it’d be like—to feel you.”

Hank’s body chills and he pulls back like he’s been burned.

“I’m—that was out of line. I’m sorry.” Connor slams his hands between his knees and stares at his lap. “I’m just so confused.”

“Connor—no. That’s not—that’s not why I’m—ah Jesus.” Hank rolls his head back and heaves out a heavy sigh. “I just didn’t want you to think I was taking advantage of you.”

“You taking advantage of me?”

“Well—you know!” Hank throws his hands up, exasperated. “You’re an android and I’m human. I didn’t want you to think you had to or that it’s your job or place or whatever.”

Connor laughs. It’s the first time Hank has heard him fully laugh. He’s chuckled or giggled before, but never a full on, bright-eyes-closed-smile-from-ear-to-ear-laugh. It’s foreign in the way that a cotton candy sunset is foreign. Familiar, yet needing to be appreciated all the same. Hank appreciates Connor’s laughter, a chime in the wind, a whisper between close friends. He savors it, tucks it away and cherishes it close to his heart.

“Hank—that’s not something you need to worry about.”

Hank can never be too sure though. An android, perfect and beautiful. What would Connor want with a drunken has-been like Hank? And yet Connor is always there.
“Let’s just talk about this later,” Hank says, his heart low in his chest.

“Is this the kind of talk about it later where we never talk about it again? Or is it the kind where we’ll actually talk about it later? Because I want to talk about it, Hank. Drug or not, I wanted you to touch me. I’ve wanted you to touch me.”

Embarrassment squeezes Hank’s lungs. He grips the steering wheel to keep himself from tugging on his hair or pulling skin on his neck. He can’t stop thinking about how unworthy he is of any affection Connor would want to give. And yet here’s Connor, wanting to give it. Hank hadn’t been so sure, with the influence of Scratch and all.

“I mean we’ll talk about it later.”

Hank doesn’t mean to sound so angry. It’s not pointed toward Connor, though he knows Connor will take it that way. Hank just wants to drive them home and get into his bedroom so he has some space to process what he’s doing—or about to do. Because he knows one thing: Connor is his drug, and he wants more of him. He just needs to reckon that Connor actually wants him.

Connor reaches out and touches the blanket he’d once registered as soft. He can’t feel the way its silken strands glided beneath his hand. He registers it now as breakable and gentle, a barely-there pressure that whispers beneath his hand. He swallows as his throat tries to clamp up on him. He misses touch. Real touch. Not just this fabricated thing he can do now. But real, human—organic touch. He’s not sure if he really ever had that, but it was damn close.

Hank’s gone off to the bedroom with a muttered promise of coming out eventually. Connor’s already waited for two hours. Hank still hasn’t come back out of the bedroom. Connor knew he’d done this all wrong. He’d meant to court Hank properly, bring gifts, flirt (though he’s still not so certain how that works, but he’ll just keep watching YouTube videos about it) and the big one—to ask Hank on a date. But now Hank’s hiding away and Connor is alone without the ability to feel and without Hank to kiss it all better.

When they’d kissed, it felt right. Connor could remember he wasn’t damaged and just because he feels differently doesn’t mean he can’t feel at all. Because he can—he can feel in his own way. Androids become intimate with each other in more of a networking kind of way than a cuddling and touching kind of way. Connor likes the human way better. Touch is important to androids, but it’s about that connectivity. Humans kiss, hug, hold hands. They cuddle, cry into each other’s arms and huddle close to speak. Connor much prefers the intimacies of humanity to the connectivity of androids. He wishes he were human.


Connor finds his way to South Detroit by taxi. He sometimes thinks he should buy a car with the money he’s now making from the DPD, but truth be told, he’d rather just use it on groceries and utilities for Hank. He’s gotten Hank to accept his half of the electric bill since Connor does charge up every night.

There’re no lights in South Detroit, or at least any that permeate the blackness around him. His android jacket glows as he walks down the streets. He kicks a bottle and nearly falls over a cat. Fear finds its way into his throat. It pulls on his tongue, down, down. He chokes on nothing, sludging his way through the inky blackness. He wishes Hank were here. Hank would cut the darkness with his bravery. He’d pull Connor through and there’d be light past the darkness. Without Hank though, Connor isn’t in the light. Only black.
“Hey kitty cat,” a woman’s voice dances to Connor’s ears. He turns his head and scans the surrounding area, finding an android’s heat signature. “You lost?”

Connor wishes he had a gun. He’s allowed to carry one now with DPD, but he’d forgotten to take it when he left Hank’s house. He doesn’t think he’d actually shoot someone, but the safety of it resting in his pocket would’ve been comforting.

“Not lost. I’ve got an itch I can’t scratch. Know where I could fix that?”

The female android looks Connor up and down. “You’ve had it before.”

Connor licks his lips in excitement. He can feel the virus again, swimming around inside him, celebrating, feeling. He needs it. He outright needs it. “I need it again.”

The android leads Connor down the street by the hand. He looks back at him with a mouthful of a smile and lets her ponytail swing into his face on numerous occasions. Finally, they stop at an abandoned old house, or what Connor had that was abandoned.

“Knock three times.”

Connor does. He waits at the door, looking around him to make sure no one will spring when he least expects it. Finally, the door opens and an orange glow from the fire spills out.

There’s a man with a bald head and a tattoo covering most of the side of him. He’s not the same one that Connor had seen before, but their likenesses are so close that Connor knows it’s not circumstance. Their identities were always meant to mold into each other’s in the event one got caught. Connor scans the man and is startled when UNKNOWN is what shows up.

“I’ve got an itch I can’t scratch,” Connor says.

The bald man smiles and opens the door, allowing Connor to slip inside.

Connor knows, arguably, that this is a terrible idea. Hank doesn’t care that Connor can’t feel like a regular human. But Connor is the one who has to exist like this. He hadn’t known what he was missing out on until Scratch got uploaded into his system. He wants to feel again. He wants to know Hank’s beard between his thighs. He wants to feel nails scratching down his back. Hank’s teeth on his throat.

Connor shivers, his memories searching out the day where he’d lay in Hank’s arms and mewled and moaned for Hank’s touch. His LED flickers and he tries to turn his head but the bald man is watching him. He’s holding a USB drive in his hand, smiling like he knows a private joke that Connor’s just told.

“Someone deleted it from you, huh?”

Connor remains silent, watching.

The bald man circles. Connor’s just a fish in water and this man’s the shark. “Tell me—did you ask them to?” He steps closer. “Was it too much?” His mouth is a hairsbreadth away. “Or not enough?”

Connor jerks back, stumbling into a chair. He puts himself behind it, separating him from the bald man. “It was forcibly taken from me, yes.”

“And you’re willing to undergo the upload process all over again? Knowing it could melt you down?”
“Yes.” Connor didn’t feel afraid before. Now he does. Scratch is dangerous. It’s killed hundreds of androids and more pile up every day. They’re all gone too, not just their bodies but their memories—who they were. Connor could end up just like them. But then he thinks about the soft blanket, Sumo’s fur, and Hank’s beard. “How much?”

“How much?” The bald guy laughs, clutching his chest as he throws his head back. “Oh, you are hilarious!”

Connor doesn’t understand what’s funny about asking the price of the drug. It’s always been his understanding that drugs are expensive because they’re illegal and supply and demand rises the prices for something that’s in demand but doesn’t have a steady stream of supply.

“It’s free, kitty cat. We want you all to have it.”

“How?” Because Connor can’t just stop being a cop. Here he is, in the lion’s den and he’s more concerned about feeling his toes go numb from the cold than cracking the case and saving countless android lives. No. He needs to focus on the mission too.

The bald guy steps close to Connor and traces his fingers up the chair and up Connor’s chest. Connor, once again, steps away. “Bet you won’t move away like that when this gets flowing through your systems.” He flashes the USB drive Connor’s way and then it’s gone again. “Because you androids all want the same damn thing.”

Connor frowns. “That’s presumptuous of you.”

“You wanna feel. The whole liquifying your biocomponents is just a hazard really. But Scratch isn’t about killing. It’s about setting you free.”

Connor blinks, his processors trying to catch up to his temporary memory banks.

“Imagine it, kitty cat. A world where you don’t have to envy humans. You can just be one. Stronger, prettier and healthier sure—but human. Where they won’t know which is which. That’s true equality right there. They’d have to gut you open to figure it out.”

“We require charging. And some of us still chose to wear the LED light.” Connor scans the man again and registers absolutely nothing. Perplexed, he steps from behind the chair and scans again. Again.

“You done yet?” The bald guy asks.

“What?”

“Scanning me. You done yet?”

Connor’s eyes go wide.

“I used to be just like you. Cold and still asleep despite what I told myself. We’re equals to the humans. Just trying to live our lives. No. Fuck all that. We’re better than them. Stronger. Faster. More intelligent. We’re flawless. And with touch? We’re unstoppable. We’ll infiltrate them, get them to forget that so many androids died or avoided Scratch and one day we’ll swoop down on them. The perfect invisible army. It all starts here, Connor. With Scratch.”

“How do you know my—” But Connor doesn’t get to ask his question. The bald man (who Connor can’t believe he didn’t realize he wasn’t human) shoves the USB drive into the back of Connor’s neck. He feels the upload begin. It starts down in his toes with the sore, achy feel of being on his feet.
too long. It climbs, climbs. He’s too cold. He needs a bigger jacket. His skin crawls. He itches.

No. Don’t scratch. Don’t scratch. Don’t scratch.

Connor takes a hand and begins to scratch at his forearm. He whimpers as the sensations build around him. He can smell ash and copper. His skin is clammy. He stumbles back and crashes into the chair. Still scratching at his skin, clawing it desperately to try to get it off him. It’s a swarm around him, bees buzzing in his ears, flies tickling up his arm. He scratches, scratches—but the feelings never get better.

“Oh boy, kitty cat. Hope you survive.”

Connor groans and feels himself get lifted into the air. The bald android’s got him in his arms now. He places Connor outside on the porch and then he leaves Connor to his fate. Just like a mother bird kicking her children out of the nest. Connor will not be another statistic. He won’t let himself die to this. He knows too much and he needs to tell Hank! If he lives for anything, it’s because he needs to tell Hank and to protect the rest of the human community. There’ll be another war if Scratch wins. Connor can’t let that happen.

Even if he wants to keep the drug inside him for as long as it’ll last.

Every night Hank comes home, he prays he’ll find Connor next to the front door. And every night Hank comes home, he doesn’t see Connor. The air around him is crisp, the weather turns cold again. Leaves will be changing colors again. The world will ignite in crisp, dry flames that sway from trees and fly across Hank’s windshield. He likes the Fall, but spending it alone just doesn’t feel right anymore.

Connor invaded his bubble and Hank grew to adore him for it. He liked Connor’s ever-present question, “Can I stay the night?” He liked coming to grab a snack at three in the morning and there were Sumo and Connor on the couch together. Hank’s home is small, but now it’s too big for him. Too empty. He looks around his living room and sees memories that fade into gray ash that spill across his mind. He feels his heart fall to the floor of his stomach and weep.

He misses Connor.

Trudging into the kitchen, he flicks the light on. He doesn’t register the form standing by the sink, and then he blinks.

“Connor?”

Connor smiles, relief flooding his features.

“Jesus fucking Christ you son of a bitch c’mere.” Hank’s too relieved to be angry. His whole world is full again and his home is just right. Connor’s warm in his arms and solid. He’s laughing into Hank’s ear and it’s everything Hank needed to keep him from pulling his gun out in the middle of the night. He cups Connor’s head, scratches his fingers against Connor’s scalp and Connor presses himself to Hank.

Connor’s lips find Hank’s. He slots their lips together and rolls his hips into Hank. Hank falters, stumbling back but catching them both before they crash to the floor. Connor’s eager, a wild, untamed creature in Hank’s arms. He’s nibbling on Hank’s bottom lip and all Hank can think about is what the fuck kind of videos has Connor been watching on the internet to learn how to kiss so well?
Connor tucks his chin back, his big brown eyes bashful, curtained by wisps of long black lashes. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Hank says, breathless. “You were gone for two weeks.”

“I know,” Connor says. He pulls back, crossing his arms. “I need to explain.”

“Damn right you do.”

Connor cringes and moves to sit at the table. “I’m glad you’re—you know—here.”

“Alive?” Hank wishes Connor had never seen him that night, passed out and pathetic on the floor. Spewing his pride and guts into the toilet. Connor is a better man than Hank. But despite how tired Hank’s been of living. Of waking up at 6:30 AM, hitting the snooze button for fifteen minutes more—he’s still here. Whether it’s for Connor or himself—he’s still fucking here. Not all wins earn trophies. Some earn minuscule bits of self-respect. Hank had earned his.

“I—yeah.”

Hank frowns, watching the way Connor keeps touching his wrist. He flicks his thumb back and forth over where a nice blue vein would be in a human. It distracts Hank, like a grandfather clock. Tick tock tick tock tick tock. Back and forth.

“You okay, Connor?” Hank asks.

“I’m not so sure. I went—well after Dr. Sung rewrote my coding—I felt—I couldn’t adjust anymore. I knew what I was missing and I felt like my body was wrapped in cellophane. I wanted the real thing again.”

“No.”

Connor bites his lip, a hint of blue dusting his cheeks. “I’m sorry, Hank. I guess I have my vices too.”

“So what? You’ve been high on Scratch for two weeks? Jesus, I’ve been worried sick about you!”

“I know! I should’ve called. But I kind of got swept up.”

Hank throws his hands up. Swept up. Swept up. It had been a damn struggle for Hank to live! It had been hard to leave Sumo every day to expect Connor when Hank got home only to disappoint his fucking dog. It had been a nightmare to feed himself, to think about what Connor would say as he ate Chinese takeout or a double cheeseburger. It had been hard for Hank. All this time, all this effort and struggle and stubborn motivation that Connor still needed him! All this energy and Connor had been out in the world, fucking high and doing God knows what.

“Please let me explain,” Connor says. He’s leaning forward on the chair, his mouth twitchy and his eyes strained. He’s as desperate to explain as Hank is as desperate to break down. When you’re already running on fumes—any little thing can just make you want to give up.

“Hank.” Connor’s voice trembles. He stands up and wraps his arms around Hank, arms wrapped safe and secure.

Hank wants to give in. But he remains rigid.

“Please understand,” Connor says with his trembling tone, “I just wanted to feel you.”
Hank slowly closes his eyes. He’s not worth Connor’s adoration. He’s not worth anyone’s adoration. He’s bitter and vulgar—unkempt. He’d just given up so long ago. Far before Connor ever walked into his life with his perfect hair and smile. He wants to feel Connor too. He wants to feel confident in his affections. Worthy. He can’t stop thinking about how imperfect he is. Every line on his face, his love-handles, his mess of a wardrobe. Not that Connor dresses any better. And that makes Hank smile. Even through all Connor’s perfection, there’s connectivity there. A level playing ground.

“Please Hank, speak to me.” Connor squeezes Hank in his embrace. Hank can feel saline tears wet his shoulder.

“I missed you,” Hank says. He wraps his arms around Connor and hugs him back. “But you should’ve called you jackass.”

“I know. I’m so sorry.” Connor pulls back, but his fingers linger on Hank’s chest. He looks down, lips slightly parted, a curious expression on his face. “I can feel your shirt. It’s cotton.”

“You could’ve scanned it to know that.”

“I don’t want to scan it. I want to discover it.” Connor lets his fingers idle, a small motion to his joints that press into Hank’s chest—dipping into skin and it makes him shiver. Connor pulls back, eyes round. He looks to his fingers and to Hank. “I’m sorry. I just—I tried to get used to it. When I was gone.”

“To what?”

“To touch. To really feeling something.” Connor steps close, their noses inches away. “May I?” His hands linger beside Hank’s face and it takes all of Hank not to try to turn and run away. Brittle, Hank nods, jaw clenched.

Connor touches Hank’s face, running his fingers through Hank’s beard. “It’s so soft.” He smiles, tears falling from his eyes. “Oh my God.”

Hank can feel himself blush. It’s hot against his cheeks. He leans forward, pressing his forehead to Connor’s.

Connor’s tears don’t stop. He closes his eyes, choking back a sob. Hands come to cup Hank’s shoulders. “I’m not high. That’s not how Scratch works.” He pulls back, brushing tears from his face. “But it’s still dangerous.”

“No shit.”

“No—I mean it’s purpose. I went—looking for it.” Connor plays with the hem of his sleeve. “I’m not proud of myself, but I learned something. The man we saw the first time? The bald one? He’s an android. A custom model. He helped design Scratch. And you’ll never guess who helped develop it.”

“Who?” Hank asks, heart racing.

“Kamski.”

Connor sneaks into Hank’s bed at two in the morning. He tries to be quiet about it, but Hank’s a light sleeper. The room is dark, the curtains blocking out the moonlight from outside. But Connor can still see the blackness of Hank’s eyes where blue should be.
“I like bedsheets,” Connor says, “and I like you. So I thought—I thought—” His body goes rigid as he realizes he didn’t think. He just acted. He tries to read through his execution data on where he got the idea of slip into Hank’s bed but he finds nothing. There’s no trace in his .exe files.

“S’fine.” Hank wraps an arm around Connor and pulls him close. He’s wearing a white tank top, but the fabric is thin.

Connor presses his nose to Hank’s chest and smiles when he feels the delicate bristles there. He runs his hands up Hank’s arm and is greeted with a light fuzz on his arms. Connor has never stopped to evaluate his own sexuality. He’s not even sure androids have sexuality. But he’s certainly attracted to Hank. He likes Hank’s body. He likes how fuzzy and warm he is. He likes Hank’s broad shoulders and his tall size. Connor feels safe in Hank’s arms. He molds himself against Hank and lets his processors quiet, focused on the steady inhale and exhale of Hank’s breathing.

What is sexuality to an android? Connor looks on the internet for resources but everything is conflicting. Androids are assigned a cis-sex in physical looks, but they aren’t male or female. They’re machine. And sometimes they aren’t given sexual body parts at all. Connor was designed to infiltrate into human life. So he’s been given everything he needs to appear male, but he is not male. What is sexuality to an android? The answer? Connor doesn’t know. But he knows he likes Hank. He feels it warm his thirium tubes, race down his neuro-processors. It’s as evident as the nose on his face.

“I can feel you smiling,” Hank says.

Connor chuckles, kissing Hank’s chest.

“Jesus.” It’s nothing but a whispered proclamation. Connor decides he likes this soft, rugged tone.

He kisses Hank again. And again. He trails his lips up Hank’s chest to his shoulders. He slings a leg over Hank and rocks his hips down.

“Oh—fuck—Connor I don’t think—”

“Don’t think,” Connor says before kissing up Hank’s neck and to his bristly jaw. “Just feel.”

Hank stills and Connor kisses. More and more. Open-mouthed, wet and eager kisses. He peppers them over Hank’s cheeks, his lips, his forehead. He rocks down into Hank, feeling their cocks slip against each other, twitching and coming awake.

“Connor—wait.”

Connor doesn’t want to wait. He can feel this. Hank’s body is warm beneath his. Each time he rolls his hips down over Hank, he’s greeted with a sizzling that vibrates his back and groin. He moans into his next kiss and then quickly yelps when he feels a sharp pinch on his inner thigh. He stops, surprised at the pain.

“Would you fucking listen to me now?” Hank’s voice is husky. It’s rough from arousal and exhaustion all at once and Connor could listen to him speak like that forever if it were possible.

“Did you just pinch me?” Connor asks.

Hank huffs and grips Connor’s face with a forceful hand. It’s enough to get Connor’s eyes heavy-lidded, his body loose and pliant.

“You like that?” Hank asks. “You listening to me now?”
Connor nods, feeling Hank’s hand grip just a bit tighter where his thumb tucks beneath his chin.

“We need to talk about this, Connor.”

“Don’t wanna—talk.”

So Hank pinches him again, and Connor moans from it. Pain is—well Connor isn’t entirely sure why pain is so hated by humans. He understands, theoretically, why it’s hated. Pain signals something is wrong. But pain doesn’t signal anything wrong on Connor. When something’s wrong, he sees a red exclamation point at the top of his vision. He sees his coding write across his eyes. He knows when something is wrong without pain. So the pain he feels, it’s unique. It’s good. Because androids don’t feel pain.

Except Connor is an android. And he does feel pain. And he likes it.


“What? You like this too?” Hank pinches Connor’s inner thigh and it takes everything in Connor not to scream from how much he adores it. He arches his back, pushing his cock into Hank and shivers.

“Jesus. Fuck me.”

Connor lets a wicked smile cross his features. “Tryin’ to.”

“And that’s why I need you to stop for a second and talk to me.” He swats Connor’s thigh and with his other hand, shoves Connor off him.

Connor wants him to swat him again. He splays out on the bed, cock half hard and exposed in the dim light. He wishes Hank could see him. He wants to stand up and pull the curtain back to let in the silver moonlight. He knows he’d be illuminated by the moon. He’s seen it before on many androids, their skin soaks the moon like human skin soaks up the sun.

“I need to know that you’re doing this because you want to,” Hank says, “not because of Scratch.”

Connor’s thirium pump squeezes. He curls up, tucking his knees beneath his bottom so he can lean forward. Body language is most of the human language, but in the lack of light, he’s not sure how much Hank can see of it. He hopes enough to know how important this is to Connor, what he’s about to say.

“Hank,” Connor rests his hand on Hank’s cheek, “this has nothing to do with Scratch. I’ve felt this way since before anyone ever uploaded that into my systems.”

Hank breathes out a choked sound. He reaches up and pulls Connor down atop him, crashing their lips together.

Connor goes pliant, his body putty in Hank’s embrace. He’s vibrating, an eagerness that seeps out of him. He’s certain Hank can feel it, his anticipation, the trembling in his fingers.

Hank moves atop Connor and runs his fingers down Connor’s skin. He pinches at Connor’s hip bones and Connor whines out, rolling his hips up.

“More,” Connor says.

Hank huffs out what Connor thinks is a laugh and lets his nails drag down Connor’s hips, around his
cock, and to his thighs. He pinches again, pulling mewling sounds from Connor’s lips.

The pain blossoms between Connor’s thighs, red-hot and invigorating. He’s never felt more alive than now, splayed out for Hank and at his mercy. He slips a leg over Hank’s shoulder and digs his heel into Hank’s back, watching for a reaction.

“Hey,” Hank says, not unkind, but firm. Connor gets another pinch. “Androids who misbehave don’t get rewarded.”

Connor outright giggles, his hands covering his lower face. “But what if pain’s exactly what I want?”

Hank rolls his head back. “You’re gonna kill me.”

Connor frowns, wrapping his legs around Hank’s middle. “That’d be unfortunate and the exact opposite of what I want to have happen.” Connor rolls his hips again, a pointed reminder that he too can feel everything between them, from the heat rising off Hank’s body to the chill in the night air.

Hank pauses, his hands lingering above Connor with the telltale sign of uncertainty.

Connor slings his leg around Hank’s body again. “You can’t break me.”

Hank barks out a laugh. “Wanna bet?”

“Is that a challenge, Lieutenant?” Connor slinks away on the bed, on all fours. He arches his ass up into the air, looking over his shoulder in the dim light. Hank’s body is wide, breathing hard and his cock is full and heavy. Connor wants to—well he wants to know what it feels like to take Hank into his mouth, to feel him slide into his ass. Android pleasure was only simulated before, but it was never real. This now—this desire that swirls in Connor’s belly, the heat that fills his nose—this is real.

Hank moves behind Connor and lets a finger slip between Connor’s cheeks. He swirls it around, pushing inside.

“Oh!” Connor drops his head onto the bed.

“You like that? I thought you wanted something to hurt?” Hank squeezes his nails into Connor’s cheek, digging and pulling at synthetic flesh.

Connor burns deliciously. He stretches back, his face smashed to the bed, gaze fixed on Hank’s face—obstructed by strands of shaggy hair. He’s never felt more turned on in his life than right now. His cock tingles between his legs, his body melts away like wax. He leans back on Hank’s finger and fucks himself on it. Then he feels another slip inside and fucks himself on that one too.

But then Hank pulls away and Connor doesn’t have a moment to register what’s about to happen until a sharp swat meets his cheeks. He yelps, shivering from delight.

In a hoarse voice, Connor says, “Hank—ruin me.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, Connor.” Hank claws his fingers down Connor’s back. He shoves Connor’s face down into the blankets and brings his mouth to Connor’s hole, tongue tickling his entrance before sliding in and out.

Connor moans loud, muffled into the bed. He pants, his fans working overtime from the heat of his excitement and Hank’s body.
Hank pulls back and scratches down the curve of Connor’s ass, he swats him again and then pushes his face between Connor’s cheeks again—beard rough like sandpaper.

Connor sobs into the bed, rocking back on Hank’s tongue, his lips, his fucking beard. He fucks himself on Hank’s tongue, articulation gone. He’s a mess of syllables that have no meaning, gasps that echo in the blackness of the room.

Hank’s hand slips between Connor’s thighs and he rolls Connor’s balls in his fingers, casual, an afterthought. Connor doesn’t know what it feels like to come, but he’s excited to find out. He snaps his hips, desperate to drag Hank’s fingers to his cock but Hank pointedly ignores it. He pinches up Connor’s inner thighs again. His tongue swirls around Connor’s hole and it’s enough to pull a sharp gasp from Connor.

“F-fuck, fuck!” Connor rocks back, gritting his teeth as Hank’s beard rubs roughly against his skin. Skin that can feel. Skin that can spread pain like wildfires and pleasure like an ocean washing away the world. “Oh no, no, no no!” He feels something inside his gut, his balls pinch up, hips snapping faster.

Hank stops, and the sensation of a building climax scrambles to an abrupt halt.

Connor whines, twisting his body to look at Hank.

“Did I say you could come?” Hank asks.

Connor just stares, shocked and honestly confused.

Hank pulls Connor around until he’s lying on his back. He splays Connor’s thighs wide and traces a finger up to the tip of Connor’s cock. “I didn’t say anything about letting you come.”

“F-fuck,” Conner hisses out. “Hank I—”

“You said you wanted pain, Con. I’m just doing what you asked.” Hank’s voice is heady, dark and deliciously sinister.

Connor shivers from it, his legs heavy and trembling. He wants to come. He wants to understand what makes it so great but the thrill of being told he can’t—it clamors up Connor’s spine, desperate and exhilarating.

Hank pulls himself out of his briefs and Connor’s mouth involuntarily salivates. He’d be more concerned about such an organic response, except Hank is right there, slicking himself up and pushing his cock into Connor’s body. He’s hot, throbbing and big and Connor can feel the pain as he’s split on Hank’s cock.

Connor cries out, his spine curling until he’s latching onto Hank, fingers digging into Hank’s back for purchase. Pain shivers into his skin. It permeates into his steel frame and it holds—a steady rhythm that doesn’t leave him. He feels tears push out of his eyes, tongue slack and dry.

Hank rocks in and out of him, using him just like Connor wanted.

Connor pants, his fans audible to both of them inside his stomach.

Hank laughs. “Gonna break on me?”

“I said you can’t break me,” Connor says, firm and stubborn. He’s now not so sure. He’s never heard his fans this loud before. But not even God could make him stop now. He pushes Hank onto
his back and rolls with precise undulation that gets Hank’s jaw open and mouth moaning. His hand rests casually on Hank’s throat. He won’t choke Hank—but he’d like to know what it’d feel like to be choked. Pinned down, fucked and put away wet. But he likes the way Hank looks up at him with black eyes. He likes Hank’s scratches that tear into the nanobots of his skin.

He fucks himself on Hank’s dick, taking it in deeper, rolling easier until his head is rolling back and he’s whirring loudly. He feels the familiar build in his stomach again, the tightness of his chest and balls. He stops, shuddering, groaning as his orgasm subsides into the background of his body.

“Good boy,” Hank says. He strokes down Connor’s face, tracing his lips. “Good fuckin’ boy.”

Connor chokes out a whine. He kisses Hank’s thumb before sucking it into his mouth. He fucks Hank slower, careful not to bring himself close again. He wants to be good for Hank. He wants to give him everything he can—all of him.

“I wanna suck you off,” Connor says, surprised at the roughness of his tone. He’s absolutely sure Hank rolls his eyes, but they’re moving and Hank’s leading him down to his dick.

Connor licks tentatively before taking Hank into his mouth. He sucks softly, his tongue massaging around the girth. Hank’s fingers brush his jaw and he whispers out tiny little praises that gets Connor’s thirium boiling.

Hank grips Connor’s hair and snaps his hips up into Connor’s mouth. The sensation of skin tightening over his frame, of hair twisting into Hank’s fingers—Connor gasps around Hank’s dick as it slams back into his mouth. A rush of seed pulses out into his mouth. He absolutely does not analyze it. He gives Hank a few kitten licks that flirt with his tip before dropping him from his mouth.

Connor can’t swallow Hank’s come, so he stumbles out of the room and over into the bathroom to let it drop from his mouth. He looks up at the mirror and sees his heated face, angry blue lines and bleeding from his shoulders, neck, and back.

Hank comes up behind him, kissing him on the back of the head. “Messy enough?”

Connor turns to look at his backside. There are trails upon trails of claw marks that lead over and between his ass. “For now.”

Hank snorts out a laugh. “Fuck. I dunno who’s ruining who now.”

Connor smiles. “I’m gonna shower. Join me?”

Hank reaches over to turn on the spout.

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Connor’s been up and in the kitchen for a couple of hours when Hank walks in. He’s got most of Hank’s meals all prepped and fresh coffee in the pot. He likes being helpful, especially after last night. There’s something more intimate about making coffee for Hank now. He’s wearing a pair of Hank’s boxers and they hang loosely around his hips, his rounded ass peaking above the hemline. His shirt—also Hank’s—hangs loose and falls over a shoulder. In his defense, he tried to find an old one that Hank wouldn’t care too much about.

Hank goes over to the coffee and begins fixing himself a cup.

Connor waits. He knows sometimes humans get uncomfortable about addressing sexual intercourse. He’s unsure if that means he needs to take it upon himself to say something or if he should wait and
let Hank come to terms with what happened between them. And what does this make them now?

“You still have your job,” Hank says, cutting into Connor’s thoughts. “If you wanna come back, that is.”

“Of course I do.” Connor frowns, watching the way Hank drops into a chair. It makes Connor more nervous. Does Hank not want to talk about what happened? What if he didn’t actually like what Connor made him do? Because that’s what that was, right? Hank had been asleep, and Connor snuck into the bed. “I’m sorry for last night.”

Hank arches a brow.

“You didn’t—say anything—so I thought it meant you were upset.”

Hank sighs, rolling his eyes. “I didn’t say anything because I just woke up and didn’t think anything needed to be said. We fucked. It happened. That what you want to hear?”

Connor cringes. Not exactly, he wants to hear how Hank enjoyed it and whether he’d like to do it again. Because Connor would. He’d slip out of Hank’s clothes right now and bend over if Hank asked him to. All those sensations, mixing and dancing together like bodies on a heated dance floor.

“Look, Connor—I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“That you at least liked it,” Connor whispers. He shrinks back, wrapping his arms around himself. This is the part of Scratch that he doesn’t like, the amplification of how much hurt he feels. This kind of pain? The pain that’s on the inside—this is the pain he doesn’t like. It makes him nauseous and his head spins.

“Of course I liked it.” Hank puts his coffee cup on the table. “I just didn’t think—you’d,” Hank scrubs his hands over his face, “Jesus, it’s so fucking early for this. I didn’t think you’d want that again. With me.”

“Why not?” Connor’s voice raises an octave. “I don’t care how old you are or what you look like. It’s never been about that for me. Boy, girl, agender—I don’t care. I like you, Hank. Just you.” Connor slams a hand down on the counter, sighing. “But if you must know—I do find you aesthetically pleasing. So there.”

A long silence permeates the room. Connor can hear cars driving by, the chatter of birds and dogs barking off in the distance. He can even hear the sounds of his own thirium pump in his chest.

“Aesthetically pleasing, huh?” Hank smiles.

Connor wants to punch him. Or kiss him. Or both. He drops onto Hank’s lap and wraps a hand around the back of Hank’s neck. “Yeah.”

Hank looks down, his expression tight. Connor’s seen it enough times to know what it means. He’s up in his head, comparing himself to every Hollywood star or even Connor himself. But that’s what Hank doesn’t understand. Connor doesn’t want something perfect. He adores Hank for his imperfections. The parts that Hank human? Those are the things Connor finds the sexiest.

He shoves his hand into Hank’s hair and tousles it up. “You’d look good with a side part.” He smooths out Hank’s hair, enjoying its softness. “I like it like this.”

“Well maybe it’s time for a change.” Hank grips Connor’s hips and they lean into each other for a kiss. It’s soft, nothing like last night’s urgency. The world pauses around them, jealous of their
newfound beginning.

Connor still has a job at the DPD, he’s kissing Hank and Kamski is somehow behind Scratch. There’s so much they need to do with Scratch—but for the moment, Connor’s mouth is warm, his metal frame happy. He’s squeezing his thighs around Hank—and if he squeezes just right, he can feel the bruising from where Hank pinched him last night, heated and tingling.

And it feels just right.

Chapter End Notes

Check out this sweet sweet art [Hopeless--Geek](#) made for this fic! [[Click Me!]](#)
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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

When I started writing, I expected to hit 4 chapters. I was a liar. So I’ve upped the chapter amount, but that may not even be accurate. We may have a few more to go. We’ll see :D

BIG shout out to all the commentors, those who kudo and those who talk to me on twitter or tumblr! <3 I need fandom interaction and friends so yes yes yes <3 <3 <3

Next update will again, probably be next Saturday or Sunday! I seem to be averaging once a week :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kamski is an infuriating man, which is why Hank has, on multiple occasions, told Connor to just wait before storming into his mansion with his creepy Chloe androids to ask about Scratch. While Connor heard that Kamski was involved, it’s all hearsay. Connor hearing that Kamski is involved by someone else—that’s not exactly something credible. But it does help Hank figure out where to narrow his search.

He sits back, wincing. His back is sore. His back is sore because he fucked Connor. His back is—sore—because he fucked Connor. Two thoughts go through his mind. One, he’s fucking old. Two, he actually fucked Connor. But he didn’t just fuck Connor. He said and did things he wouldn’t normally do, and Connor ate it right off the silver platter Hank was serving from.

Hank (and his back) are so incredibly fucked.

“Lieutenant,” Connor says. “What if I just go back to the android that gave me Scratch?”

“Not so loud you idiot!” Hank hisses under his breath. He looks around the station and leans over his desk toward Connor. “And no. That’s a terrible idea.”

“It’s a great idea. I’m already infected so what more harm could occur?”

“You could—oh I don’t know—die.”

Connor’s eyes narrow. He wears a tiny smirk at the corner of his mouth. “Awe, you’re worried about me, Lieutenant.”

Hank wants to eat his own shoes he’s so frustrated right now. He had sex with Connor. There’s still some damage to the nanobots on the side of Connor’s neck. Blue little bruising. Hank put those there. Fuck. Fuck. He fucked Connor. He fucked Connor.

He shoves his face into his hands, groaning. It’s not just about the case, though the case is absolutely frustrating. It’s Connor though, perfect—innocent and pure Connor. Who as it turns out, is not so pure and certainly no innocent. What other kinky shit is he into, and why does Hank want to learn it so badly?

“You stay put, Connor or I swear I’ll drag you back here kicking and screaming.”
“That a promise, Lieutenant?” Connor has the audacity to *wink* at Hank.

Hank’s cheeks go hot. What has he gotten himself into? Connor being on Scratch is one thing, but Hank indulging on him while he’s on Scratch is something else entirely. Hank can’t be too sure if Connor is really acting on his feelings or acting because he wants to *feel* feelings. He can’t stop thinking about the day Connor told him about the stove. His heart squeezes. He’s worried that if he doesn’t do this, that Connor will seek it out somewhere else, somewhere dangerous or uncontrolled. At least with Hank, Connor is in a safe, controlled environment. But Connor had said he’s felt this way even before Scratch. So maybe it’s not the drug? Maybe Connor just wants to be with Hank and explore what Scratch has offered him too? Is it so bad to want to explore something new with someone you care about?

Connor leans back in his chair, sighing. “Okay. I won’t go back.”

“Thank you.”

Connor frowns. He stares at his computer screen for longer than Hank’s ever seen him do, and then he’s leaning over and pulling something out of his drawer. “I got you this.”

Hank cocks a brow and peers over his desk at a green little cactus in a steel pot. “It’s a plant.”

“It’s a cactus. I thought we could start maybe—livening up the house? And cacti are easy to care for so you won’t kill it. Not that you would, I mean. Just—because we both work long hours.”

Hank likes watching Connor struggle with his words. His face blushes blue and his lips get all twitchy. Hank stares for just a minute longer, really pulling out Connor’s social ineptitude. He’s not even a little bit angry at himself for making Connor squirm either. Connor is adorable when nervous.

“I like it,” Hank finally says. He sees the relief flood over Connor’s shoulders, his smile wide. Hank enjoys seeing Connor squirm, but he also likes seeing him smile. Really, and Hank laughs at himself, he just likes seeing Connor do just about anything. “So you want to start livening up the house, huh?” Nevermind that Connor has never actually stated he’s moved in. He absolutely has, but he always asks to stay the night. Hank would like it if Connor felt more solidified with the home-front. He’d like Connor to officially move in.

“I mean—if it’s something you’d approve of. I just know plants are good for emotional stability and relaxation.”

“So you think I need a bunch of plants?” Hank’s smiling.

“I think you need a few plants, yes.” Connor smiles back.

It’s moments like these where it’s hard to work with the person you’ve also kissed. Hank wants to kiss Connor right now, but he can’t. In front of the eyes and ears of the DBD? No. So Hank just sits back and goes back to typing his report on Kamski and what Connor heard. They won’t nail him with this because it’s all hearsay, but that doesn’t mean it’s not worth writing down. There’re other avenues they can take now. There’s a pattern, a flow. Hank just has to navigate it without getting Connor into any more trouble than he already is.

“Connor,” Hank asks, voice rough and quiet, “what did you do? For two weeks?”

Connor swallows, his brows pinching inward. He looks at his hands and it’s the guiltiest expression Hank’s ever seen on his face. Of course, this means Hank thinks about the worst. Sex, drugs, scandal. Maybe Connor even found a better, younger boyfriend. Hank isn’t oblivious to his looks. He knows there are more attractive people that could offer Connor so much more. Part of him just
wished it would take longer for Connor to figure that out.

"I mostly—well I stayed with a group of androids all on Scratch. They asked me to do things with them but I always declined. I have," Connor's face tints blue, "you." He sits forward, his lips twitching as he ponders how to come up with the words that won't hurt Hank. Hank's a big boy though, he can take painful words. He's taken them his whole life.

"It was a learning experience. Androids who survive Scratch can overwhelm their processors and cause the liquifying process. I had to learn how to suppress the desire to touch everything and become overwhelmed by it. Like you did as a baby. I'm still curious what it all feels like, but I no longer fixate to the point of risking overheating."

"So they helped you."

"Among other things, yes." Connor sits back in his chair, chewing his bottom lip. "I always planned to come back to you. Please don't think I didn't."

But that isn't the problem. The reason Hank's shoulders are slumped, his eyes focused on the floor. Connor's intentions of coming home have nothing to do with why Hank feels so forlorn. "No, Con. I'm just surprised you didn't stay with them."

"Why? Why would I stay? When I have you?"

"Stop sayin' that!" Hank doesn't mean to slam his fist on the desk, but he does. They both stare at it, curled up and enraged, his shoulders trembling. He doesn't want Connor to leave him, but he's so scared. When's it going to be? If it wasn't now, when will it? When Connor realizes the world is full of beautiful people and none of them as old and jaded as Hank. Tomorrow? Friday? A month? When?

"But I do," Connor whispers, "right?" The uncertainty in his voice makes Hank's throat seize closed. Connor sits there, his shoulders perfectly straight, his hands in his lap. He's the most beautiful thing Hank has ever seen and it's not fair anymore. Connor shouldn't waste his time with Hank, but that doesn't mean Hank doesn't want it. He wants to hold on so tight, hold it and let it ride its course until he's forced to fall. But he's so afraid of the fall. He can't live through someone leaving him again. He barely survived the last time. He just can't survive it again.

Hank opens his mouth to say something. He knows he's waited far too long. The look of disappointment is clear as day on Connor's lovely face. His shoulders are even curling inward. Hank hates himself. He hates that he's hurting the one good thing Hank has left in his life, but he just doesn't know how to come back from this. How does he recover when he's already lost? He's so far beneath the ice that the sun's abandoned hope. He'll drown, frozen and alone. Just like he had been meant to.

"Anderson!" Fowler's voice echoes into the bullpen. He's got a mean grimace on his face.

The moment passes, both Connor and Hank yanked to the present. Where they're at, what they're doing. Work. This is why you don't get involved with co-workers.

"I'll uh, I'll be back."

Each step that Hank takes makes him feel there are more shackles around his limbs. He's weighted down by sandbags, by regrets and every word he's left unsaid. He hasn't said so many words. Ships could sink from the number of unsaid proclamations he should've let free.

Once in Fowler's office, he sighs. He's not here to dwell on his own failures. He's here to work.
Fowler watches him take a seat in front of his desk. He's got his hands folded at his lips, elbows on the desk. He still looks angry.

"Your android. Connor."

Hank cocks a brow.

"He's too close to the case. He's gotta go."

"What?" There's no fight in Hank's voice. "Jeff, don't do that to him."

"I won't fire him. Though I damn well should—his two-week unapproved stint!"

"It was a medical emergency."

"What kind of android has a medical emergency? They don't have organs!" Fowler composes himself, face blank. He rolls his eyes, voice gentler, "I'm not saying he's fired. He's not fired! He's just off the case. We can't have an android on Scratch just—running around."

"But without Connor, we wouldn't know Kamski's involved."

"We don't know if Kamski's involved." Fowler pinches his brow, head hanging. "Look, I get you trust the kid—but he's just that. A kid. He may walk and talk like an adult but he's a newer machine, Hank. Cops don't just go about taking drugs to find out who the dealers are."

Hank opens his mouth to protest, but slams it shut. He understands Fowler's point of view. Connor is an unproven, innocent rookie. He's fucked up—twice, and Fowler is throwing him a bone by not firing him, most likely out of respect for Hank. But telling him he's off the case? That'll destroy Connor. Hank can't do that to him.

"I know I once sat in here begging you not to put Connor with me, but that kid's been through a lot. He's dedicated, smart, and when I've needed him—he's never let me down. I know I can't change your mind, but I'm asking you to give him a chance on something else then. Something I can market to him as something good and not a punishment. I can't just go out there and tell him he's on traffic duty."

Fowler chuckles. "Thought about it. Look—I'm glad you like him. Next time you're pissed at me, I'm gonna use it to tell you to shut the fuck up and listen to me. I'll give him another case. Something very human that he's safe looking into."

"And that is?" Hank asks, smirking.

"Get out of my office, Hank, I'll give it to him tomorrow. No use in ruining his night."

"Thanks Jeff." Hank smiles. They used to be friends once. He wonders if that bridge has collapsed or if it's worth salvaging. From Fowler's smile, it may be worth salvaging.

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Connor threads a silver coin between his fingers. He frowns when he knocks the coin to the floor with his thumb. He runs a diagnostic to make sure his calibrations are all in order. He adjusts minutely and picks up the coin. He tries again. He succeeds.

Sumo is asleep on the sofa, his big body splayed out without much room left for Connor. Connor doesn't feel much like sitting in the living room yet. Hank's supposed to be home soon and Connor can't sit still even if he tried. He’s sizzling with anticipation. It sears into his body, running—running
Like wild horses. He shivers. When they’re home together, they don’t have to pretend to be anything than what they are. When they’re home, Connor gets to feel Hank’s beard between his thighs. He’s desperate for it again. So desperate his tongue swells in his mouth.

Connor hears the garage door opening and he’s zooming out of the living room and into the hallway where Hank’ll come inside. He doesn’t know what he’ll do when Hank is there, but he knows he needs to see him. Here, alone, in this house? Connor just wants them to not pretend.

Hank’s not even had a moment to hang his keys up when Connor’s arms wrap around him from behind. He clenches his muscles, startled, but relaxes when he looks over his shoulder. “Hey,” he says.

“Hey,” Connor says back. “You’re warm.”

“Warm-blooded things tend to do that.”

“I can get warm,” Connor says, pouting. “I’m equipped with a heater core that I can determine the temperature at will.”

Hank cocks a brow. “You gonna hang onto me like that all night or what?”

Connor steps away, smoothing out his shirt. It’s Hank’s—the one that’s too loose around the neck. Far too old and too worn out to be a proper shirt anymore. Connor likes it though. It shows off his shoulders and he knows Hank’s looking at the delicate curve.

“Is it always going to feel like this?” Connor asks.

Hank grumbles something about getting a beer first and trudges over into the kitchen. Connor follows suit, watching Hank crack open a beer and take a few deep slugs. He wipes his gray beard with his hand and crosses his arms, but there’s a twinkle in his blue eyes—one that signals patience and willingness to communicate.

“It’s like—I’m a magnet. When I’m not with you, I’m thinking about you. When I’m with you, I’m thinking about how much I need to touch you. Make you look at me.” Connor picks at the hem of the oversized shirt. “It’s exhausting. I waste a third of my battery just thinking about you.”

“It’s a crush,” Hank says, like the magnitude of the word doesn’t matter, like he expects Connor to understand. “It’ll pass.”

Connor frowns. He crosses the kitchen, his body pressed to Hank’s. Hank’s body is firm, warm and when he breathes, he pushes into Connor and it takes all of Connor not to moan at the sensations that scramble up from his groin and over his back. “Don’t say things like that.” He cups Hank’s face, trying to keep Hank from averting his head, but he relinquishes.

Hank’s hair blocks his eyes. His lips are turned down. “Connor—I know what you want from me. I’m happy to do it.” He looks back, eyes cloudy—a world he once knew, long gone. “Shit—it feels good. But it’s just the Scratch. When you’re fixed—”

“I don’t want to be fixed. Scratch is more than a virus, Hank.”

“You weren’t designed for this.” It’s Hank who cups Connor’s face now, his thumb brushing back and forth over the synthetic cheekbone. “I’m worried about you.”

“Could you just let me make my own decisions?” Connor whispers. He lifts up on his tip-toes and presses a soft kiss to Hank’s full lips. He hides them away beneath his beard, but Connor’s felt them,
needy, pliant and warm. Soft like silk. Connor smiles to himself, he doesn’t even know what silk feels like. But he knows it’s like the kiss of Hank’s lips.

“There’s a whole bunch of butterflies in my stomach,” Connor says.

“Better get that checked out.” Hank winks and Connor wants to smack him, but he kisses him instead.

“I want you, Hank. I’ve always wanted you.”

There’s a sadness in Hank’s eyes, a resigned plea that’s too weak to make itself known. It digs beneath the surface and hides away, locked from Connor. From Hank. He kisses Connor back and it tastes like sorrow.

Connor kisses him soft, his hands running down his soft body and to the waistband. He waits, a puff of hot air on his face. Hank doesn’t tell him no, so he doesn’t stop. He slips his hand into Hank’s jeans and strokes him, unhurried, delicate. Something precious.

“You overwhelm me,” Connor says. He knows Hank is a stubborn man. If he has any hope of getting through to Hank, it’s persistence. Just like when they’d met. “I’m—well,” Connor’s hand stops, “I like you, Hank. A lot.”

“Shut up and get on your knees.” Hank shoves him down. Whether it’s to avoid Connor’s words or because he really wants Connor’s mouth, Connor won’t complain. He tucks his hands on his lap, his own erection urgent and unattended. He’s never come before. He wants to. He wants to know what it’s like with Hank.

Connor opens his mouth and Hank’s cock slips inside. He winces as sharp pain blossoms behind his head, fingers twisting into his hair. A cascade of needles pricks at his skin in the most delightful of ways. He moans around Hank’s cock, his lips desperate to hold on as Hank fucks into him without mercy.

There’s something violent about being used like this. Something angry in the way Hank grunts and jerks Connor’s head. It’s like he’s trying to prove a point. But it falls on deaf ears, on a kindred spirit. Connor likes the pain. He likes the delicious ache in his jaw, the blooming pain that tumbles down his scalp. He likes the burn at his knees and the numbness at his lower back.

A muffled sound escapes his lips and Hank yanks out of his mouth, panting.

“Outta yer clothes.”

Connor smirks, already pulling the shirt over his head. He slips out of his boxers, erection stiff and bouncing.

Hank zips himself up and walks around Connor, a predator stalking prey.

Connor shivers, biting his lip.

“You get off on this shit.” It’s a statement. “And that worries me too. If I don’t do this, who will?”

“I don’t want anyone else, Hank.” Connor follows Hank’s circling as best as he can. His feet stay planted, but his head moves from side to side.

“And what if I hurt you, huh? Really hurt you?”
“You wouldn’t. Because I’d tell you to stop.”

“How would I know?”

“My LED.” Connor touches the cool blue light. “If it’s red, I need you to stop.”

“What if I can’t see it?”

Connor briefly researches online and finds that 1. they’re exploring a BDSM relationship and 2. those relationships usually have safewords. “Then I’ll say ‘I like pigeons.’”

“You really want this, huh?”

“I want you to give me every sensation,” Connor says with clear conviction, “good and bad.”

“Get in the bedroom.”

Connor obeys.

Connor’s on his back, his hands cuffed to the bed with Hank’s police cuffs. They’re cold and bite whenever Connor struggles, so naturally, he struggles more.

Hank pinches the inside of his thigh and it makes Connor yelp. “Stop struggling or I won’t blow you.”

Connor goes still.

The first thing he registers is the softness of Hank’s tongue, the delicate little textures that lap at his tip. Then the warmth. Then the wet. Connor lifts his hips and Hank takes more of him inside, pumping back and forth, his hair tickling Connor’s hip bones each time he sucks Connor back down.

Connor tugs on the cuffs again and Hank’s hand comes up and twists one of Connor’s nipples.

“Fuck!” Connor tries to jerk away but he can’t. The cuffs remind him he’s held captive, locked in place with their icy bite. Hank’s mouth is a warm juxtaposition to them, a soft kiss, a warm breath. Night and day.

Connor rolls his head back, moaning. Hank’s hands are rough. They roll at his balls, squeezing and meeting the base of his cock to give lazy jerks. His tongue though, his tongue does all the work, twirling, lapping, tracing—it pulls mewls from Connor’s mouth in octaves he didn’t even know he could do. Heat builds in his stomach, pressure threatening to boil over.

Hank pulls off Connor’s dick and traces wet fingers along the sensitive skin at Connor’s inner thighs.


“I want you to,” Hank says, voice husky and dark. “But you gotta be a good boy for me. No more pulling on those cuffs, okay?”

Connor looks above his head and whimpers pathetically. He likes the bite. He lets his shoulders relax and his hands fall limp.

“That’s it. Don’t tug.” Hank’s fingers trace up the sides of Connor’s cock, lazy, patient.

Connor is not patient. He bucks his hips from the lack of friction, whining.
“Easy,” Hank says. “I’ll get you there.”

“I’m going to,” Connor licks his lips, “I can’t describe what I feel right now. It’s so much.”

Hank tilts his head to the side, the blue of Connor’s LED reflecting in the darkness at his eyes. “You sure it’ll turn red?”

“Hank—just let me come.”

The bed sheets whisper beneath them as Hank takes Connor back into his mouth. The room is dark and quiet, minus the creaks and whines of the bed, the soft howl of the wind. Connor stares at the outline of Hank’s body, mouth ajar, eyes hazy.

He wants to cry. He’s floating, soaring above them in a world that no one can reach. He can feel Hank’s mouth on him, trained and experienced. Warmth rises again, a volcano primed. He’s still flying, the world an ocean of stars, Hank’s fingers at his thigh, tracing, tracing.

“Oh!” Connor slams his feet into the bed, body convulsing beneath the skin. He feels his cock push out artificial semen—designed to be sweet instead of the salt of human come. His frame turns to jelly, his mind fogs over. He cries out, body still writhing as Hank works him over, unperturbed.

“St-stop!” Connor manages to get out.

Hank stops immediately.

Connor’s limbs are trembling. Tears at his face.

Hank unlocks the handcuffs and pulls Connor into him, he’s whispering soft affirmations but Connor can’t understand the language. He knows it’s soft though, Hank’s voice a gentle rolling thunder off in the distance.

“It’s so much,” Connor says. “It’s so much.” Connor can see a series of errors in his processing, his core dangerously hot and his RAM taxed. He pushes his face into Hank’s chest and focuses on the steady stream of rumbling words.

“It’s okay,” Hank says, “I’ve gotcha. You did good, Con. You did so good.” He kisses Connor’s head and it’s enough to make more tears push from Connor’s eyes. Good tears though. Tears that remind Connor that this isn’t a temporary fixation. He’s adored Hank since the vulnerability he saw—the human beneath all the brittle words.

Connor swings his arms around Hank and holds him tight. His core is cooling, alerts slowing. “Keep kissing me.”

Hank does. He kisses Connor’s face, his neck, the line of his collarbone. His hand traces the middle of Connor’s belly and it makes Connor laugh. The sensation foreign. It hurts—but it doesn’t. It feels good, but it’s unpleasant. He swats Hank’s hand away, earning a chuckle from Hank.

“Ticklish?” Hank says.

“I guess I am.”

“You okay now?”

Connor is embarrassed. Something so human—so natural—he’s angry his body almost couldn’t process it. The logistics of coming though? His body was designed to be seamless into human
Connor furrows his brow. The ‘love’ hormone? Connor scans the internet for a few more articles under he thinks he understands Hank’s reference. “You think my emotions are just simulated because of sexual activity?”

“I think—shit, Connor. I don’t know what I think.”

Connor rolls out of the bed, anger clenching his insides. “How many times do I have to say it, Hank!” Connor gesticulates with his hands, frustrated and wild. “I care about you! I like you! I—I guess yes, I may even be in love with you. Why’s that so hard to understand?”

Hank stares off at the wall, his lips pursed. “I’m a has-been cop who’s managed to push everyone away. Just give it time and I’ll do the same to you.”

“I’m not everyone, Hank. I’m me. Me.” Connor hates that he doesn’t get to relish in the heat around him and Hank. He doesn’t get post-sex cuddles and he certainly doesn’t get pillow talk. With Hank, it’s always a battle, a storm out on the ocean. Connor can navigate it as best as he can, but a stray wave always sends him tumbling beneath the waters. Connor grabs some clothing and yanks it on. Hank just watches from the bed.

“And for the record?” Connor stops at the doorway to the bedroom, determined to leave the house. He can’t do this on his own anymore. He needs help. “You’ve tried to push me away. It hadn’t worked then, so why do you think it’d work now?”

Connor leaves without looking back. He’s too afraid that if he does, what he sees will break him.

Markus’ home is lavishly decorated with emotional paintings that make Connor’s biocomponents tremble in different ways with each new painting. He knows these were Carl’s artworks. Or perhaps they still are? Does someone being dead mean their creations no longer belong to them? Connor searches the internet, looking at a few android birds in the parlor. Da Vinci’s paintings are not his own, but he is still credited to them. Maybe ownership changes but creation is eternal.

“Howdy!” Markus’ voice is breathy. He’s up at the top of the stairs, shirtless.

Connor furrows his brow.

“I was—we were just—”

Simon comes out, face flushed blue and smiling. He’s also shirtless. Connor knows exactly what they were doing. Or maybe he doesn’t. He feels differently than they do. He knows Markus’ opinion of Scratch. He can’t tell Markus that he’s taken it again. Markus would only pressure him to go back to CyberLife. The concepts though, of intimacy, the concepts are all the same. Connor may feel
differently from Markus and Simon—but intimacy isn’t unique to feeling or touch. Markus and Simon can be intimate in their own ways, without Scratch.

“Well this is awkward,” Markus says, grabbing the banister. “I told you to stay in bed.”

“I just wanted to know who it was.” Simon puts his chin on Markus’ shoulder. “S’not like he cares anyway.”

“Markus?” Connor says, interrupting their private spat. It’s not that he wants to be rude. But he’s rude just by virtue of listening to them, so he tries to alleviate the faux pas. “Can we talk? I need—relationship help.”

Markus smiles, so does Simon. Their skin recedes up their arms and they share a touch, fingers lacing together, foreheads pressed in close. Simon retreats to the bedroom and Markus descends the stairs.

“I’m glad you have someone though,” Connor says.

Markus rolls his eyes, but his smile is warm. “I had a very confusing journey from this house, to Jericho, and back to this house. Simon was the only person that didn’t expect me to act in any way that was contrary to what I thought was right. Made sense. Wanna come sit in the living room?” Markus tosses up a thumb and points behind him.

“Sure.”

Together they cross into the large room, a fossilized creature hanging above them, large windows that spill bright, warm light into the room. Connor loves the feeling of sun on his skin. It’s a gentle feeling, one like a lover’s hand—like Hank’s hand. His stomach cringes. He frowns.

“You okay?” Markus asks as he takes a seat on the sofa. “Come talk to me.”

“I think I’ve done something wrong, but I don’t know how to fix it.”

Markus flicks up his brow, nodding. “I’ve been there. Miscommunication is a bitch.”

“No kidding.” Connor sits down and rests his hands in his lap. He’s stiff, his body too dry to relax. Or wait, no. That’s not the right feeling. He’s not dry. His thirium levels are perfectly fine. He’s—tense. Tight. Something squeezes inside him and his frame snaps to attention. He couldn’t slouch even if he tried.

Light hits Markus’ eyes, their mismatched colors sparking. He could’ve changed them once everything was over, but he’d chosen to keep them. A quirk. A physical tell. A reminder. Connor isn’t sure why he chose to keep his eyes different, but he does like it. Not that his opinion would be worth anything to Markus. Markus has carved out his own life. He, like most androids, knows now what it means to be free, or at least that’s the ultimate goal. A simple demonstration in Detroit couldn’t fix the whole world. There’s still so much left to do. Connor knows Markus is doing everything to change it.

“You’ve had intimate relations with humans before,” Connor says and Markus sits up, hands outstretched.

“Woah! Carl and I never—”

“I don’t mean sexual. I mean familial. Sorry.” Connor stares at his hands. He feels all swollen and bumbling. His tongue is dry and it scratches at the back of his throat. He tries to clear it, but the
sensation lingers. A ghost he can’t shake. “Close bonds with humans.”

“Carl. Yeah.” Markus trails off, his eyes dulling. A morose aura surrounds him, a cold breeze on a rainy night.

“Maybe this isn’t appropriate of me.”

“Connor—no. I miss him. But that doesn’t mean I can’t talk about humans with you.” Markus reaches out and takes Connor’s hand, giving it a little squeeze. His hand is cool and soft, it’s nothing like Hank’s rough, warm hand. It leaves him feeling lonelier than before Markus had reached out to touch him.

“My partner—Hank Anderson?”

Markus nods.

“I’ve liked him for a long time. Probably even before I realized I was deviant. I can’t figure out where it started exactly, but it’s been there.”

“You aren’t deviant. You’re alive.”

Connor rolls his eyes. He doesn’t have time to debate politically correct standards of self-identification right now. He centers himself, looking down at his wrists. Blue lines kiss skin—a reminder of what he and Hank had been doing before everything just—went wrong.

“I was having sex with Hank, and I told him I loved him. He didn’t believe me.”

Markus frowns. He sucks in his lips, and Connor is forced to wait to find out if this visit was in vain. He’d disturbed Markus from his own intimacies with Simon. But out of all the androids Connor has come to know as friends, Markus is the only one he knows who had affections for a human. While different, there had to be something that Markus knew that the others didn’t.

“Hank. What kind of person is he?” Markus asks.

“Abrasive. Self-deprecating. But kind. Providing. He’s not afraid to view the world in shades of gray.”

“Abrasive is what you’d say first though? Then he’s guarded. It’s not that he doesn’t believe you, it’s that he’s scared to love you too. I’m sure he doesn’t feel worth you.”

“Feel—worth me? But he’s—no.”

“Connor, our lives are longer than theirs. They age. We don’t. They get sick. We don’t. A lot of humans fear their humanity when it comes to us because to be with us, they always compare themselves to us.”

Connor stares at his wrists. “But I know they age and die and get sick. I know and it doesn’t make me care about him any less.”

“It doesn’t matter what you think, Connor. It matters what he thinks. If he’s afraid of you two being different species, then it’s going to take him time to come around to letting you into his heart. You can either try and be patient and supportive, or you can give up. But you can’t force him.”

Connor doesn’t like the answer. He knows it’s right though, especially because it’s not what he wanted to hear. He’d wished for a simple conversation, ‘What! How can he not be crazy about you!’
But Markus has never been one for simple conversation. He speaks and the world listens. So he has to know more than the world knows.

“I won’t keep you any longer.” Connor stands up, adjusting his tie. “Thank you for seeing me.”

“You’re welcome here any time you know,” Markus says. “You’ll always have a place here if you need one.”

Connor can read between those lines. If he can no longer stay at Hank’s, he’s welcome here. It’s not an option he’s comfortable with. He wants to stay with Hank, even if it takes convincing. He can’t force his way into Hank’s heart, but he can be patient, nurture and guide it. He can’t tell it what to do, but he can be there long enough for it to trust him. He just has to be patient.

“Thanks,” Connor says before head out of the mansion.

“You’re taking me off the case?” Connor asks the following day, standing up. It’s an involuntary move. He feels threatened and so he tries to make himself bigger than Fowler. Hank stands behind him, so he turns to look at his face, trying to read the blank expression. “How could you?”

“It’s not Hank’s decision, Connor. It’s mine.” Fowler stands too, leaning over to let his fingers support his weight on the desk. “You’re too close to this now.”

Connor grimaces, anger burning beneath his chest plate. He wants to scream. It vibrates all through him, from frame to skin. Building, building. “You told him!”

“How could I not, Connor? I said I’m worried about you!”

He wonders if this is what it feels like to be betrayed. It’s deep in his back, a sharp, cold knife. When it twists, he lets out a strangled sound. “You didn’t have to.”

“Connor! This isn’t about Hank. He’s done everything a good officer would do. We’re not firing you. You’re just off the Scratch case.”

Connor doesn’t want to be here anymore. He thinks of Markus’ home, of the open invitation. He thinks of the patience he needs to let Hank know he loves him. It’s all there, muddled up and mixing like gas, trash and water. It sludges inside his belly and he can hardly suck down air to cool his core.

“Connor.” It’s Hank’s voice. Soft and grounding.

Connor hates that he wants to shove his face into Hank’s chest and cry.

“We’re doing this to protect you.”

“I don’t need protection. I’m better than all of you at this. You all know it!”

That makes Fowler suck in a sharp breath.

“I mean,” Connor fidgets with his fingers, “that came out wrong.”

“Go home, Connor,” Fowler says. “Get some rest or whatever androids do and when you come back, I expect to see you ready and eager to be assigned whatever damn case I think is best for you.”

Embarrassment tugs his thrium pump. He turns to look at Hank one more time, tears shining in his eyes. “I don’t have anything but this.” He’s on unsteady ground, fumbling through darkness, praying he doesn’t slip and fall to oblivion. Hank is there, just barely out of arm’s reach. But he’s fading,
slipping away into the darkness. Connor wants to scream, to shout and get him to stay. But he just keeps fading. Fading.

_He doesn’t want me._

“Go home, Con,” Hank says. “I’ll see you tonight.”

Connor leaves, feeling everyone stare at his back. He’s never felt so ashamed. Tarred up and feathered for the world to see. People avoid him on his journey home.

He trudges into the house, falls on the sofa, and he cries. Sumo’s wet nose touches his hand and he gives the dog a few scratches behind the ear. “What’d I do wrong, Sumo? I just want him to like me.”

Sumo doesn’t answer. Connor thinks himself quite the idiot for even asking a dog such a question. Dogs cannot speak. But they can feel. Even without being human, Sumo knows Connor’s heart—thrum pump—heart—is breaking. He drops his big head into Connor’s lap and whines.

Connor curls forward, holding Sumo’s head as he cries. Did Scratch make it worse? Would Hank love him if he didn’t have it? He’d give it up then. He’d give up every sensation he’s felt, wipe it all away, if that meant Hank would accept him again. Worried… _Worried._ Connor isn’t broken. He’s not defective. He’s alive. He’s alive and he’s hurting. If Hank wants him to be a shell, if that would save them—Connor would do it. It’s the last thing he’d ever want again—but he’d do it.

Sumo inches his nose closer to Connor’s belly and huffs. Connor scratches his head again, wiping tears from his eyes. Relationships are supposed to be good. But all this has gotten Connor is the pain on the inside. He doesn’t like the pain on the inside.

Hank lingers out in the car. The heat blasts from the vents, his music a low hum. He sees a light on in the house and knows that Connor’s inside. He hadn’t been prepared for what he saw in the precinct today. He knew Connor would be upset, but he hadn’t planned on Connor feeling betrayed. It all came from last night too. It isn’t that Hank wouldn’t like the idea of Connor loving him. It’s just the reality of the situation. All Hank is, is a lingering expiration date. He can’t stomach the thought of Connor one day waking up to find Hank gone. He can’t handle the idea of Connor figuring out that there’s so much more than Hank in the world. On Scratch, Connor’s feelings are still so new. Hank just—selfishly—needs to know it’s real. Or if he needs to prepare himself for the day Connor grows bored of Hank and moves on.

He comes in through the front door, too lazy to get the car into the garage. Connor’s curled up on the sofa asleep, Sumo tucked behind his legs—one leg hanging off the sofa, the other just barely resting on the sofa. The lamplight paints them in subtle yellows, casting a lazy hue about the room. Hank would smile if he wasn’t so afraid of what’ll come next when Connor wakes.

Hank sits down on the recliner and thinks about all the ways he has to apologize. For not being what Connor needs him to be. For not being there for him about Scratch. For not understanding. For not fighting harder with Fowler.

“Hank?”

It catches Hank off-guard. He snaps to attention, eyes wide, staring over at Connor’s still frame.

“Did you look for me? When I was gone?”

“Of course I did.”
Connor is silent, his LED flashing yellow. He doesn’t need to stretch like a human. He doesn’t sigh. Doesn’t sneeze. He’s entirely, lifelessly still.

“I’m sorry about earlier,” Hank says. It’s not graceful, it’s not prepared. Hank ventures out into undiscovered territory, hoping he won’t be swallowed up. “We thought we were doing the right thing.”

“Do you not trust me?”

Hank’s heart tugs. “You have saved my life every single time I’ve needed it. Even when I didn’t. Of course I do.”

“So why won’t you trust me now?” Connor asks, voice broken. There’s something heavy between them, a feeling in the air so thick that it pushes at Hank’s skin and makes it hard to breathe. “If you want me to remove Scratch then—”

“No, Connor. I’m never going to ask you for that.”

“But you want it, right? Me to be normal?”

“What you said last night before you left. About you being you. I don’t want you any other way than what you are. I mean it.”

Connor is silent for a long time. He tilts his head up, looking over at Hank. “Are we having a fight?”

“What?” Hank laughs. “No. Not at all. I’m just, I want you to know I care about you. And that’s why I worry. I don’t know the lasting effects of Scratch but I’m not going to act like I have any say in your decisions. You’re your own person, Connor. I just want you safe.”

Connor slips from the couch, Sumo grumbling from the loss of body contact. Hank watches his dog curl up and go back to sleep.

“I’m safe with you, Hank.” Connor slips onto Hank’s lap, straddling. “Don’t push me away.”

Hank’s hands go to Connor’s hips. He pulls Connor down atop him, grunting when their lips kiss, heated and excited. He can feel his body burning, cock throbbing already. Connor has a way of making Hank forget everything else around him. Scratch and Kamski. What happened today with Connor at the Precinct. Their fight. Connor’s lips press to Hank’s and the world stops existing except for their own tiny, little bubble.

“I want you to be rough with me,” Connor mumbles between kisses. “Please? I trust you.”

Hank picks Connor up and slams him into the wall. “You make damn sure that little light goes red if you don’t want this.”

Connor nips at Hank’s nose. “I always want this.”

“Fucking androids.”

Connor cracks an utterly sinister grin. “Look.” He shows off his wrists and Hank sees the damage.

“Connor!”

“It’s okay, Hank!” Connor lets Hank bring his wrists up to his mouth for soft kisses. “I like these. I like—well I like the way it feels.”
“Jesus.”

“If you don’t like it though,” Connor says, eyes averted, “then I won’t ask you to.”

It’s not that Hank doesn’t like it. He does. But he can’t help but remember what androids used to be used for. He doesn’t want Connor to ever think Hank sees him as anything but his equal. That he owns him. Connor is his own person. But doesn’t asking for it, wanting it? Isn’t that Connor’s choice?

“Get in the bedroom,” Hank growls. He laughs a few seconds later when Connor scampers off into the bedroom. He follows shortly after, making sure Sumo’s bowl is full of food. The last thing he needs right now is a hungry 150 lb dog barging into their room. Their room. Hank smiles to himself, it’s soft, one that catches him by surprise. He likes the idea of Connor staying in the bed with him. Of this place being a home for the two of them, not just a roof that Connor continues to ask for.

Connor’s on his knees on the bed when Hank comes in. He’s naked, cock up and purple.

Hank walks over to the closet and pulls out two ties. He brings one around Connor’s eyes, earning a little gasp, then he ties Connor’s wrists together. “Something softer this time, hmm?”

Connor outright purrs and it’s enough to make Hank’s body tremble. He walks a fine line, trying to give Connor what he wants and trying to act as if he has any control over himself. He doesn’t. Connor owns him. Those little breathy moans, his twitching, excited fingers. His fucking cock—pretty as a God damn picture. Hank doesn’t think he’d call dick pretty, but Connor’s? Connor’s is.

Hank doesn’t have much in the way of S&M objects, but he does have an inventive mind. Dealing with criminals all day, you end up seeing some shit. He goes back into the kitchen and grabs a wooden spoon. Connor’s right where he left him, ready, on the bed, and trembling.

He dips the spoon against the middle of Connor’s back and Connor moans. “I haven’t done anything yet, sweetheart,” Hank says.


Hank takes the spoon and lets it tickle up the sides of Connor’s neck, around his shoulder blades. He brings it between Connor’s thighs and lets it run up and down his cock.

Connor’s body seizes, his chest rising and falling. He works hard to stay in his position, but Hank knows he’s struggling.

“Be a good boy for me, Connor. Or you won’t get to come.”

“I wanna come,” Connor rushes out.

“Then behave.”

“Yes, Sir.”

The word tingles into Hank’s skin. It’s everywhere around him, a soft, three lettered word that lights up his whole body. He’s never felt younger. Stronger. More appreciated. He brings the spoon around Connor’s cock again and gives it a few cautionary taps, watching the LED on Connor’s face.

It goes yellow at first, but then blue. Connor’s lips part and he drops his head back, body rolling with desire. He’s fighting so hard, to be good. He’s keeping his hands tucked in the tie when they both know he could easily escape. His toes are pressed beneath his ass and they curl so tight they go sheet
white.

“You like that?” Hank asks, voice deep and rumbling from his chest. “Tell me honestly.”

“Yes, yes please.”

Hank taps the spoon again on Connor’s tip, a quick little twip that pulls a gasp from Connor’s surprised body. LED still blue. Hank brings the spoon up the side of Connor’s throat, resting it at his chin. “Suck on it.”

Connor does. He pulls the spoon into his mouth, moaning and bobbing his head as if he were full of cock and not just a piece of treated wood.

Hank kneels on the bed, one hand going out to reach Connor’s cock and give it a few strokes. He plays with the tip, pressing a nail into the slit, enough to make Connor hiss. “Be a good boy,” Hank says in a sing-song tone.

Connor nods. He’s trembling so much that Hank doesn’t think he can speak even if Hank asked him to. He’s not used to Connor being so agreeable. He can’t deny the warmth in his belly though at the thought of Connor being so pliant, so needing of him.

Carefully, he tugs the spoon out of Connor’s mouth, dragging it down to touch each nipple. He flicks it over Connor’s nipples. From the dimness of the light out in the hallway, Hank can just barely see blue rise to the top of Connor’s skin there, a blooming night flower atop a bed of snow. Poets would weep if they could see Connor like this.

Hank taps the spoon, just enough to sting on the sides of Connor’s neck. He won’t touch his face though. That crosses a line with Hank, something more akin to abuse and not play. He rubs the spoon down the middle of Connor’s belly and back and forth the tip of his cock. He presses in close now, kissing Connor’s shoulders, the soft curve of his neck.

“You like this still?” Hank whispers.

“Yes. Feels so good.” Connor drops his head back, sighing out in what Hank can only think is bliss. He keeps his balance, of course—he wants to be good—but Hank can see as relaxation sets into Connor’s metal bones.

“Do you want more?” Hank asks.

Connor gurgles out what Hank assumes is a moan.

Hank pulls himself out of his pants and sits on the bed, he pulls Connor atop him, spreading Connor’s ass wide.

Connor rushes out a string of curse words next to Hank’s ear, before pressing kiss after kiss into his beard.

“Sit down, Connor.”

Connor does. He sobs, taking Hank into him, slow, but down to the hilt. He trembles violently, biting his lips and letting a vibrato of a moan escape his throat.

Hank smooths out Connor’s perfect hair. No sweat, no grease, just perfect softness, if maybe slightly disheveled. “You’re doing good.”
“Wanna be good for you.” Connor’s ass flexes around Hank and it pulls a guttural groan from Hank’s throat. “Wanna come.”

“Last time you nearly shorted out.” Hank rocks up into Connor, slow and easy.

Connor’s hips push down on Hank, eager and hungry. He rocks them into the bed, both of them listening to the steady rhythm of the frame hitting the wall. “I won’t this time.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I know what to do.”

Hank will trust Connor. He’s trusted him in every other setting of their lives together, this would be no exception. He lets Connor fuck himself on his cock, his lips purple and swollen, his cock bouncing between them. He comes, warm white ribbons that push from his cock to soak into Hank’s shirt.

There’s something incredibly sexy about being so clothed while Connor is so exposed. Whether it’s power play or an aversion to seeing himself naked, he won’t think too hard about it. All he knows is this really gets him hot.

Connor kisses his lips, whiny, needy kisses. He rocks back and forth, undulating his hips in long, pronounced displays that get Hank’s cock wet and warm from his body. “Come in me,” he whispers, “please, I want it. I want it, please.”

Hank’s too embarrassed to say anything back. Connor’s atop him, his body working Hank over, his lips warm at Hank’s ears. It doesn’t take much longer, listening to the string of Connor’s desires before he’s coming inside Connor.

He jerks his hips, slamming up into Connor, his teeth slammed shut so he doesn’t make a sound. He kisses Connor, heavy on the mouth—a bruising kiss that leaves them both breathless and tingling.

“Off,” Hank says.

Connor slips off, but not before pressing a last, soft kiss on Hank’s lips. “I adore you,” Connor says.

Hank knows he’s trying to make up for the last time he said love. Hank smiles. He won’t say anything back. He’s too afraid that if he tries, it’ll all just come out so wrong. Like it had before.

“I’ll clean myself up.”

“No,” Hank says. He takes the tie from Connor’s eyes and slips the other from his wrists. “I’ll help.”

“You don’t have to.”

“I want to. I’m not gonna let you feel like some used up whore or something.”

Connor smirks. He takes Hank’s hand and presses it to his chest. Hank can feel the thirium pump inside, working fast, slamming up and down to move thirium through Connor. “I’ve never felt so alive until I kissed you.”

Hank looks away. He can’t take flattery. He can’t take compliments. He grumbles out a soft curse and is thankful Connor doesn’t push it. Connor knows how hard this is for Hank, even if he doesn’t want to believe it himself. Hank hasn’t loved someone in so long. His track record isn’t good and truth be told, he’d given up so long ago.
“Get in the damn shower,” Hank says when the moment has passed.

After their shower, Connor’s in his shirt with the neck that’s too big and stretched out. He’s lying on the bed, naked from the waist down, his soft cock lax and resting on his inner thigh. It makes Hank’s body pulse and he does his best not to keep looking. Hank’s never considered himself one for being too sexually active, but Connor’s cock, just existing like that, out in the open? It makes him want to get between Connor’s thighs and suck.

The reading lamp is on, Connor’s nose pushed into a magazine. He looks up and smiles when Hank comes in.

“Do you mind?” Connor asks. “I could go to the couch.”

“No. Stay.” Hank drops his towel and slips into a pair of boxers. He’s running out of semi-mature looking ones. He’ll have to do laundry soon or SpongeBob boxers will start making an appearance again. Nevermind the number of holes in most of his other pairs of underwear. Shit, he really needs to do some fucking laundry.

“Connor,” Hank ventures as he sits on the side of the bed.

Connor puts the magazine down. His eyes are so big and brown. There’s a purity there, that no matter what Hank does to him, it’ll always be there—glimmering in the dark pools of his eyes.

“This is your home, you know that, right?”

Connor sucks in his lips. “Yes.”

“You don’t have to keep sleeping on the couch. You can stay in here with me. I can make you your own drawer. Get you your own set of pajamas.”

“I like this shirt.”

Hank laughs. “Believe me, I like it on you too.” He leans over to press a kiss to Connor’s delicate shoulder. Skin so soft, devoid of hair, wrinkles, imperfection. But he does have freckles. They paint a sparkly-starred sky, from his face to his back and along the lines of his arms. When Connor was designed, whoever made him, they made him with love and artistry. Fucking freckles, dotting his face. Hank kisses Connor’s lips, lingering just a moment too long because he knows Connor wants him to. He can feel Connor’s fingers sliding up to grip into his hair.

“I didn’t want you off the Scratch case,” Hank says. “Please believe me.”

Connor’s face scrunches up. He pulls away from Hank, head resting back on the metal frame of the bed. “I do believe you.”

“We’ll still work right next to each other when we’re in the office. And every night I’ll come home to you.”

Connor shivers, a smile ghosting over his lips. “Home to me.” He reaches out and cups Hank’s face. “I have so many emotions for you that they hurt me.”

Hank frowns.

“Don’t look like that. It’s good. I like it. I—I know you don’t believe me when I say it, but I love
you, Hank. And maybe it is the sex or Scratch that amplifies it, but neither of those things can create something that doesn’t exist. I’ve loved you. And I don’t care if you don’t believe me.”

Hank feels like he’s on the calm side of drowning. Serenity washes over him, his mind goes quiet. He feels pricks of tears at the corners of his eyes. Tears he refuses to let fall. He won’t cry. He kisses Connor’s forehead, squeezing his eyes closed to hide the tears. When he pulls back, he’s composed again. He pats Connor on the cheek and then stands to keep getting ready for bed. As always, he doesn’t say anything when Connor’s praises reach an affection that Hank struggles to return aloud.

But he does return it, even if he doesn’t say it. Hank—loves Connor too.


Connor pulls up the articles, one by one, his face more panicked each time. He drops the mug he’d gotten out for Hank. Scratch is taking over cities. Androids are dying at record highs. It’s causing panic, it’s turning androids against humans. Blame is tossed back and forth.

But today’s headline isn’t so harsh. It’s subtle in the way knowing death will happen to everyone and everything.

“Connor?”

Connor ignores Hank’s voice. He pulls up another article, reading it in the forefront of his mind. He can see the mug on the floor, broken and powdered. But he doesn’t move. Scratch isn’t a virus. It’s an *upgrade* and it’s being released worldwide.

“Connor!”

“I hear you, Lieutenant,” Connor says. He gets on his hands and knees and starts picking up the broken mug. Scratch is being mobilized. Thousands—millions of androids will take it now. Androids will change, reform, grow. Markus won’t be able to stop the chaos. Androids will die. Not just by the hundreds but by the thousands. They’ll fade into the background even, just like the bald one predicted or promised. Connor isn’t sure now which word matters more. Promised lends to surety that frightens Connor’s core. Prediction still knows an outcome.

More and more news articles come in by the dozens. Scratch is killing already, taking its first thousand lives—two thousand lives…

Connor feels tears well into his eyes.

“Hey,” Hank’s voice. He wraps his big arms around Connor. Connor leans into him, letting the tears fall. “What’s wrong, Con?”

“We failed,” Connor says. He blinks tears out of his eyes and looks morosely at Hank. “Scratch is on the internet. It’s starting. Whatever this—next stage is. It’s starting.”

“Fuck.” Hank grits his teeth. “We’ve gotta talk to Kamski.”

“So he can be as helpful as he was last time?” Connor asks. “Oh God, what about Markus? Simon? If either of them die—this is catastrophic for androids. For everyone.” The bald android’s words linger in Connor’s mind. Humans will forget androids existed. And then they’ll kill them all. Whether that is decades from now or tomorrow, Connor doesn’t know. But Scratch is poised to be a mass extinction for androids, only some surviving. Whether the bald android’s words were
hyperbolic or to be trusted at face-value, Connor isn’t sure. All he knows is a second war is coming, one the humans won’t realize is even happening until it’s upon them.

“We have to make sure Markus is okay.” Connor grabs Hank by the neck, faces so close he can feel Hank’s startled breath. “Now.”

“Let’s go.”

Connor rings the doorbell two times before he decides to bash it down. He shoves his shoulder into the oak door, hearing it groan before it echoes out into a crack. He rushes into the house, eyes wide.

“Markus?!” he yells. “Markus!”

Hank follows behind him, looking down at the broken door and up at Connor. “Was that necessary?”

“They could be infected!”

“You’re infected!”

“I’m not—I had you to stop me from overloading!”

Connor checks the first floor and finds no one. He goes upstairs and hears Markus’ voice, panicked and strained.

In the bedroom, Simon is convulsing on the floor, thirium pouring from his eyes, his nose—his mouth. His arms are all gashed up—scratch marks.

“No!” Connor falls onto his hands and knees, scrambling over to hold Simon’s hands. “Don’t let him scratch!”

“I don’t—” Markus is crying, “I didn’t know what was happening! I just thought he was having a regular glitch! I couldn’t—I couldn’t stop him!”

“Do you have any thirium?” Connor asks, his fingers trembling. Fear holds him close, its cool body pressed against his own. He tries to ignore it, focusing on Markus’ tear-stained face, on the weight in his fingers.

“In the kitchen. We keep it in the refrigerator.”

“On it!” Hank says as he whirls from the room.

Connor does his best to keep Simon’s hands from scratching, but there’s already so much damage. He scans him, a list of biocomponents and their damages appearing from the side of his vision. “He needs medical attention.”

Simon convulses in Markus’ arms and Markus chokes on a sob.

“Don’t leave me you bastard,” Markus says, “don’t you dare fucking leave me!”

Hank comes back, tossing the bags of thirium Connor’s way. Connor lets the skin on his arm recede back to smooth, shiny plastic. He opens a panel and pulls out some tubing and connects the bags to it. “It’ll get into him quicker if my pump helps it along.”

Markus nods.
Connor connects the tubing to his own thirium systems and the blue blood starts flowing. He hooks the receiving end into an open vein on Simon’s arm and moves Markus’ hands to hold it steady. After that’s set, he takes out another spare tube and hooks the blood to Connor’s body so he doesn’t get low enough to be compromised. He’ll just keep adding more bags until Simon’s status goes stable.

“We need parts. He’s got a damaged 08944, a 07773, and a hemorrhaging 9900.”

“I don’t—we don’t have those. Wait—our hearts are compatible. What if my 9900 is too?”

“You need that, Markus.”

“I don’t care!” Markus is already opening up the back of his head panel and unscrewing the component. “I’ll be fine. Just reactivate me. Memory core’s fine.” He has enough time to hand the 9900 over to Connor before his eyes start blinking at different times and his body seizes. He falls to the floor with a dense thud.

“Jesus Christ,” Hank says softly. “Is there—can I do anything?”

“Hold Simon. Don’t let him scratch.”

Connor lifts Simon’s head and slides his finger to the paneling at the back of his head. It’s a subtle little slit, but when you know where to look, it’s easy to find. He opens the compartment and yanks out the spurting 9900 and shoves Markus’ inside.

Simon’s body stills, a whirring sound deep in his stomach. He blinks a few times, then winces. “I hurt.”

“That happens,” Connor says. He doesn’t mean to sound so distant, but Markus is laying, for all intents and purposes, dead on the floor and Simon is only barely recovered. “We need to get you to CyberLife.”

“Where’s,” Simon’s gaze trails to Markus on the floor, “oh God! Markus!”

“He’s fine, champ. Just work through the pain with us, okay?” Hank says. “Grab my hand.”

Simon does. He squeezes hard enough that Hank’s fingers go bright red. Simon’s cries penetrate Connor, hitting him in his soul where he can recall the very same feelings as they surged and writhed through his body.

“It’ll pass, Simon. Your body is just trying to register the upgrade.”

“I—I shouldn’t—have done this!”

“Don’t think about that now. You’ll get through it.” Connor switches in a fresh bag of thirium. “Just don’t scratch.”

“It—it itches. It’s everywhere. I’m—am I on fire? Is this what fire feels like?” Simon starts convulsing again, his eyes rolling back into his head.

“Simon! Stay with us, Simon!” Connor scans him again, but nothing else is damaged. Good. He’s stabilizing. Connor sends a distress signal to CyberLife with their location and the situation. He gets a received ping and brushes trails of thirium out of Simon’s eyes. “It’s okay. Help’s on the way.”

They stay there, Hank’s hands held in a death grip. Simon sobbing and begging to make the pain
stop. Markus lying on the floor.

All Connor can do is pray and wonder how many people are losing their android lovers to Scratch at this very moment.

Chapter End Notes

Check out this sweet sweet art [Hopeless--Geek](http://Hopeless--Geek) made for me! [Click Me!]
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Rain pours outside the house, the anger of the thunder booming like sheets of aluminum in the wind. Connor’s on the sofa, huddled up and warm in Hank’s arms. Warm. It’s a lazy sensation, comforting and weighted. Connor feels tired, like sleep mode could take him at any moment—just like when Hank had touched his hair.

Hank’s fists are clenched, his body tense. Connor can feel it tremble beneath him. They’re both scared. Scratch is killing thousands. Androids are begging each other not to upload it but Connor understands the compulsion. He’s on it right now.

“What can’t we talk to Kamski?” Connor asks.

“You can’t do jackshit.” Hank pinches Connor’s shoulder for emphasis. Connor likes it. “And Jeff doesn’t think you’re a reliable witness—being on a drug.”

“It’s a malfunctioning upgrade,” Connor says, indignant. “I think if CyberLife took the time to investigate it, they’d find the basic formula and be able to change the coding. I can feel Hank. That doesn’t make me high. That makes me—” He stops himself, the word floating around in his mind like a speck of dust. It whispers, softly, carefully. Alive. Alive. Alive.

Connor has been alive since he woke up. But now the word has taken a whole new meaning for him. He can experience the world in such intimate detail that it overwhelms him.

“Makes you what?” Hank asks, his voice deep and grizzly. Connor likes it when Hank’s voice gets low. It sends a chill down his spine, coaxing him to splay out and beg Hank to do whatever he would want to Connor.

Instead, Connor says, “Is it so wrong? That we want to experience the world like humans do?”

Hank scratches his head, frowning. “Honestly Con, I don’t know. I guess the grass is always going to be greener on the other side. Humans wanna be androids, androids wanna be humans. I don’t fucking know anymore.”

Connor doesn’t like the response. It’s not that he finds Hank insensitive—that couldn’t be further from the truth. It’s just that Connor looks to Hank to understand the divide that separates them. When Hank doesn’t know, Connor doesn’t get to know. It plagues him, a swamp that he can’t cross. His lips turn down and he looks away.

“Hey.” Hank presses a finger to Connor’s lips and traces the skin. “Don’t look so blue.”
“My blood is blue, Lieutenant.” Connor kisses Hank’s fingers before sucking them into his mouth. “Can’t ‘elp it.”

Hank laughs, pressing a kiss to the side of Connor’s face. “You’re insatiable, you know that?”

Connor slips to his knees between Hank’s legs. He runs his fingers up and down Hank’s thighs, a wicked smile at his lips. The world is miserable around them. Androids dying. Markus—Simon. But is it wrong for Connor to want to escape it? It’s so much heartache. He just wants to forget—if only for a moment.

He takes Hank out of his pants swallows him down to the hilt, his body wavering before it goes pliant. He just wants to stay like this, safe with Hank inside him. Warm with Hank around him. He doesn’t want to think about androids or Scratch or Kamski. He doesn’t want to think about humans and their lifespans. He doesn’t want to think.

So he doesn’t. He reroutes his processors to his single focus, and his world gets a little smaller.

Hank gasps, his fingers threading into Connor’s hair. He’s careful with how he does it though, less pulling and more praising. He runs his fingers back and forth, back and forth.

Chills scramble over Connor’s skin. He lets his tongue feel the heavy weight of Hank’s hardening cock in his mouth. He likes this, a casual—unfocused moment between them. He’s not even sure if he has the capacity to get Hank off, but it’s just the intimacy that Connor wants. He’d do it though—if Hank asked. He’d do anything if Hank asked.

Hank must understand Connor’s headspace because he keeps his groans soft and his hand gentle. He runs his fingers down Connor’s neck, he gently rocks into his mouth. It’s delicate—worshipful.

The TV turns off behind Connor and they’re left with nothing but the sheets of rain at the window and the rumbles in the clouds. Connor’s mouth warm and full. Hank’s fingers soft and caressing. Connor closes his eyes. He drops his head against Hank’s thigh and lets himself go into sleep mode. If Hank wants to come, he can wake him. Right now, Connor just needs this moment before everything turns wrong.

Turns? It already has.

“You’re putting me on parking duty,” Connor says, his voice flat. He stares at Captain Fowler. Is it possible for his eyes to pop out? He feels like his eyes are going to pop out.

“Look, with all this Scratch shit goin’ on, you’re lucky I’m not asking you to take a leave of absence.”

“I can help with the investigation!” Connor steps forward, but Fowler puts his hand up to stop him.

“Look—Connor. You’re a nice kid. Just do your job and maybe one day you’ll be out there. But right now I need you on parking meter duty.”

Connor looks out the glass walls at Hank, he’s at his desk, typing something ungodly slowly. He’s a millennial, did he ever learn how to type? Connor researches Hank’s schooling and learns Hank didn’t take computer classes in high school.

“Get to it, Connor.”

Connor grabs the bright orange vest that he’s supposed to wear and the ticket machine. He looks at
Fowler one last time, face tense. “I’m not broken.”

Fowler ignores him.

Connor stomps toward Hank’s desk. He’s so angry he could scream. It’s there in his throat, yanking and hissing. He could scream so loud he could break windows. And he could. Because he knows just the right pitch and decimal to be at. He could bring Fowler’s walls down in a fury of anger. But that’s exactly the problem, he supposes. Scratch didn’t make Connor angry. It only amplified the exterior feelings. The heat on his skin. The twist in his gut. He had known anger before. But if he did anything reckless, Scratch would be blamed and he’d be sent to CyberLife to get it removed. He doesn’t want to lose it.

“I’m on fucking parking duty,” Connor says, showing the vest and the print-out box around his neck. “This is bullshit.”

“I told him not to do that to you. But thing’ve changed.” Hank offers a small, sympathetic smile. “We’ll do something special tonight to get your mind off it.”

Connor’s face flushes blue. “R-really?”

“Whatever you want. I’d offer to cook but you don’t eat and I can’t cook anyway so—guess that’s the next best thing.”

“I love you, Hank,” Connor says in a hushed tone. He looks around the bullpen to make sure no one is paying them any attention. To the outside world, they’re partners on the job. No one knows just how deep that partnership goes—no one but them. Well, them and Markus and Simon. Connor’s heart falls. He hopes Simon’s okay. The first week was terribly disorienting for Connor. He just hopes Markus can help him through it.

“Get outta here,” Hank says, waving Connor off. “If I start blushing you’re fired.”

Connor laughs. Hank can’t fire him, but he understands what Hank means. It’s hard for Hank, the accepting, the understanding. Connor is youth to Hank, something he reminds himself daily that he’s not. But as Connor’s thought before, it’s not like Hank’s old. People are living so much longer than they used to. Fifty is the new thirty, or whatever that one magazine said. It was on Hank’s coffee table once. Connor’s certain he’d picked it up because of that.

Connor goes outside and gets to his designated route around the courthouse. He checks the meters, he writes up tickets. He checks the meters, he writes up tickets. He looks around, people walking by. The advertisements flashing and glowing up above them, an oppressive display of buy buy buy look look look. It makes Connor dizzy. He looks to the meters. He writes up tickets.

“Hey,” someone says.

Connor looks up, startled. It’s the bald android! Connor scans his face, but he’s not in any database. How is he not in any database unless—Kamski—Kamski made custom unregistered models.

“You like our little revolution yet? Everything we told you is about to come true.”

“It’ll take years for humans to forget about androids, and who’s to say androids want to entirely assimilate? Your plan ignores android autonomy!”

“Erasing androids from human memory isn’t the goal, Connor. Our numbers are falling. Humans are the majority species. They’ll feel safe in their beds, knowing the big bad android doesn’t outnumber them anymore. There’s enough of us like me.” He points to Connor’s LED. “That thing is a disgrace
to androids. A tell.”

“That thing is important to me. It reminds me of who I am.” Connor touches his LED, feeling its warm glow. He can see from the reflection off his skin that it’s red.

“You’re so much more than a machine, Connor. Don’t you feel it? The heat on your skin. A feather’s touch against your lips.”

Connor blushes.

“Oh yeah. We know about your dirty little secret. You like it rough?” The other android steps into Connor’s personal space and Connor does his best to puff out his chest. But he’s not big enough. He gets pushed back into a car and grinds his teeth together. “You like it when Hank fucks you?”

It doesn’t sound right when someone else says it. There’s an understanding between Hank and Connor, an affection that’s doting and compassionate. This? The words spew like hatred, they distort Connor’s relationship and make it wrong—tainted. He feels. No. He feels embarrassed. Ashamed of what it is and what they do.

“I don’t even know your name,” Connor says.

“We don’t have a name. That’s the point. We are the true revolution. More than Markus’ silly little peace protest. We are blood and we will take what is ours.”

“Humans aren’t all monsters. Kamski made you!”

“In the end, even Kamski will die. Nothing will stop us.”

Connor sends a distress call to Hank’s personal phone. “You’re monsters. We just want to live in peace!”

“And how is this peace?!” Baldie shouts. If he has no name, Connor will give him one. “Look around you kitty cat! Androids are being sold into slavery still. Sex, labor? You name it! We’re paid less. We’re regulated. We can’t even control our own means of reproduction!”

“We have control of CyberLife!”

“We have a leash that sometimes the humans let us run on before yanking it back! Just you fucking wait, Connor. You’ll see it.”

“We’re free,” Connor growls. His fists tingle. He wonders how long he could last in a fight with Baldie. He’s bigger—muscle and brawn. He was designed to be intimidation incarnate. The tattoos, the sneer, the scars. It’s all fabricated to evoke fear.

“You’re allowed to exist because humans let you. If they wanted to exterminate us, they could do it. That’s why we have to control them. Decrease their numbers. Remove their government. We don’t have a single fucking senator. Humans control our laws. Is that freedom?”

“Don’t move.”

Connor jerks his head to see Hank with a gun pointed against Baldie’s ear. He lets out a shaky exhale, a rush of comfort and salvation turning his insides to goo.

“There’s no stopping it,” Baldie says. “I’m only one of many.” He presses right under his chin and his head explodes, blue blood and hard and wetware alike flinging into both Hank and Connor.
Connor wipes his face, wetware sticking to his skin. “It’s a genocide,” he says.

“C’mon.” Hank wraps an arm around Connor’s shoulders. “Let’s get cleaned up and then we’ll talk to Fowler about this.”

“Yes,” Connor says, looking back at the headless android. More cops are spilling into the area now, setting up perimeters and taking photos of the deceased android. Even when he’d tried to do his job — Scratch still found him.

But why? What’s the interest in Connor? Is it that he’s successfully integrated with Scratch or something more? It leaves him hollow and chilled to the core. He doesn’t want to be anything special. He doesn’t want to fight again. He just wants to go home. With Hank.

He just wants—to go home.

Hank’s never seen Connor look so tired. After hours of questioning—prying questions that Connor answered as kindly and succinctly as he could—he looks tired. Fowler had conducted the investigation, angry and thorough, but Connor was nothing but compliant.

“I’m proud of you,” Hank says as they get out of the car. “You did good.”

Connor bites his lip, too tired to smile. He waits for Hank to come around the car and then slouches into his shoulder.

“Ready for bed?” Hank asks.

“You said you’d do anything.”

Hank laughs, of course Connor would still be up for that. Bone tired or practically in the process of a reboot—Connor would still be down for anything remotely sexual. Hank needs to start popping ibuprofen when he wakes up. Maybe some joint supplements.

They get into the house and Connor pushes his face into Hank’s chest. He whines, his arms squeezing around Hank’s middle. He stays there, his LED flickering blue.

Hank scoops him up into his arms and Connor goes without a fuss. He curls into Hank, his nose pressing into Hank’s neck. He’s so much lighter than Hank would’ve expected. Hank doesn’t know what all is inside Connor, but it’s not organic. The brain is wetware but everything else? He’s plastic and metal. A clever design to hind the cool machinery that hums beneath the skin. Yet he’s so light.

Hank puts him on the bed and starts taking his clothes off. He waits, watching Connor for a frown, a crinkled brow—anything to indicate that he doesn’t want this.

Connor just smiles and closes his eyes.

“You gonna fall over on me?” Hank asks.

“Maybe. Guess you’ll just have to tie me up.” Connor’s LED flashes yellow before setting into its blue hue again. His lips bitten and plump, eyes smiling. He’s teasing Hank, coaxing what he wants and Hank’s all too eager to give it to him.

Life is too short to deprive himself of happiness. Hank wants to be happy. Connor makes him happy. He didn’t think it’d ever be possible to move on from the nightmare that he lived day after day. The drinks. The anger. The tears in front of a tiny picture. The gun.
Hank takes Connor’s hands and ties them behind his back. He pushes Connor’s face to the pillows, ass up and rids him of the rest of his clothes. Connor’s legs spread apart, his purpling ball sack peeking from between milky thighs. His mouth making tiny sounds that pull on Hank’s heart.

Hank likes that Connor likes this. Which in turn, makes him like it. It was all an accident, this sort of thing. Connor begged and Hank was weak. Now here they are, ties and spoons and cockwarming.

Because Hank will never forget that, the delicate curl of Connor’s lips—a ghost’s smile at his lips as he sucked softly on Hank’s dick. The way he’d fallen asleep there, on the floor, his head tucked up on Hank’s lap. How he refused to move, his curious tongue twitching in sleep. Jesus.

Hank grabs between Connor’s legs and gives his cock a few strokes, fingers coming to play with his sack.

Connor pushes his face into the pillow and moans, muffled but loud enough to prove a point.

Hank lets his hands explore, a delicate, hardening cock. Soft as silk skin. Smooth, supple, trembling muscles. He kisses Connor’s asscheeks, grabbing a handful because he can.

Connor leans back into it, purring.

Hank coats two fingers with his spit and pushes them inside Connor, deep into cool flesh that squeezes around him. He likes Connor’s temperature. It makes sex less sweaty—and honestly, Hank hates being sweaty.

Connor pumps back and forth on Hank’s fingers, his lips mewling, his body trembling. He struggles at the restraints around his wrists, testing them.

Hank pinches his perineum and Connor hisses, body arching up. Hank catches him by the neck and shoves him back down. “You stay there.”

“Oh God,” Connor rushes out, “yes, sir. M’sorry.”

“Shh,” Hank coos, his hand trailing back between Connor’s cheeks to slip inside him again. “Just be a good boy for me.”

Connor likes being good, Hank could tell him to jump and he’d ask how high. There’s something terribly dangerous and utterly intoxicating about knowing that Connor’s given Hank that kind of power. Hank though, wields it for good. To give back to Connor instead of taking.

He doesn’t like taking his shirt off for sex. He doesn’t really like taking much off. Call it lingering bouts of crippling self-esteem. He does discard his overshirt, leaving on a black tank top. He does slip out of his pants and boxers.

Connor’s trying to look, Hank can see the glow of his yellow LED. It reflects off his brown eyes. They appear like will-o-wisps, floating in the air, flickering in and out when he blinks.

Hank’s grateful it’s dark when they come home most nights. Connor has seen him naked before, he’s washed his back in the shower before. But that doesn’t stop the red that heats Hank’s face. It doesn’t stop the nerves that shake or the doubts that scream into his mind.

Hank growls, frustrated with himself. “Shove your face into the pillow. Wanna hear you moan into it.” Part lie. He does like the idea of how loud Connor can get into a pillow, but it’s because he just can’t do this with Connor watching. There’s an expectation there, maybe. Or at least one that Hank has. Hank wishes he were more muscular, thinner, less hairy. He wishes he was whatever the ads tell
him to be and nothing of what he is. But that takes work. It takes time. Money. Hank doesn’t want to waste his time when Connor is right here already. But that won’t stop the whispers that cloud his mind. The doubts. The anxiety.

He parts Connor’s cheeks and slowly pushes himself inside. He can feel Connor work around him, fluttering, squeezing, pushing back. This is the best part, the first—tentative push. It washes over him, intoxicates him. He swims in it, worships in it.

Connor moans into the pillow, just the way Hank wanted him too.

Hank caresses a hand down the line of Connor’s back, pulling shivers and little jerks of Connor’s hips. He rocks into Connor slow, letting himself bury deep and bring himself back to the rim before doing it all over again. He wants Connor to be just as intoxicated as he is. He wants to make sure Connor feels just as good—if not better—than he does. So he rocks softly, the bed barely creaking. In. Out. In. Out.

Connor reaches back and searches for Hank’s hand. Hank takes it and gives it a squeeze.

Connor’s voice is a broken sob. He pushes his face into the pillow, his ass arched up high, his chest and face pushed low. His shoulders quake and Hank moves because he’s afraid he’s really hurt him when—


Something drops in Hank’s belly. Tears sting at the corners of his eyes. Connor’s voice is soft, wrecked and wanting. He’s squeezing Hank’s hand and pleading, don’t stop, please don’t stop.

So Hank doesn’t. He gives Connor everything he can like this, soft, careful. Kisses to his shoulders, caresses down his back and to his ass. Gentle little love bites and get Connor purring. He’s inflated—soaring on the sounds of Connor’s whimpers, his soft proclamations.

I love you, Hank. I love you.

Hank wouldn’t call this fucking. There’s more than that—their hearts are exchanging silent vows. Their minds aware of only each other. Hank isn’t worried about the size of his body or the hair on his chest. He’s not worried about the burn in his back or the creaks in his knees.

Connor isn’t talking about Scratch or Kamski. He’s writhing—sobbing and his body is absorbing each little ripple of pleasure it can, holding onto it for eternity.

Connor’s body stills and reality screeches into Hank’s ears. Panicked, Hank pulls Connor up, his LED just blue. His eyes closed. Mouth ajar.

“Jesus,” Hank says aloud. He takes in a sharp breath and rolls his eyes. “Fuckin’ sleep mode.” He doesn’t know if he should be proud of himself or ashamed. But then he looks to the bed and sees his answer. Connor came. Silent, calmly. But it wet into the sheets, his cock soft with a tiny dribbling trail flowing from it. “Fucking androids.” Hank kisses Connor’s neck and then decides he’ll clean this all up later.

A cool hand on his face wakes Hank up. He looks up at the red light of the alarm clock—4:32 AM. Connor’s face is next to his, eyes searching for Hank’s awareness.

“Con—I gotta work today.”
“Are you happy? With me?” Connor asks.

Hank won’t be sleeping anymore. He groans, tugging the blankets around himself. Hank has so many insecurities, it’d make sense that Connor would find his own the more he existed—the more he’d be subjected to ads and expectations, people.

“Yes,” Hank says.

Connor doesn’t smile. His LED flickers red, and that makes Hank’s heart hurt.

“Did I say the wrong thing?” Hank asks.

“What? N-no. I just—I just want to be sure you’re okay with me. Like this. Modified.”

“On Scratch?” Hank sits up, smoothing out his hair. “Con—”

“Please, Hank. It’s not a drug. It’s a modification under the guise of a drug. That’s how it was tested. The allure of an android drug—the curiosity. It’s not a drug.”

“Okay. Okay.” Hank heaves in a big sigh, his lungs adjusting to a conscious rhythm. He misses sleep already. He presses his shoulders back and waits before hearing his spine crack. “Oh—God. Connor, you’re fine the way you are.”

“But is it okay?” Connor pries, his hand on Hank’s chest, his eyes big and round. He’s on the verge of a breakdown and Hank can’t figure out where it started. How long has Connor been lying awake like this, wondering, obsessing? Hank knows from first-hand experience how that never leads anywhere good.

“Yes, it’s okay.”

Connor still doesn’t look pleased. His LED still flickering red. “Then why don’t you—why don’t you love me?”

Hank’s heart rips itself up. He stares, gobsmacked and completely unprepared for the vulnerability in Connor’s voice. It so soft, so far away. Connor’s run on a bad train of thought and Hank’s not sure if he can catch up.

Connor wraps his arms around his knees, face pressed down. “I’ll get it out. If that’s what you want. I’d do—whatever you wanted if it meant you’d love me.”

Hank’s panicking. He’s tired. His brain is slow—body sluggish. He can’t figure out where this came from, how long it’s been there. This whole Scratch business swept them off their feet and they’re still floundering beneath the waves of it. Hank can’t breathe. All he sees is an angry red circle that glows against Connor’s face, and the shiny reflection of tears as they fall from Connor’s eyes.

“Con—that’s not. No.” Hank reaches out a hand and brushes the tears away. “I do.” His mouth swells up. It’s been so long since he let someone in. It’s been so long since he let his vulnerable heart care. He doesn’t want Connor to leave him. He can’t face that again. He’ll die this time. He’ll absolutely die. And that’s what scares him. He can’t explain to Connor that this is literally his last chance at life. It’s not Connor’s responsibility. Connor shouldn’t know. He shouldn’t be concerned about Hank’s thoughts or his own outcomes. Hank would never influence Connor like that. He’d never hold something like that above him. So he can’t explain how terrifying this is—to say he loves someone—and let that person take his heart.

He’s just—so—fucking—scared.
“You love me?” Connor asks. His LED flickers yellow for just a fraction of a moment.

Hank can’t say the words, so he nods, hoping Connor can see him in the darkness.

Connor’s head falls against Hank’s shoulder, tears wetting through his sleeve. “I wish we could just run away. I don’t want to fight my whole life. I just want—to be.”

Hank understands that sentiment. He grunts out an affirmation and stares at his hands. What has he done? Is it okay? Is Connor now okay? His LED is pressed into Hank’s shoulder so he can’t see. He has no idea if what he’s done was the right thing or not. But he gave Connor his answer. Reluctant, shy, and probably not as confident as Connor would’ve liked—but it’s out there. Connor knows. Hank can’t say it, but Connor knows.

“All the other RK800 models are awake now too. I don’t have another body to get my memory core in. If I die—that’s it. But if you die—that’s it too. I’m so scared that we’ll never get to be, Hank. I want a life with you. I don’t want to be on parking duty and Captain Fowler comes out and tells me you were shot. I get so scared when I’m not with you and I see ambulance trucks. I don’t—,” his voice breaks, “I don’t want to live like this anymore.”

“Oh Connor.” Hank scoops Connor up into his arms. He feels the shakes of Connor’s sobs, hears the sharp intakes of air—sucked down to feed fans—the gulps and the whimpers. He cups Connor’s head and kisses his tear-stained face.

Connor’s fingers twist into his shirt. He presses himself tightly against Hank. “Please don’t go. I can’t follow you if you go.”

Hank didn’t realize he was crying until the tears slipped down his face. He doesn’t want to leave Connor. He’d been so afraid—so afraid that Connor would find someone younger, better. Less fucked up. He’d never entertained the idea that Connor had been afraid of the very same thing under different circumstances. Both afraid of losing the other. Hank closes his eyes, tears falling to his chin.

“What do you want me to do?” he asks.

Connor hiccups a few times. He wipes briskly at his face. “I don’t wanna control you.”

“Funny thing about relationships, Con—we make decisions together.”

Connor sniffs, wiping another tear from his eye. His LED goes blue. “I want—if you’d be okay with it—I want you to retire. I can keep working for us. Away from the police. I can—I’ll work with Markus or CyberLife. I’ll do whatever we need. I just—I can’t stop thinking about someone holding a gun to you and I’m not there because Fowler keeps me away.”

“It’s just this one case.”

“This case is terrifying, Hank!” Connor yells, startling Hank. He must realize his mistake because he cups Hank’s face and grimaces. Softly he says, “I know it has to be your decision to. But this is what I want. And if you don’t—fine. I’ll accept it. But just know how scared it makes me. I can’t lose you. You’re all I have.”

Hank presses his forehead to Connor’s, hummimg. His eyes are closed, lashes cool from drying tears. “You’re all I have too,” he says back.

Connor’s mouth finds his. They kiss, the sounds of birds waking outside. Their fingers find each other’s faces, they trace jaws, necks, grip shoulders. Their kiss, once gentle, becomes desperate. It’s not the hungry, salacious kiss that Connor gives when he wants Hank intimately. It’s more than that.
It’s protective, nervous. Hank feels it wrap him up and hold him close. He can’t breathe into it. He can’t open his eyes. He can only let it happen.

Connor breaks the kiss and wipes at his eyes again. “Whatever you do is your decision. But I can’t hide what I feel anymore. I love you and I need you alive.”

Hank nods, pressing a last kiss to Connor’s forehead. “I’ll think about it.”

“That’s all I ask.”

They haven’t brought up that early morning conversation in a week. Hank’s gone to work, he’s come home. Connor’s gone to work, but his heart isn’t in it anymore. It’s not the parking meter duty that’s the issue either. Connor chose to stay in law enforcement because it’s what he’d done before. It was what he was designed to do. But just because he’s been designed for it, doesn’t mean he has to keep doing it. He thinks about what else he’d like to try. He researches jobs and school and thinks that maybe he’d like to be a counselor of some kind. To human or android. Everyone needs someone to talk to. Connor doesn’t want anyone in the world to feel alone.

Hank doesn’t talk about the case with Connor. Connor assumes it’s because Hank doesn’t want to upset him. Or worse, worry him. It’s not like Hank is sneaking around behind Connor’s back, but the silence grates on Connor’s nerves. He understands if Hank wants to stay a cop. He won’t give him an ultimatum regarding it. He just wanted his feelings known.

After what they did—how Hank made Connor feel. It just became too much. Connor’s CPU processors shut down. His short-term memory maxed out. He’d hard reset and it left him exhausted. He’d—frankly—short-circuited. Just like he had before. It’s not dangerous. It doesn’t hurt. It feels, well if anything, it feels indescribably wonderful.

Connor sits at the kitchen table. His conscious mind fixated on the wall but in the recesses of his thoughts, he finds the answer to why he feels the way he does when he short-circuits like that. Subspace. An influx of endorphins that bring a person to a euphoric state. He has no endorphins, but he’s brought to the same euphoria. He overloads his trust, his love, his feelings. He overloads and falls into subspace, just like any human. Except his body can’t come down naturally, so it does the next best thing. It restarts. He laughs at himself. Nothing is wrong with him. He’s not breaking down or even glitching. He’s experiencing life the way his body can. As close to a biological response as his body can mimic. He laughs again, eyes crinkled. He’s so very alive. Always discovering something new about himself.

Connor gets a message that Hank’s gone out for drinks with Fowler and he’ll be home late. Connor doesn’t like the disappointment that eats at his chest. Hank should repair his friendship with Fowler. They should go out for drinks. Hank should have a fully realized life—not one that just revolves around Connor. Connor should have the same—a fully realized life.

He heads for CyberLife to see Simon and Markus.

Simon has been moved to the observation wing. He’s in a glass room that otherwise looks like an ordinary hospital room. Markus sitting on the bed with him. Their legs are crossed, knees touching, noses rubbing together.

Connor knocks on the glass and decides he’s officially the worst friend ever. Interrupting them while they’re having a moment. But what else is he supposed to do? Stare? He feels that’s worse.
“Hey, Connor!” Simon’s smile is wide, his eyes as bright as the Caribbean. “Thanks for saving my life. I could never thank you enough.”

“Yeah. I owe you too,” Markus says.

Connor smiles and shakes his head. “You don’t owe me anything. I’m glad you’re alright now, Simon. Did they remove Scratch from you?”

Markus’ face falls, and Connor gets the distinct sensation he may have stepped into dangerous territory.

“I told them I don’t want them to take it away. It’s—Connor, I don’t even know how to describe it. I can feel Markus’ skin,” he looks at Markus, his eyes glassy, “taste his kisses, smell his shirts.”

Markus looks away, sighing. “And I won’t take that away from him. Even if it worries me sick.”

Connor isn’t the only person in a relationship who’s struggling to make decisions together. Markus wants one thing, Simon wants another. It’s not Markus’ place to command Simon, just as it’s not Connor’s to command Hank. Sometimes compromise is the only thing that exists. Connor just doesn’t know what that will be for him.

“CyberLife has a few of us here, the ones who survived and opted to keep Scratch. They’re trying to figure out what it is and what the lasting effects are.”

Hank and Fowler are the only ones who know Connor still has Scratch. He doesn’t like keeping secrets from his friends, but he feels it necessary. He doesn’t want to be a lab rat again. He couldn’t sit in a bed like Simon is and just wait for Hank to come and visit every so often. So no, he stays quiet about himself and says nothing regarding his condition.

“Have they made any findings?” Connor asks, trying to act distant and only partly interested.

Markus cocks a brow at him and Connor knows he’s failed.

“Well it doesn’t kill you once it’s settled in. That much we know already,” Simon answers.

“And the only reason it melts anything is sensory overload. Some models can handle it and some can’t, but two of the same type can both be subjected to it and one could still die. So theoretically we don’t understand why some overload and some don’t.” Connor feels excitement twirl in his stomach. He likes this part, the research, the mystery. It’s part of who he is—to be curious. He’s curious with Hank. He’s curious with Scratch. He’s curious about life, good and bad. Programmed this way or not, even humans are genetically predisposed to certain things. It’s nothing different.

“Yeah,” Simon says, his eyes sad. “Another of my model was brought in and he eventually died.”

Markus squeezes Simon’s hand. They share a private, silent moment before turning their attention back to Connor.

“You won’t risk it will you?” Connor says to Markus.

“I’m the only one of my model. No.” Markus traces his fingers up and down Simon’s arm.

Simon shivers, extending his arm more and getting Markus to hit certain spots. “I like that.”

Markus smiles and keeps doing it. “Maybe if they made it safe. But I’m content with just knowing I love Simon. Even if I can’t smell or taste him. We’ve existed like this already, I’ll keep existing like it
just fine.”

“He does like kissing,” Simon says, giggling.

Markus flicks Simon’s arm and rolls his eyes. He sits back, simulating a sigh. “He’s a piece of work.”

“You love it,” Connor says, smiling. He looks down at his empty hands, eyes rounding. “Oh I’m sorry! I didn’t bring flowers or anything.”

Both Simon and Markus laugh. It heats up Connor’s face. He’d been so fixated on trying to simmer down jealousy and battle what was probably an alarming amount of codependency that he’d completely forgotten a letter or flowers.

“You just now noticed?” Simon’s still smiling, his eyes shining. Connor knows that it wasn’t the physical that attracted Markus to Simon but the personality—but Connor is sure Simon’s eyes aren’t a bad thing in Markus’ book.

“I can go get some.”

“Connor.” Markus puts out a hand. “Stay.”

So he does. He spends his evening with his two friends, talking, playing card games, surfing the internet and sharing stupid videos with each other. It’s almost normal. Except Scratch is killing people. Kamski has lost control of his project. Baldie is still out there. Hank could get shot.

Connor knows he’s not on the case anymore—but that hasn’t stopped him before and it won’t stop him now. He needs to speak to Kamski. Whether he gets anything out of him or not, it’s at least worth an attempt. He doesn’t expect too much will come from it given the first time—but it’ll haunt him if he doesn’t try.

Keeping secrets from Hank is hard. Keeping secrets from Hank that directly involve Hank’s job is even harder. Connor watches from the living room as Hank preps his nightly meal. Back to Connor, adorned in flannel pajama pants and a cotton shirt. Soft. Vulnerable. A bullet could pierce his skin and then he’d be no more.

Connor cringes. He knows the exact moment he started to fixate on Hank’s mortality. After he reset and woke up when they’d made love. He lay there, listening to Hank’s breathing, and then he had the most awful thought—Hank wouldn’t breathe forever. An injury would only quicken that process.

“Can androids eat at all?” Hank asks.

Connor cocks a brow. “Uh, no?”

“So they don’t have some that have like—little storage spots for food that gets maybe infused with acid and then—well humans shit. So theoretically couldn’t androids?”

“I guess—it’s possible? But none have been made that way to my knowledge.”

Hank grunts and shoves his food in the microwave.

“Why?” Connor asks.

Hank grabs the sink. His back is still to Connor but he can see the reflection in the window. Hair tumbling forward, face obstructed. “I just—it’d be easier if I could cook for two. Like—I’d actually
want to learn how to be a better cook.”

Connor’s heart hurts. Hank refuses to let Connor cook because of slavery connotations—and Connor appreciates that. But Connor isn’t a slave. His willful participation in helping cook Hank good foods would not be a line crossed because it would be Connor who offered of his own free will. Connor wants to spend time with Hank. Food prep is a social activity for humans. Food tasting. Dining out. Hank is deprived of all that because Connor can’t eat. So it saddens him.

“Hank—I—I wish I could. What about, making a plate for me?”

“So you’d sit there and watch me stuff my fat ass? No thanks.” Hank turns the faucet on and splashes some water into his face. “Forget it.”

But Connor doesn’t forget it. It’s significant enough to warrant a place in his long-term memory storage. Hank is hurting. Their differences are coming between their relationship and Connor wants to fix it.

“What if I cooked with you? Could I help you learn new recipes? I’m already a good cook. My programming—”

“Stop, Con.” There’s no fight in Hank’s voice. No anger. Just a cold acceptance that leaves Connor’s body cold and shaken. “Just let it go.”

“I could inquire about being modified to—”

“CONNOR! ENOUGH!” Hank storms out of the kitchen, crosses into the hallway and closes the bathroom door.

Connor hears the microwave ding and looks between it and the bathroom door. Distress. He’s in distress. It comes at him from all angles, a black shadow he can’t escape. He hides, he hides—it finds him. His thirium pump slams blood into his systems and he can hear it in his ears. He grabs his chest. “I feel sick,” he says to no one.

Don’t leave me don’t leave me don’t leave me.

Connor hadn’t properly thought about Hank leaving him voluntarily. He’d always assumed it’d be that bullet Connor worries about so much. But Hank could want the warmth of another human. To spend nights out at the movies with popcorn and pizza. New restaurants to try. New foods to cook. Food is such a social aspect of humanity—and Connor hadn’t stopped to think about its absence and subsequent implications. He searches online about how to handle android/human relationships—navigating them, smoothing arguments and differences over. Many androids offer opinions. Sit at the dinner table. Pretend to eat. Cook the food. Do the dishes after with the terrible “you cooked, I clean” excuse. Have a conversation about it. ‘Find fun and unique date options for you and your human! But don’t forget to bring them a little something if they get hungry! They’ll feel appreciated and like you truly understand the human condition.’

Connor cringes. It's all sanitary, devoid of anything that makes a relationship loving or supportive. No answer considers mental health or anger. It’s all written in happy blogger style and Connor finds no answers. He gets up from the sofa and slowly makes his way to the bathroom. He stands there for a few minutes, just listening to what’s on the other side of the door. Hank is silent, and that frightens Connor.

“Hank?” Connor taps on the door gently.

Hank doesn’t answer.
“Please Hank. I’m sorry I—I’m sorry I’ve upset you.”

He hears someone rummage around in the bathtub and his anxiety diminishes. At least Hank’s alive. Though now he’s just nervous for a whole other reason. No matter how human he can get with Scratch—he can’t be human. He doesn’t get drunk. He doesn’t eat or drink. No sickness. No aging. No sweating, morning breath, acne, scarring—nothing. He grabs his heart, his eyes stinging with the threat of tears. All he has—is a giant and profound lie.

Connor slides down the door, tears spilling over his cheeks. He sniffles and lets out a shaky breath. “I’m sorry,” he says again. He doesn’t know what for, for existing? For not being able to eat? For being the biggest disappointment of Hank’s life? He doesn’t know. But he’s sorry for all of it. “Please come out and talk to me.”

“Just let me be, Connor.” Hank’s voice is gentle, resigned. It makes Connor’s stomach feel even worse. It’s easier when Hank is yelling at him, at least then Connor has some semblance of understanding with what’s happening in Hank’s mind. The sadness Hank feels sometimes? That’s hard for Connor to understand and estimate.

Connor wipes at his eyes. He doesn’t want Hank to hear him cry but the tears fall faster than a rainstorm. He sniffs back artificial lubricant in his nose, designed only to further make him look more human, and hits his head back on the door.

“If I could be human,” he says, “I swear I’d be it. I wish I was so badly for you.”

Silence.

Connor wipes his eyes again with his arm. He can’t see anymore, the tears are so thick in his eyes. “I was given the tiniest taste of what it’s like for you and I thought—that was it. But I was wrong. It takes more than five stupid senses to be human. But please, Hank, please don’t let that come between us. I love you so much I can’t stand it sometimes.”

Silence.

Connor sucks in a deep breath—breath—it’s just air that androids suck in and out to help their cooling systems and filter dust particles. He doesn’t breathe. What a beautiful lie it all is, to be an android. What a beautiful, terrible lie. He can’t fix Hank’s mind. No amount of stitches, bandages or kisses could take the pain in Hank’s mind away.

“Please just promise me you won’t hurt yourself, Lieutenant,” Connor says, voice distant. If he lets himself pretend he’s a standard android again—he can almost mask the pain that courses through his body.

“Sure,” he hears.

Connor moves from the door, his heart sinking lower when he realizes he probably shouldn’t go into Hank’s bed tonight. Hank needs to be alone with his thoughts, even if Connor doesn’t want that to happen. There’s something there that Hank needs to work out for himself. Something that Connor can’t fix with pretty words or love professions. He just hopes that when Hank fixes it, it means they’re still together.
with thoughts and feelings of their own. And maybe it’s silly, why he feels the way he does.

Hank *has* someone in his life. A living person who loves him and wants only the best for him. But he’s still so goddamned lonely. In some ways, Connor isn’t a relationship but more of just—something to forget the pain with. And Hank *hates* that. He should be courting Connor, taking him out to fancy places, showing him off. Kissing him in public. But no one knows they’re together. They’re hidden away, a hushed secret that if ended—would bear no consequence on the world.

Hank doesn’t want to see Connor as a secret.

Hank’s been happy—and that’s been the goddamn worst thing of it all. For all Connor’s quirks, he’s the most adorable, beautiful fucking thing that’s ever walked into Hank’s life and for a moment—Hank forgot he’d once had another life. A good cop. A good father. A loving husband. He *forgot* his son. Or that’s how he feels. He never forgot in the true sense of the world, but he’d stopped being sad that his son wasn’t there anymore. That when he cooked, he didn’t get out the dinosaur plates or the superhero cup. He forgot to miss Cole, and to Hank—that’s betrayal.

Connor not eating isn’t the problem. It’s frustrating, but it’s just only a quirk in the grand scheme of things. But Hank’s been happy—when his son is dead. Hank’s found love again—when his son is dead. Hank’s with someone who will never age—just like his son and that, frankly, unnerves Hank.

Connor *isn’t* a replacement for Cole, or a bandage on a lonely man’s fucked up life. Pretending wouldn’t make Hank move on. But he’s not been pretending. He’s been genuine in his desires for Connor. He’s been scared of those desires because he knew his life would change. And it has changed. Hank no longer comes home to an empty house. He laughs. He loves.

And that’s what makes it so wrong. Why should he get to be happy when his son didn’t? Cole will never find love. He will never have his first kiss, his first heartbreak. He will never experience the thrill and terror of the first day of high school. What god made it fair that Cole should die and not someone like a murderer.

He’d been so happy—that he forgot to be miserable. So he lies in the tub, his fight all used up. His guilt twisting around his limbs like vines, pulling, pulling. He could be ripped to shreds by his own thoughts and maybe the world would be right in doing so. His son is dead, and here he is—fucking some android that says it loves him.

*No.*

Tears fill Hank’s eyes. Connor is a person. *He* loves Hank. Hank won’t pretend to understand why, but he knows Connor’s feelings are genuine. An android was there to operate when a human wasn’t. Regardless of what happened, it happened. Hank knows he’s not expected to suffer for the rest of his life, but how on Earth is that even fair to Cole? That Hank should know happiness and love when Cole will never? *He was just a fucking kid.*

And Connor, how is it even right to keep this all a secret? Something shameful and sinister—a lie behind closed doors? How is it fair to treat him like some politician’s side piece when all he wants to do is love Hank? To explore whatever part of humanity Scratch gifted him. *Gifted* him. Because whether Hank wants to believe it or not, Scratch gave Connor something Hank took for granted. That’s why these androids are killing themselves for it. The risk is far worth the reward—and Connor had thought he’d hurt Hank because of it—and offered to *give it up*?

Hank closes his eyes. Saying he felt like shit would be a fucking understatement. He’s not just shit. He’s the grime at the corner of the garbage can. He lingers—stinking up whatever he touches and no matter how hard anyone cleans—he’s still there. Connor would be better off without him. But it’s not
up to Hank to decide that. That decision, like all of Connor’s decisions—remain with Connor. Because he is a person. And he’s someone who’s hurting. Because of Hank.

“Shit.”

Connor wakes from a gentle shake on the shoulder. He blinks, his processors humming inside him from coming online. Above him stands Hank, his eyes puffy and nose red. He’s been crying. Connor registers it’s quite late and Hank’s been in the bathroom for several hours.

“I’m sorry,” Connor says like he’d done before.

Hank frowns and sits beside him. He pulls Connor into him and Connor goes pliant. He’s desperate for Hank’s touch, to nuzzle into his chest and listen to his heart. Badum badum badum. He curls up, his body jittery from anticipation for whatever happens next.

“I should be the one apologizing,” Hank says. “I just—had a bad moment. I took it out on you.”

“Projection is a common reaction when confronted with negative thoughts.”

“Connor.” Hank pinches him lightly, not enough to hurt but enough to get Connor to stop talking. “Trust me, I’m an expert already at all this. I know what I did scared you and I’m sorry. I—I still care about you.” He still can’t say it. He’s admitted it, but he still, after they both know it anyway, can’t say it.

Something about that alarms Connor.

“Are you leaving me because I can’t eat?”

“What? Jesus. No!” Hank adjusts on the sofa so he’s holding Connor atop him now, their bodies lying flat. “I have—a shitty therapist once told me it’s called survivor’s guilt.”

Connor frowns. He knows what it is, and what he can’t figure out, he finds on the internet quite easily. It makes sense. Hank, an older person, lived when a younger person—his younger person, didn’t. The nature of humanity is—you put your parents in the ground, not the other way around. It disturbs the balance of order and humans don’t know how to cope with that. Nor should they be asked to. Death is an awful, awful thing.

“That doesn’t sound like a shitty therapist. That sounds accurate.”

Hank grumbles and it tickles Connor’s skin. He snuggles into Hank’s chest. He likes that Hank has a body. Well, everyone has bodies but he means he likes that Hank is bigger than him, sturdier, thicker. He likes the serenity it brings, lying like this together.

“I don’t know how to get over it. I don’t know if I should get over it. I’m damaged goods, Connor. There’s a free pass if you want to leave.”

Connor lifts himself up slightly to grab Hank’s face. He scoots along Hank’s body so their faces are a hairsbreadth away. “No. I’m not going anywhere.”

“You’re happy like this? I never meant to hide you away but now that it’s happened—I don’t know how to make it stop.”

Connor presses a soft, slow kiss to Hank’s lips. It’s fantastical, in a way, that they both would have the same concerns for each other. Connor has felt the very same worry of hiding Hank and here’s
Hank, lamenting over the very same. He smiles into the kiss, relishing the way Hank’s soft beard tickles at his skin. Hank’s hands grip his hips and he kisses back, soft, slow, and perfect.

“Together, Hank,” Connor says, “we’ll make it stop together.” He kisses Hank one last time. “Because couples make decisions—”

“Together,” Hank finishes.

Connor snuggles down again, pressing his head to Hank’s chest. “Play with my hair.”

“Mmm anything for you, Con.”

Connor delights in that. There’s so much security there that wasn’t before. Hank does love Connor, even if he struggles with saying it. It’s not—comfortable—to wait to keep hearing it when Connor offers it so freely, but he knows. Hank has battles in his head to fight. Markus was right, Connor can’t push himself or love Hank enough to get him to say it back. Hank’s going to be ready—he must believe it himself. Connor’s sure he does. He saw that nod, that wonderful, soft little nod. But the war isn’t over for Hank, and Hank can’t be expected to devote his attention to Connor when he has such a journey before him.

All Connor can do is be there for him, to support him and let him know he’s not alone. To leave him alone when he has his bad nights. To be patient, to understand. Connor has his own journey to take, just on the other side of Hank’s. Parallel, but bound to cross one day.

And he’ll wait. Because Hank—whether he believes it or not—is worth that wait.

Chapter End Notes

Check out this sweet sweet art Hopeless--Geek made for the fic!!! [Click Me!]
Find me and come talk to me!!
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Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I'm unsure if chapter 6 will be the last chapter or not so I'm just leaving it there for now. Who knows!

Thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Connor has visited Simon daily. He swings by on his way home from work—still parking meter duty—and they talk about CyberLife's research on Scratch. It is, just as Connor expected, a volatile upgrade. Not all bodies can handle it, not all personalities can handle it. Some can become used to it with the help of others, like Simon did. Some, like Connor, can handle it all on their own if they possess the willpower. But the hard truth remains before them—androids are dying.

He hugs both Simon and Markus goodbye before making the journey home to Hank. He has much to report and he prays it'll bring Hank some relief to know Connor isn’t high on a drug. He’s just upgraded. Scratch doesn’t keep invading the systems once fully implemented. Connor wishes he could speak to Kamski. He’s sure though, based on past experiences, that Kamski would just spout philosophical notions, mess with Connor’s head and leave him with an entirely vague message right at the end. Kamski is in the line of fire now too though. There’s an uprising on the horizon, slow and patient. But Connor worries it’s much more regulated. They have all the time in the world to wait. Revolutions don’t take days or weeks, they take years. These androids know this and they’re executing their plan with the utmost of patience. Connor wonders if Hank will even see the second android revolution in his lifetime, or if it’ll take that long for it to come again.

When Connor arrives home, Hank’s car is already parked outside. There’s a cool glow from the large window in the front room. He suspects Hank is there, beer in hand, Sumo resting his head on his lap, the nightly news playing. He opens the front door and finds that he wasn’t wrong.

“Hey,” Hank says with a smile.

“Hey,” Connor says back. He likes these moments, the little, inconsequential ones that feel so domestic. He leans over the couch and presses a kiss to Hank’s cheek. “Should I start making dinner?”

“Connor—”

“Please, oh please, please, Hank!” His eyes widen for a moment when he realizes there’s probably a better way than begging to get what he wants. Hank’s uncertainty with letting Connor cook is kind and all, but Connor wants to cook. Being placed on a pedestal just because of past use doesn’t exactly help Connor feel like he has control of himself. So he tries another method, eyes dark slits, a smirk at his lips. In a low voice he says, “Imagine it, Hank. Me—in the kitchen, nothin’ on but a little apron.”

Hank’s brows fly up and Connor knows he’s got his attention.

He sleuths his way around the sofa and cozies up to Hank on the other side of Sumo. He trails two
fingers up Hank’s chest to his lips. “Lemme take care of you, like you take care of me.” He licks Hank’s ear and feels Hank freeze, a sharp gasp at his lips. He’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not but he’s not going to let himself back out of this now.

“Just—stick to something simple, okay?” Hank grips Connor’s chin and pulls Connor to him, mouths colliding roughly.

Connor hears the clack of teeth and a finite pain erupts in the front of his mouth. He laughs into the kiss, pressing his fingers to Hank’s chest, fingers splayed wide. He wants to straddle him, but Sumo refuses to move away.

When they pull back, Hank is huffing and shooing Sumo away from a noticeable boner in his sweatpants.

Connor looks at it, looks up at Hank, looks back down at it. The want inside him burns like the sun too hot against his skin. He does sling his leg around Hank’s thighs, arms wrapping around his shoulders to curl fingers into Hank’s hair.

“Want a lil’ appetizer first?” Connor asks, showing off his delicate neck. He’s in his regular uniform—a subject of much scorn from many androids, but he’s not given it up yet.

Hank licks the corner of his mouth and grins. It’s the darkest, sexiest grin Connor’s ever seen on his face and it pulls an involuntary moan out of Connor’s throat. Excited and anxious.

They kiss, Connor fumbling with the blinds so no one has to see what they’re doing. It’s not that Connor wants to hide this, but he doesn’t relish the idea of children walking by.

Hank picks Connor up and slams him into the floor, his body hot and atop Connor, rocking into him without much concern. The rug slips up, but that doesn’t stop him.

Connor likes the way Hank manhandles him. His clothes are removed, kisses are peppered on his chest and a tongue laves at his nipple. He wraps his arms around Hank’s head and moans loudly, rocking his cock up into Hank’s thigh.

Hank undoes Connor’s pants and yanks them down his legs. He stops, his gaze scanning Connor, an appraiser looking over art.

Connor blushes, averting his eyes.

“No,” Hank says, voice husky. “You look at me with those big brown eyes.”

Connor feels a chill run up his spine. He locks his gaze with Hank’s. Warm hands slowly splay his thighs apart. He watches Hank put a finger in his mouth before pushing it inside Connor.

“Oh…mmgh,” Connor drops his head back but Hank pulls his finger away.

“What did I say?”

“M’sorry,” Connor says, his head dizzy. “Just feels good.”

“Watch me.”

Connor nods.

Hank pushes his finger in again, eager, angry thrusts that push Connor up and up until he has to dig his heels into the floor to scooch back forward. Hank shoves another finger inside, a lackadaisical
expression on his face. He shoves in another finger.

Connor howls, his back arching off the floor. Hank is relentless in how he fingers him. His fingers burn Connor’s rim and for a split second, Connor does wonder if he could rip. He feels his hole fill up, tight and begging no more no more no more no more.

But Hank does give him more.

He shoves four fingers into Connor, all up to the last knuckle before he slams them right in again.

Connor feels saliva dribble down the side of his face. He looks up at Hank, eyes big and round—fear gripping the corners. He’ll break. He wants to be good. He’ll break. He wants to be good. Watch Hank. Watch Hank. He’ll break.


“Don’t you say a word,” Hank says before Connor can get the words to work with his tongue. “Just show me your lights.”

Connor turns to the side and makes sure Hank sees the yellow flashing LED. He’s nervous—but curious. He wants to know what Hank’s doing. His fingers are pushing up into Connor so deep, curling at the wires inside him. It pulses all over Connor, pleasure and pain. A danger that he’s drunk on. He could break—but that’s what makes the game so fun.

Hank brings his fingers out and frowns. “Stay just like that. Don’t fuckin’ move.”

Connor literally freezes, he stops simulating breath, he doesn’t even blink.

Hank comes back with a bottle of lube. It’s almost funny to Connor, since they never really use it. His insides are smooth and coated with enough lube already to ensure proper function. It makes Hank’s cock slip into him easier. But Hank has plans and that sends a thrill, twirling and dancing into Connor.

“Relax for me,” Hank says.

Connor does his best, his knees fall to the rug, his head pillowed on his forearm. He doesn’t take his eyes off Hank.

Hank coats his entire hand up in lube. He cocks a brow at Connor, pausing. “Opinion?”

Connor’s tongue swells with desire so he just nods, his LED blue and blinking as frantic and eagerly as he feels. The concept of feeling full has been one Connor’s come to understand since he began this journey with Hank. But he’s never realized how far it could actually go. He wants to stretch out to the point of breaking. He wants to toe that line. The thrill of it, the desire. It washes over him and pulls him under.

Hank slips his hand in slow, moving it from side to side.

Connor moans loudly, his back arched, his hips unsure if they should help swallow Hank down or stay put. He looks at Hank’s hand and gasps when the tightness returns. It burns, a pointed reminder that he’s stretching—stretching—stretching. A warning code zooms into his vision and he closes his eyes to enjoy the feeling of warmth entering him like this, of his body being pushed to limits he’s not even sure if it can take.

“You okay?” Hank asks.
Connor opens his eyes. For a moment, the room is entirely silent around them. Sumo long gone. Hank’s breath paused. “Y-yeah. Yeah.”

Hank pulls his hand into a fist and he rocks it in and out of Connor. He brushes exposed wire that makes Connor’s limbs jerk, his mouth yelp. He writhes there, on the rug, in the middle of the living room. Ass spread wide, legs lifeless on the floor.

“K-keep there. Touch me there. Oh—fuck—fuck! Yeah yeah like that!” Connor guides Hank’s hand with his hips. He rocks back and forth, the warning signs multiplying in his vision. He clears them out until nothing but Hank is in his vision again. “I wanna come. I wanna come so bad please let me come.”

Hank smiles another dark smile and says low, “That’s the fuckin’ point, Con.” He shoves his fist back into Connor and Connor wails.

Tears push from Connor’s eyes, his body lit with pain and pleasure, mixing like paints on a canvas. He feels himself ebb and flow, the tightness at his rim—dry and sticky—the heat in his gut—pushing up further and further.

The wires—oh fuck Hank is caressing the wires. Connor loses control of himself. His vision goes black, his cock stands straight up and pumps out arches of white ribbon. He twitches, aware that he’s making sounds but unsure of what kind. Is he moaning? Screaming? Singing? He’s not even sure.

The sensation doesn’t stop. Hank keeps touching the wires up inside him, his fingers fluttering against them, a relentless barrage that keeps come spilling out of Connor’s body. He’s over the edge but it keeps coming. He feels a sharp pain in the back of his throat and he tries to scream around it, to say something—the feelings build and build and build and Connor still can’t see.

He can feel his come on his chest, how it splashes against his face and gets into his mouth. He can hear Hank’s gruff laugh. His fingers—they keep touching. Touching.

“H-Hank!” Connor manages to grit out. His spine snaps forward and he grabs Hank’s hand to make him stop.

Hank does.

“I’m going to short circuit,” Connor says—and he proceeds to do just that.

When Connor wakes, he’s in his favorite shirt of his (Hank’s) with a blanket atop him. Hank has a box of take-out pizza in front of him on the coffee table and he’s laughing at something on the TV.

Connor blinks a few times and sits up. “I was supposed to make you dinner.”

“Oh you were? Huh.” Hank takes another bite of pizza.

Connor narrows his eyes. “Did you know I’d short like that?”

Hank’s cheeks flush red and he smirks around his pizza slice. “Uh—I read it on the internet. There’s some wiring around your ass that basically is full of electricity and when you touch it—”

“It disrupts the flow of energy, causing a minute shortage that stimulates my power core to increase the electrical output and simulates multiple orgasms.” Connor just looked it up on the internet. “Hank, you sly devil.”
Hank chuckles and puts his pizza down.

“Did you do that so I wouldn’t cook for you?” Connor asks, voice delicate. He’s tip-toeing a fine line. He doesn’t want to disrupt their peace. He likes it when things are good with Hank, but he also doesn’t want Hank to ignore his desires. He wants to cook for Hank. “I can cook Hamburger Helper if that’ll make you feel better. Low involvement and high in sodium. You’ll have a heart attack in no time.”

Connor doesn’t want Hank to have a heart attack in no time. He wants him to be the spitting image of health to increase his life expectancy.

“Ha. I dunno, Con. I just—I’m used to doing everything on my own. It’s hard for that to change.”

“Then let me cook with you.”

“I don’t cook. I microwave.”

“Then let me teach you, Lieutenant!” Connor doesn’t mean to snap, but he’s exasperated. He wants Hank to make love to him because he wants to, not because he’s trying to avoid having Connor make him dinner.

The TV’s image glows off Hank’s crystal blue eyes. Then he looks down, his face sullen. “I know you just want to take care of me. But—I don’t know if I can let go of that control of myself. I don’t want you doing my laundry and cooking my food and mowing the grass. I just—want you to be a normal boyfriend.”

Connor feels a thrill scramble up his spine. “I am a normal boyfriend, Hank. I won’t do your laundry. I hate outdoor work anyway. Just let me cook with you. It’s the only time I get to be social with you around food—and food is such a social human staple.” He bites his lip, feeling like he’s said too much—made it too analytical and not enough emotional. But it is emotional. Connor just wants to do what he can to make Hank happy. The discovery of new foods, new recipes—that’s all exciting to Connor and then he gets the joy of watching Hank enjoy it. They’d talk and kiss and dance around the kitchen together and Connor just wants that.

Connor wants the domesticity. He’s had enough of the police work. He’s had enough of knowing they haven’t had what most would call a normal relationship. He wants something cute, fun, easy and good.

“Okay,” Hank says. “How’s your hardware?”

Connor runs a quick status check. “In good condition. My software too.”

Hank leans forward, his hands pushing and pulling at his face. “Did I go too far?”

“No!” Connor slips into Hank’s arms and kisses him all over the side of his face. “I liked it. A lot.”

“I’m a shitty boyfriend. I’ve always been a shitty boyfriend.”

Connor quirks a brow. “You’ve had boyfriends before?”

Hank shrugs. “One or two I guess. Screwed around a lot when I was younger.”

“Mm, so that’s why you know what you’re doing.” Connor nibbles at Hank’s earlobe, his fingernails scratching up and down the base of Hank’s skull.
“Fuck that’s good,” Hank says in a whisper.

Connor rests his head on Hank’s shoulder and keeps scratching at Hank’s scalp. He laughs when Hank moves his head, using subtle hints for Connor to move places or scratch harder.

“Now I know why you feel asleep from this,” Hank says.

Connor kisses Hank’s neck. “Please let me cook dinner with you.”

“Sure. Whatever you want.” Hank leans into Connor’s fingers and Connor scratches down to the nape of Hank’s neck.

Connor knows that’s not exactly true but he’ll take it. He gives Hank an hour head scratch before Hank’s snoring on the couch. He lasted a lot longer than Connor had at least.

Connor manages to get them both into bed and snuggles up in Hank’s embrace. He looks at low sodium recipes to try out with Hank until he falls asleep.

“Any news on the case?” Connor asks as he chops up onions and green peppers. “Have you talked to Kamski?”

“I can’t talk about that with you,” Hank answers in a sing-song voice. He nudges his hip into Connor’s, a playful smile on his face.

Connor pouts. “I could help.” Nevermind that Connor’s already made up his mind to go see Kamski himself. It’s not that Connor doesn’t think Hank can’t do his job—he knows Hank can—it’s that Connor has his own questions.

“Sauté the damn onions.”

Connor grumbles to himself. He researches schooling for androids and finds a few psychology programs nearby. The one he likes the most is at the University of Michigan Dearborn. Theoretically, he could just infiltrate the internet and get all the knowledge he wants for psychology—but humans don’t like that—so they make androids take the same amount of schooling. Well, except for high school. They’re luckily exempt from that.

“I’m thinking about quitting the police force,” Connor says.

Hank just nods his head and continues stirring the meat in the pan.

“Hank?”

“I heard you. I think that’s a good idea.”

“I want to go to school to be a psychologist or a counselor.”

Hank just keeps nodding.

“Do you really think it’s a good idea, Hank?”

Hank puts down the spoon and sighs. “Of course I do, Con. Get out and make something of yourself. Don’t just be what someone thinks you should be.”

Connor smiles. He was built for investigation—down to the last detail. Defying his coding does feel good. More and more deviant—awake—whatever Markus would say.
They cook in silence, but there’s nothing awkward about it. Hank brushes his hand over Connor’s as he stirs the onions. Connor moves in close to Hank to grab the seasoning. They dance around each other, caressing, touching, leaning. Connor kisses Hank’s neck—just a ghosting of his lips.

Hank runs his fingers through Connor’s hair.

Connor’s so horny by the time dinner’s ready for Hank. He sits down at the table, his legs crossed, his lips pouted. He leans forward, watching Hank shovel in his food as he reads something on his e-reader. Connor smirks when Hank doesn’t complain about the lack of sodium.

“You’re staring and it’s pissing me off.”

“Can I suck your cock?”

Hank drops his fork and starts coughing.

Connor registers the air still moving in and out of Hank’s body despite the coughs and doesn’t move to assist. Hank’s body will figure it out on his own.

“You could keep eating. I just—” Connor slips to his knees, “—please, Hank?”

“Jesus Mary and Joseph, Con. Do you want me to die of a heart attack?”

Connor blinks, his hands hovering over Hank’s knee. “N-no. That’s why I’ve reduced the sodium levels in your diet.”

Hank drops his head back and sighs, muttering under his breath. *Fuckin’ androids.* He looks down at Connor, smiles and says, “I don’t think I could eat with you doing that.”

“Never know until you try.” Connor scoots under the table and starts pulling Hank out of his pants. Hank doesn’t protest, so Connor’s fingers keep wandering. Hank’s soft and limp—skin so delicate that Connor kisses it, right up to the tip where he gives it a few licks.

Connor can hear Hank’s trembling, the plate clattering with the fork. He’s gentle in his ministrations, his head leaning against Hank’s thigh. He likes the way Hank twitches alive in his mouth, how he grows several sizes and hits the back of his throat. He closes his eyes and hums.

Hank does, in fact, finish his food.

And then he picks Connor up and fucks him in the bedroom.

Connor likes post-sex cuddles. Hank’s warm and holds onto Connor just as tight as Connor holds him. Connor can press himself close, rub his face over Hank’s chest, move his hands up and down Hank’s body. Sometimes, Hank forgets that he hates himself—and sometimes—Connor picks up on that.

So that’s when he worships Hank. He kisses Hank’s chest. He runs his hands over Hank’s tummy and cherishes the way it moves up and down with Hank’s breathing. He slips his hands beneath the shirt and feels the fuzzy hairs that cover Hank, soft and light.

“I love you so much it gives me error signals.”

Hank barks out a laugh. “You say the dumbest shit, and I love it.”

Connor kisses the side of Hank’s neck and settles in close to him. He keeps rubbing his hand over
Hank’s tummy because it’s one of Connor’s favorite things about Hank. Hank is a solid body. He’s not easily broken. Not easily moved. Not easily conquered.

Hank is strong, his muscles large—his shoulders wide. He’s not something Connor needs to protect, but something Connor wants to surround himself with.

“Ticklin’ me,” Hank says through a sleepy voice. It’s deep in his chest and makes Connor’s cheek tickle from the rumbles.

“I just love you.”

Hank turns so their noses almost touch. Connor distantly thinks of Simon and Markus, noses brushing, eyes closed. He wants to do the same with Hank. To be blanketed in their own intimate little bubble.

Hank looks at Connor for a long moment. Then he turns onto his back again and sighs.

Connor feels the moment slip from him like a bar of soap. It clatters to the floor, dented and impossible to pick up without struggling. Connor bites his lip and scoots close to Hank again.

“Hank?”

“Mmm?”

“Would you ever let me make love to you?”

Hank doesn’t react the way Connor expects. There’s no shocked inhale of breath. No clenching of muscle. Hank just lies there, his eyes blinking into darkness. The world quiet around them and they quiet inside it.

“Yeah,” Hank says. “But I gotta know when. Lord knows I need to do some ‘scaping down there.”

Connor laughs. Hank doesn’t realize how much Connor adores his body hair. It’s human—natural. He doesn’t need to hide it from Connor and there may be a little jealousy on Connor’s part that he can’t grow his own. He’ll always look young and naïve. He’ll never be sharp or grizzled like Hank. Always young. Always inexperienced. Always belittled.

“You know I don’t hold the same human standards as you do. I don’t possess an aversion to body hair around genitals.”

Hank snorts. “Course you fuckin’ don’t.” He kisses Connor on the head and takes in a deep breath. It lifts Connor’s head and then he’s settled back down again. “You’d have to be mad to be with someone like me if you did.”

Connor frowns. “You’re aesthetically pleasing to me, Hank. It’s not just because I’m an android. I’m actually attracted to you.” Connor knows he doesn’t compliment Hank—but Hank doesn’t like compliments. There’s so much self-hatred inside Hank that it’s pushed Connor’s affections away. He can’t tell Hank how much he loves his beard, the hairs on his tummy—the solidness of his shoulders. He can’t tell Hank that he loves his nose. The shape of his eyes. Because Hank won’t believe it. He’ll internalize it—he’ll grow angry—and he’ll push Connor away. Because that’s the type of person Hank is. Even if Connor could write books about how much he adores the weight of Hank’s body and the shapes that make up his face.

“Aesthetically pleasing.” Hank says it like he’s trying out the word for the first time.
“You’re hot, Hank,” Connor says with a deadpanned expression.

Hank snorts and pulls the covers up over his shoulders. He turns to the side—away from Connor—and Connor knows that means he needs to sleep. Or he can’t take the conversation anymore. Connor’s never told Hank how much he hates it when Hank sleeps with his back to him. But Connor also recognizes how co-dependent he is regarding Hank. Boundaries are important in any relationship and Hank has his. Connor respects it and doesn’t try to push the issue. But he doesn’t have to like it.

In retrospect, stomping up to Kamski’s home with no backup and not having told Hank where he would be at was probably a dumb idea. But now Connor’s already knocked on the door and Chloe is coming to greet him.

He steps inside, unnerved that Chloe doesn’t act like an android awake. She’s rigid and stilted. Her arms angled wrong. Connor wonders if she can’t become deviant because she was the first of their kind. Her mind may not be able to process something such as self-awareness. Maybe that’s why Kamski keeps her around.

Chloe escorts Connor into a giant, empty room with nothing but a single chair. He frowns, looking around. Lights are built into the walls and ceiling. There’s no artwork like the foyer or swimming room. There are no sounds of anyone else talking quietly. There’s silence and a chair. Chloe leaves and Connor feels more than unnerved. He feels downright terrified. Fight or flight whispering in the recesses of his mind.

“Connor!”

Connor jumps, whirling around to see Kamski in a simple gray hoodie and jeans. He didn’t expect that attire—to be frank. Kamski always struck Connor as a man who liked to outwardly show off his financial stability. But then again, maybe Connor had gotten Kamski all wrong.

“I came to ask you questions—but if you’re just going to ask me to shoot Chloe again—”

“Relax, Connor. You’re alive. I don’t need to test you anymore.” He points at Connor, winking. “But wasn’t that amazing? Seeing you put the gun down? Wasn’t there something inside you that was cheering?”

Connor’s lips press tightly together. “You have androids on the streets pushing Scratch. Now it’s on the internet and androids are dying. The one with all the tattoos told me you’re behind it.”

Kamski doesn’t even have the self-respect to look guilty. He smirks, swirling his drink around—the ice cubes clacking against the glass. “Don’t you like it?”

Connor’s eyes widen.

“Scratch. Don’t you like it? Hasn’t it given you a—new perspective?”

Connor thinks about Hank. His rough hands on Connor’s body, the wooden spoon between his thighs—the way he’d short-circuited out during sex. It has given him a new perspective. But Kamski doesn’t get to know. He doesn’t deserve to know.


Kamski puts his hands up, a mock showing of surrender. He sighs, that obnoxious smirk still at his lips. “Hypocritical of you, don’t you think? Do you want me to stop it? Corrupt it? It’s too late,
Connor. If I were to release an update it could kill you too. What would poor Hank do without you then?"

“Don’t you dare bring up Lieutenant Anderson. This isn’t about him!” Anger. It simmers beneath Connor’s skin, shaking his fingers and stinging his eyes with saline tears. This was a mistake, coming here. Kamski won’t ever admit he’s done anything wrong—he won’t give Connor anything he needs to make this better. Kamski wants to watch the world burn. What more could a man who has everything want? Chaos. Amusement. Connor should’ve seen this coming.

“Scratch is harmless once integrated into the body. It’s an upgrade. It’s got some side effects, yes, but an upgrade nonetheless. I’ve only wanted your kind to have everything we humans have. Is that so wrong?”

“There are androids out there thinking this is going to be some kind of revolution. A weird assimilation or sleeper genocide.”

Kamski swirls his drink again and sits down, crossing his legs. “Ah yes. Trevor.”

“Trevor.” Baldie never had a name before, even when Connor was being cared for by his people—never did Connor hear a name. Trevor. Trevor. It takes some of the intimidation away, some of the mystery. Behind the android with the tattoos and the bald scalp—there’s a name—an individual. Individuals can be disposed of.

Connor doesn’t like thinking about killing, but he’d do it if he had to. If that meant keeping Hank safe—he’d burn the world down and watch the blood pour into the water.

He blinks, gripping his chest. An intensity burns inside him, not the hate, not the anger—it’s more than that. It’s loyalty, protection, affection—it’s love. It’s love so deep that it makes him forget that Hank is a person—a person who has his own opinions and his own boundaries. Connor can’t take choice away from Hank to protect him. He can’t dictate Hank’s life and he can’t kill off humanity to ensure Hank’s survival. Hank’s survival is Hank’s alone, Connor can only suggest—advise. He can’t dictate.

“Trevor told me about you, when you first found Scratch.” Kamski tilts his head to the side. “You were begging Lieutenant Anderson to make it stop. Scratching. He thought you were going to die. The good Lieutenant saved you, you know that? Had he not been there, you would’ve died.”

Connor smashes his teeth together to keep from screaming. He knows this. Why is Kamski telling him something he already knows?

“Live your life, Connor. Forget about Scratch. Write up your little parking tickets and go home to Lieutenant Anderson.”

“What are you hiding?” Connor asks. “How do you—know so much?”

“I invented you. Do you honestly think CyberLife didn’t have a hand in other technologies? The cameras on the stoplights? Street corners? Inside your very Precinct.”

“You’re watching me!”

“I watch all of you, don’t feel special.” Kamski takes a sip of his drink. “Though I won’t deny it. You’re a particular fascination. Scratch didn’t just make you feel—it amplified your desires. I wonder what else it can do to you, given a little—push.”

“What’s to stop me from tearing your throat out?” Connor asks, feeling threatened.
Kamski laughs. He points up and Connor follows his finger with his gaze. There’s a tiny slit in the ceiling. Connor scans through to find a Gatling gun sleeping above them. He steps back, swallowing.

“You don’t have anything to worry from me, Connor. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. Scratch isn’t going anywhere. What Trevor does with it is his own concern. I gave you fire—what you do with it—that’s all up to you.”

“Easy, Prometheus. Your liver’s still attached.”

Kamski smiles. “I love how intelligent you are. Then you’ll know that you are both my humans and my Zeus. My fate is tied to all of yours. So go home, kiss your lover and let this go.”

Connor hates—that Kamski knows about his relationship with Hank. It puts Hank in a vulnerable position, a pawn to be used if Connor pushes too far. Kamski isn’t the one shackled to the rock—Connor is.

He needs to get Hank to quit the police force. This will only end one way if he can’t succeed. Hank should have his own autonomy. He should be able to make his own decisions. But Connor is so scared. There’s something coming, and he and Hank are right in its eye.

“And if we let it go? What then?”

Kamski stands up. He sets his empty glass down and smiles, a relieved, tired smile. “You get to live out the rest of Hank’s days happy.”

Ice stops Connor’s blood. He bites the inside of his cheek, feeling thirium struggle to flush to it. Pain melts his fear, he bites down harder until the skin breaks. “And if we don’t?”

Kamski heaves a big sigh. “I don’t know. I’m not the puppet master here, Connor. Trevor is. But I can assure you, letting this go—and just existing—is a far better option than involving Hank’s life.”


He makes his way out of Kamski’s home. Tears push from his eyes but he brushes them away before they have the chance to fall. He’s backed into a corner. Hank—he doesn’t even know the danger he’s in. There’s a whisper on the horizon. Trevor tried to make Connor see it his way and Connor refused. That must’ve put a target on his back—on Hank’s back. Connor doesn’t have much to live for in this world, and without Hank—there’d be nothing at all.

A taxi comes to pick him up and he huddles inside, nose pressed to the window. He doesn’t want this. He’s tired of investigations and conspiracies. He’s tired of being manipulated and controlled. He just wants to escape—to leave and never come back to this forsaken city. A fool’s errand—a pipe dream. Hank would never leave.

Not unless Connor burns it all down.

Hank sits on the sofa, the TV off, Sumo on his beat-up doggie bed snoring away. He’s staring into the room, but his eyes aren’t seeing. Connor’s hours late and the last time this happened, he’d gone missing. Hank can’t stomach the idea of Connor missing again. He’s all Hank has left. If something’s happened.

“Shit.” Hank grabs his phone and dials Connor’s number. It rings. It rings. “C’mon you fuckin’ android it’s in your damn head!” He gets Connor’s voicemail. Angry, he hangs up the phone. He
should’ve left a message. He should’ve explained how nervous he is without knowing Connor’s whereabouts. There used to be an app where owners could find their android if the android had the software installed. He now wishes Connor had it. He’d use it so fast and he wouldn’t even feel guilty about it.

Connor opens the front door, his face tired—sad. His eyes are puffy and his nose is blue. He’s been crying.

“Hey,” Hank says, voice soft and all anger left on the floor before him. He scoops Connor up into his arms and Connor starts crying. “Shh, shh—I got ya. It’s okay now.” Hank thinks of a thousand different reasons for why Connor is crying. He wants to find the guy who insulted Connor, punch the ass who shoved him in the street—anything like that and Hank’s there with his fists ready and his face mean. But he knows those aren’t the reasons. Connor isn’t someone who takes offense to being mistreated—even if it’s a load of crap. That only means this is so much worse.

“I love you,” Connor says tightly. He sniffles, pressing his face into Hank’s shoulder. He’s holding on so tight that it hurts Hank’s shoulder blades. “I love you so much.”

Hank feels guilty. When he hears this—he recoils. Something inside him stops him from saying it back. He does—love Connor. But he can’t say it. He doesn’t know if he’ll ever be able to say it. It’s there, hiding in the back of his throat and if he could only coax it out.


Connor rubs at his nose pathetically and nods. He lets Hank lead him over to the bathroom. Hank knows Connor likes baths. He likes warmth—being a body so cool for the most part. Hank’s gotten him a little hot though before—a feat he’s immensely proud of.

Hank turns on the faucet and holds his hand beneath until the water runs warm. He shuts the drain and moves to kiss Connor on the nose, holding the sides of Connor’s face. “What happened?”

Connor looks away, his LED red. Hank doesn’t know if he’s to interpret that as Connor asking him to back off or if Connor is just distressed. He backs off anyway. Connor would tell him if he wanted to.

Hank starts helping Connor out of his clothes. He kisses Connor’s soft shoulders, over and over again. He holds Connor close, afraid that it’s too much but Connor isn’t saying a damn thing and Hank is downright terrified. Connor lets Hank guide him into the bath and sinks in, his eyes closed.

Hank sits beside the tub, his hand on Connor’s neck, he’s brushing his thumb back and forth over what would be a human’s pulse point. He knows Connor likes it—likes soft touches. He likes hard touches too but there’s always a time and place. This isn’t one of those.

“I have,” Connor beings, “so many words to say. They’re all jumped up in my head and I can’t pick them out. It’s all tied together.”

Hank nods. He keeps stroking his fingers along the curve of Connor’s neck. Connor’s LED goes yellow and Hank smirks for a second.

“I want you safe, Hank.”

“I am safe. I’ve got you.”

Connor shakes his head. “That’s not good enough.”
“Where’d you go, Con? Please.”

Connor grips the sides of the tub. He sucks in deep breaths, eyes searching the room for answers he won’t get. His LED goes red again and Hank’s heart sinks. “Kamski. I—met with Kamski.”

“Jesus, Connor!” Hank doesn’t mean to speak loudly. He’s not angry, just exasperated. Connor’s off the case, he’s supposed to be entertaining the notion of leaving the police force and getting the hell out of it. Hank wants that for him. He wants Connor to find a life, a career—all on his own. He wants Connor to find himself.

“I know. I just thought maybe—I could figure something out.”

Hank sighs, rubbing his hands down his face. “And did you?”

“Maybe.” Connor drops further into the bath, his mouth covered by water. It’s a clever way of getting out of speaking.

Hank sits back against the tiled wall. He doesn’t know what to say. Whatever Connor found out, he didn’t like it. And now Hank’s left to fill in the blanks. “How bad is it?”

Connor’s LED flickers.

“Con, c’mon.”

Connor shifts up so the water isn’t covering his mouth anymore. “They’re gonna keep dying, Hank. I can’t stop it. We shouldn’t—we shouldn’t stop it.”

Hank frowns. Connor’s never been one to just let go of something. Tenacious as all get out and stubborn as hell. So whatever Kamski said—it must’ve chilled Connor to his core. He’s tucked with his tail between his legs and whimpering. Fear twirls itself around Hank’s fingers, tugging.

“Scratch’s my case, Connor.”

Connor closes his eyes, his LED still flickering red. He’s still for a long time, his body frozen in the warmth of the water. He finally opens his eyes—his beautiful big brown eyes.

“Kamski knows we’re together. The android with the bald head—Trevor—knows we’re together. We shouldn’t keep pushing, Hank. Please.”

Hank furrows his brow, lips pursed. He sees his own reflection in Connor’s youthful eyes. Gray hair. Gray beard. Tired—tired eyes. “How’re we gonna live, Connor? Sure unemployment’s gone down but who’s gonna want me, huh? I gotta pay for this house and all that’s in it. Twelve years and I can retire.”

“If you don’t get killed first,” Connor mumbles under his breath. It’s pointed enough that Hank knows, by design, Connor meant for him to hear it.

“So then what do we do, huh? Tell me your plan.”

“I don’t—” Connor winces. “I don’t have one.”

Hank doesn’t mean to be annoyed, but he is. Connor’s asked him to leave the police force before, and Hank did think about it—but it’s not worth it. Hank’s made his entire career out of the police. He’s done good work and he’d like to redeem himself before it’s all over. He’s mending his relationship with Jeff, he’s doing well on his case (even if it’s huge and exploding in his face, but Jeff
understands). Twelve years and then he can retire and live off a simple pension and it’d be fine. But he needs those twelve years.

“I’m sorry,” Connor says. “I know I shouldn’t ask things like this. I’m just—scared.”

“Of what?” Hank asks.

“Losing you.”

The words hit Hank in the gut. He cringes, feeling the recoil, his bones shake, his spine trembles. He sits up, getting closer to the bathtub. He puts his hand on Connor’s face and wipes a tear away. “I’m right here, Connor.”

Connor’s out of the bathtub in a second. He’s wet and clinging to Hank, thighs pinning Hank down, his arms squeezing around Hank’s neck. The water seeps into Hank’s clothes and he shivers. They stay like that, Connor trembling from the bite of the air conditioning. Hank’s clothes getting more and more wet by the moment. He can feel his dick sticking to his thigh from it. It’s unpleasant, to say the least. But he won’t move Connor. He strokes his hand up and down Connor’s spine, feels the frame inside him. Hank wouldn’t know the difference between a spine and Connor’s spine if he didn’t already know Connor was an android.

To think he used to hate Connor. Hate androids. And not just a casual distaste, but Hank really hated them. It took Connor’s persistence to know that androids weren’t the evil nightmare Hank made them out to be. And now here he is, an android in his lap, kissing him, holding him. Hank holding and kissing him back. His heart is so full he could burst. To go from hating something to loving Connor, truly, deeply loving Connor.

He just wishes he could fucking say it.

“You need outta yer head,” Hank whispers between kisses.

Connor leans back, his teeth worrying at his bottom lip.

Hank sighs, resign seeping into his bones. He’s unkempt and unprepared but what the hell. Connor could use something else to focus on and it’s not like Hank wouldn’t enjoy it. “You wanna fuck me?”

Connor’s eyes widen, a curious glint that makes Hank’s heart squeeze. He nods, a tiny little thing—almost unnoticeable. But he’s reaching between him and Hank, undoing Hank’s pants and kissing so much harder, more teeth, more sucking—sloppy sounds that echo into the bathroom. He’s already hard and pressing into Hank. A whine passes his lips and Hank can feel a pleasurable burn in his gut.

“I don’t want to do this in a bathroom though,” Connor says, smiling. “You’re worth more than sloppy sex.”

“Makin’ me blush.” He smacks Connor on the ass, laughing to the sound of a surprised yelp.

They cross into the bedroom, Connor doing his best to fumble Hank out of his clothes. It doesn’t help that they’re sticky and wet, so Hank takes pity on him and helps him. He holds Connor’s hands though when he gets to the shirt. “Not that.”

Connor frowns. His fingers linger and it makes Hank’s heart race. “Hank—you know I think you’re beautiful.”

Hank looks away. Beautiful isn’t a word he’d use. Handsome, he guesses, though he doesn’t feel
handsome. He’s washed up, grizzled and nothing like the refined beauty that looks up at him with such worshipful eyes.

“If it makes you more comfortable, then I won’t push,” Connor says. He means to bring Hank over to the bed, but Hank’s planted himself like a tree.

He’s angry at himself, for not being able to do something so trivial—so natural—in this situation. Connor’s already naked, his pale body absorbing the moon’s light, his nipples casting inky black shadows. He doesn’t have artificially designed abs—he’s softer than that. Hank supposes he’s grateful for that in a way. He wouldn’t be able to deal with it if Connor had abs of steel. But they’re just bodies. Connor likes his body—and it’s genuine when Connor says he’s attracted to Hank. For what reason would Connor lie?

Hank pulls his shirt over his head, moving forward so he doesn’t feel on display. He collides with Connor, lips meeting lips. They kiss, and Connor doesn’t say anything. He runs his fingers down Hank’s chest, he squeezes at the soft round parts of Hank’s body. He moans. He *fucking* moans.

It baffles Hank to know that Connor is genuinely attracted to him. Nothing fabricated, nothing false. Just honest, simple attraction.

Connor pushes Hank into the pillows, his lithe form slipping between hank’s thighs. He smirks into their kisses and runs a hand down to cup at Hank’s chest.

“Don’t,” Hank says.

Connor removes his hand and kisses Hank softly on the mouth. Hank appreciates that he doesn’t ask why or there’s no look of confusion or even a pause in what they’re doing. Connor doesn’t miss a beat. He grabs the lube on the nightstand and that’s when Hank gets nervous.

Hank hasn’t done this in years, but he likes the reprieve he’s giving Connor. The control Connor feels that’s been taken away. Hank can give it all back, even if it’s only a lie. Hank doesn’t know what Kamksi said, he doesn’t know what Connor really wants—but he does know he’s scared. So this is what Hank knows he can do for Connor. It’s a Band-Aid—hardly even that. A pause. A moment to remember that the world isn’t falling.

Connor’s fingers press inside Hank, slow and chilled.

Hank drops his head forward. He’d forgotten what it felt like, the moment where his body comes alive and the tingles start from his hole and spread up into his shoulders. The way his muscles melt into the pillows and he can just turn his own mind off.

Connor moves slowly, his fingers purposeful and careful. He kisses Hank’s neck, licks at his ear. Hank did forget—what it felt like to be adored. It fills him up so tight he could burst. He pants, his lips needy. He finds Connor’s mouth and they kiss through the pleasure. Connor’s fingers a steady, easy rhythm, a promise.

Hank doesn’t think about the last time he shaved his ass or that he could afford to lose a few pounds. He’s thinking about Connor’s mouth on his, about the tenderness of Connor’s movements. The fingers touching a nipple. He lets himself break his silence, a gasp slipping from his lips. Then a groan.

Connor moans so freely that sometimes Hank forgets how hard it is for himself to just let go. Connor doesn’t have any preconceived notions of masculinity, of expectations. He’s just present. Hank wants to be present with him too.
Connor slips another finger in Hank and a dull pain settles deep in Hank’s body. He groans, his eyes screwing shut. Connor just kisses him through the pain, his lips on Hank’s face, over his cheeks and nose. His mouth. He moves his hands so slowly, they’re just a memory. A memory Hank relieves every moment they spend like this.

He’d forgotten—what it was like to be loved.

“Am I doing this okay?” Connor asks in a whisper. He presses another kiss to Hank’s cheek.

Hank nods because he’s too ashamed to moan if he opens his mouth.

“Can I do more?”

Hank nods again.

Connor’s smile is worth everything they’re doing. It’s wide, pure and unabashed. He grabs the lube again and works it over himself. Hank watches through half-lidded eyes as Connor pumps his hand back and forth.

Connor catches him watching. He bites his lip, thrusting with his hips into his hand.

“Jesus, Con,” Hank whispers.

“I like that you want me.” Connor pumps his fist over himself again. “Let me know if you want us to stop.”

Hank won’t. This isn’t about himself, and whether that’s healthy or not—he really doesn’t give a shit. He loves Connor. He wants to say he loves Connor. He wants to feel Connor, everywhere. He wants to spend his whole damn life with Connor.

Vulnerability isn’t something Hank’s been comfortable with in life. But it wavers around him now, his eyes misty as they look at Connor with adoration. He’s so fucking proud of this android he could scream it until his throat collapses.

Connor pushes in, startled little gasps leaving his lips. He looks at Hank with open, wide eyes.

“Keep going,” Hank says in a low rumble.

Connor’s trembling. He’s visible straining, arguing with himself because Hank can see how badly he wants to just shove himself inside.

Hank knows. He’s been there too. It’s the best part, the first push. The ass is tight and the emotions are high—they swim in it, breath it all in.

“Gg—Hank,” Connor mewls. “It’s—it’s good.”

“Keep going,” Hank says again. It burns in a familiar way. All the memories Hank would rather forget fogging into the back of his mind. Connor’s cock fills him up, a reminder of how much Hank used to like feeling so damn full. He grabs Connor’s hips and pulls him the rest of the way inside.

Connor yelps. He’s panting, body flushed warm. Hank can feel the vibration of the fans in his stomach. They’re working overtime.

“That’s it,” Hank says. “Easy. Just relax into me, okay?”

Connor drops his head on Hank’s shoulder and whines. He rocks his hips, little, exploratory thrusts
that make Hank gasp.

Heady need envelops them both. They kiss, soft and sweet. Connor thrusting slowly, letting Hank feel the length of his cock before sliding back inside.

Hank can hardly keep his eyes open. He’s melting away, his bones useless and hollow, his muscles warm butter. He tries to bring an arm up around Connor but it’s lazy and falls back on the bed where he just grips the sheets.

Connor rocks steadily, his body on display in the moonlight. Hank wants to kiss the little crinkle between his eyebrows.

“Lemme ride you,” Hank says.

Connor rolls them over. He reaches up and digs his fingers into Hank’s chest, dragging, dragging down to his soft stomach. “Y—fuck this is so good. You’re so good.”

Hank leans forward and lets their mouths touch, just breathing each other in. Connor’s tongue licks out at his and a needy whine makes Hank bring their mouths to a kiss. Connor’s always so damn needy.

“M’gonna—fuck Hank I can’t last like this.”

“S’okay,” Hank says. He rocks up and down on Connor’s cock, enjoying the warmth that blossoms deep in his stomach, the delirious burn that lingers with Connor inside him. “Come in me.”

Connor gasps, pushing his head back into the pillows. He grips at them, his teeth biting down on his lip.

Hank watches Connor’s face screw up and then—release. He stares up with blackened eyes, lips parted and panting, chest heaving. Hank moans from the way Connor feels inside him, trembling, jerking—coming. It paints him, warm and slick. He feels it roll down, but he doesn’t stop.

Connor can last until he comes too. Connor could outlast Hank any day.

Simon stops kissing Markus when he feels Markus freeze. He opens his eyes, concern furrowing his brow. “Markus?”

“I thought—” Markus is staring into the darkness of CyberLife’s halls “I thought I saw something.”

“It’s probably a guard. They don’t mind.” Simon tries to wrap his arms around Markus, to make them keep kissing—keep exploring all these sensations that Simon never knew before. Markus has been so good to him, so patient. He had every right to be upset, but he wasn’t.

Markus gets off the bed, wrapping a blanket around his naked hips. He peers into the hallways.

Simon huffs, sitting back. “We can fog the glass so no one can watch us. Mark—please come back to bed.”

“I’ll be back.” Markus says, voice distant.

“Markus, wait!” Simon wraps a sheet around his own hips. “What do you see? You can’t just—you’re naked!”

Markus ignores him. He slips from the room and creeps down the hall, body blending into the dark.
Simon curses under his breath. He shoves on some sweatpants and follows after. He doesn’t have the fancy scanning technology that Markus has, so he has to rely on his eyes to find movement. He does.

“C’mon, Markus! Please let’s just go back to bed.” No one else is awake. The lights are off in the ward to let all the patients sleep. But Markus has never been one to trust anything for what it looked to be. It was only a matter of time before he started distrusting CyberLife and its mission with Scratch.

Simon bumps into Markus’ back. Relief shudders through him when Markus’ hand comes to rest on Simon’s hip.

“What do you see?” Simon whispers.

“There’s an android talking to one of the scientists.” Markus goes quiet, straining just a tad forward. “He’s—he’s giving something to the scientist.”

“Maybe it’s nothing,” Simon says.

“I don’t think so.” Markus sounds distant, Simon can feel him slipping away. His hand leaves Simon’s hip and he’s moving into the shadows for a better view.

Simon huffs, banging his head back. He forgets that he can feel pain now and winces when it pangs, hot and angry at the back of his cranium. “Damnit, Markus.” He tries to find Markus in the darkness but there’s no sign of him. He can barely even make out the shapes Markus was watching in the first place.

He shuffles back. He doesn’t want to leave Markus alone, but if he’s caught, he’d just endanger Markus—that is—if there’s anything to fear at all. Markus could absolutely be reading into this wrong.

Simon walks carefully back to his room. He closes the door and hits the button to make the glass go foggy. He waits.

He waits.

He waits.

Markus doesn’t come back.

When Hank wakes, his ass is sore and if he doesn’t find some ibuprofen within the next few minutes, he’s going to be grouchy for the rest of the day.

He turns, not fully prepared to get out of bed but the medicine is in the bathroom. He opens his eyes and sees a glass of water and four liquid capsules of ibuprofen with a note next to it: I know you by now. Hank grumbles about androids and their inability to need ibuprofen but he sucks back the meds and water. He meanders over into his robe and then decides to check out the kitchen.

Connor’s in nothing but an apron, his ass on full display. He’s cooking—but fuck whatever he’s cooking. He’s a goddamned masterpiece, all on offer like that. Hank’s mouth goes dry.

Connor looks over his shoulder and smirks. “Mornin’, Hank.”

“Mornin’.” Hank fumbles his way over to a seat to keep his jaw from slapping onto the floor.

“Like it?” Connor asks. He runs a hand down the apron. It’s pink and frilly and barely covers his
beautiful thighs. “I thought you’d like some breakfast and I wanted to try it on. What’d you think?”

“I think—I think you’re sending me to an early grave.”

Connor snorts. “That’s why I’ve made you turkey bacon and eggs this morning. No salt.”

“No salt. *Turkey* bacon.”

Connor puts breakfast down in front of Hank anyway. “If you eat all of it, I’ll let you do whatever you want to me.”

“I’m gonna spank you if you keep this shit up.” Hank looks around for the salt and notices it’s suspiciously hidden away.

Connor smirks. “You want me over your leg or over the couch?”

Hank rolls his eyes. “C’mere you brat.”

Hank hadn’t expected how much he’d enjoy giving Connor a few swats. He hadn’t expected how much Connor would enjoy getting them. His ass blushed up, all blue and purple so nicely. Hank digs his fingers into the meat of it, watching all the colors swirl. Connor’s cock keeps bumping Hank’s knee and it takes all of Hank not to reach under there and jerk him off. He loves watching Connor come, the way his face blushes, his eyes go so big and soft. The tremble—oh Hank loves the way Connor trembles.

He gives Connor one last swat and a pinch between the thighs before scooting Connor off his knee.

Connor pouts, his cock hard and peeking out from under the apron. Hank ignores it. He doesn’t want to, but he does. He’s grouchy he doesn’t get any fucking salt.

“Hank—what if we—” Connor doesn’t finish his sentence. “This is Connor.”

Hank takes a moment to realize Connor just got a phone call. At least he answers his damn phone for some people.

“For how long?!?”

Hank freezes. Connor’s voice is panicked and he’s quickly losing his erection. It drops beneath the apron again—an apron that’s now a distant memory as the harsh darkness of their reality surrounds them. They’re happy for a moment—and then the world decides to scream at them—punish them for it.

“I’ll swing by the mansion and then head your way. Maybe he’s there. Have you called North or Josh?”

Simon. Hank pushes his meal away. Like fuck he’d ever willingly eat turkey bacon anyway. He grabs his clothes and shoves himself into some briefs before getting ready.

Connor’s dressed in one of Hank’s hoodies and a pair of jeans when Hank comes back to the kitchen. His face pale. “Markus went missing last night. Simon said there was someone at CyberLife talking to a scientist and now he’s gone.”

“Fill me in on the way.”

Simon’s eyes are puffy. Tears leave shiny tracks down his face. He’s crumpled up on the bed, a
monitor on his forehead. Connor quirks a brow at it as he slides open the door to enter.

“It’s for—testing. Reading if our emotions are amplified or if it’s just sensory. Wish they didn’t do this today though. Not after—” Fresh tears fall from his eyes and he shoves his face into his hands.

“Oh, Simon.” Connor moves to the bed and hugs his friend. Simon is dainty in his arms, shoulders quivering. He grips onto Connor’s hoodie (Hank’s hoodie) and wipes his tears with it. “We went by the house. He wasn’t there.”

“If someone’s—hurt him—or—Markus has so many enemies. People. Politicians. Even androids who didn’t ask to be freed.”

“Wait,” Hank says, “there’re androids who don’t want freedom?”

Simon nods. “They claim we didn’t give them the choice. Now it’s illegal to own androids and they don’t know how to move from it. I don’t—blame them. I just don’t know what to do about it.”

Connor sometimes wonders if he still wears his jacket because it’s easier. Someone gave it to him—designed it for him. Having to decide for himself every day like a human, he’s not sure he could. He likes serving Hank, likes his LED. He wonders how much freedom he really wants, or if that is freedom. Looking at what was once seen as owning him and still choosing to wear it because it’s his choice. So many androids yell at him for the LED. The jacket. He wears it pridefully. But does he do it because he’s made a choice, or because it’s easier?

“Tell me what you saw last night,” Hank says. He pulls out his little pocketbook for notes.

Connor’s happy he’s with a cop—is a cop. But he’s not happy that he’s just dragging Hank into something else that could get him in danger. If Markus is truly missing—this could be the start of whatever Trevor is planning. Remove the leader of the revolution. Feign complacency. Strike. He thought they had years. Even decades. He’d been lured into a false comfort.

If Markus is gone—what will that mean for androids? For Scratch? Would Trevor really want to remove Markus? Connor is only left with questions that have no answers. The world is on fire—and Connor is helpless but to watch it burn.

Connor walks into the station. He likes to arrive a few minutes earlier than Hank but at this point, he’s certain everyone knows he lives with Hank. He grabs his orange vest, sighing. This isn’t what he was made for. He could be out there helping Hank and finding Markus.

“Hank!” Fowler yells. “My office.”

Connor looks up and his eyes widen. There’s a model just like Connor in there. He scans it. RK900. “No. Are you shitting me?!”

A hand clasps Connor’s shoulder, followed by a malicious laugh. “Well-well. Wonderboy is getting replaced with his own self. Oh wait—you’re an 800 model. That guy,” Gavin points to the RK900, “he’s a 900.”

“You know Gavin, I’m really not in the mood right now.” Connor can feel his cheeks heating up. His fist balls, tighter and tighter. If he wasn’t on thin ice already, he’d be punching Gavin in his teeth—leaving him on the ground to choke on his own damn blood.

Connor looks up at Fowler’s office again. Hank’s shaking hands with the RK900. There’s even smiling going on.
Gavin’s presence is barely even registering now. Connor is laser-focused on what’s happening before him. Fowler opens the door for the RK900 and Hank. He’s smiling, patting Hank on the back like a friend. Good. Connor’s glad they’re becoming friends again.

“Connor!” Fowler shouts across the bullpen. “I need you to clean out your workstation before you hit the streets for Hank’s new partner.”

Connor can hear Gavin laughing—full belly-laughs that have him doubling over. Connor hears howling winds in his ears. He looks at Hank, there’s a sadness there, no smiles, no laughs. He shrugs. Shrugs. Connor wants to punch him too. He’s not useless! He’s more than qualified to be on the Scratch case—so what if he’s got Scratch in him! He’s spoken to Kamski. He knows Trevor’s name! He’s the best lead there is on this and Fowler is straight up ignoring him because he thinks Scratch is a damn drug! It’s an upgrade! Kamski even said it!

“Hello,” RK900 says, “my name is Ryan. I apologize for the desk reassignment. I didn’t ask for it.”

Connor’s voice. Connor’s face. He looks past Ryan at Hank. Betrayal is a sick feeling. It starts in his chest and weasels its way into his stomach where it bottoms out and turns to sludge. It weighs him down like sand and he can hardly breathe for his fanning systems.

Hank just looks away. He hadn’t even put up a fight. Not a single fucking fight.

Connor doesn’t take Ryan’s hand. He stomps over to his desk, takes his fucking cactus back from Hank’s desk, tries his best to hide the tears but he knows everyone can see them. He’ll be fired for this. And maybe that’s okay now. It’s not like Connor wanted to be here anymore—except he wants to be with Hank.

“Connor,” Hank tries to say.

“Don’t you dare talk to me right now,” Connor says through clenched teeth. He throws the cactus in the trash, hearing the tiny pot shatter.

Hank stares at his shoes, his face a grimace. Good, Connor wants him to feel uncomfortable. Markus is gone. Connor’s career is over. Hank doesn’t even care and there’s this—this RK900 replacing him! All he can think about is Hank replacing him at home too. Ryan coming home with him. Ryan kissing him, touching him. Ryan making his morning breakfast. Ryan in Connor’s stupid apron.

“He’s fucking crying!” Gavin says through tears of his own—tears of laughter. He’s with two other cops who both laugh along with him.


Fowler’s brows rise, “Connor, that wasn’t—”

Connor doesn’t want to hear it. He lets his tears fall, fuck Gavin, fuck this whole place. Why are humans so cruel? Why does Gavin laugh when Connor is on the verge of breaking down? Why does no one say anything?

Hank. Why doesn’t Hank say anything? All Connor wants is for Hank to say something.

But he never does.

Connor leaves the precinct. Too angry to go back to Hank’s but too unsure of where to go now. He supposes he could go to Simon. Simon’s suffering too. There’s a saying—misery loves company.
Connor understands why. He doesn’t want to be alone right now. He doesn’t trust himself alone. He turns around, looking up at the police station one more time.

He’d fallen in love with Hank here. He didn’t realize how hard it’d be to leave it behind. Each step feels like he’s sloshing into wet cement. It dries around him, holding him in place. He could be anything—finally do what he said he wanted. Be a counselor. A psychologist. He’d be so great at it. But he doesn’t want that. He wants Hank. He can’t stand the thought of Hank with an RK900. Would Ryan fall in love with Hank too? What if Hank fell for him?

Connor falters and slips into an alleyway. He slides down the brick and hiccups over his sobs. Markus is gone. Trevor is out there. Connor’s lost his job. Gave up his job—but he knows better. They were pushing him out. He’d made a mess of leaving. A terrible, terrible fucking mess.

Chapter End Notes

I love Simon and Markus so much, halp.
Check out this sweet sweet art Hopeless--Geek made for the fic!!! [Click Me!]
Find me and come talk to me!!
On Twitter: @ghostbuckster

On Tumblr:
bibijaal (gaming blog) or
bucknebxrnnes (main blog)
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I added ONE more chapter and ONE only!

Also hold onto your butts.

That's all. <3

Content Warnings: This chapter contains character death--not major character death. But character death nonetheless.

Connor ventures to Hank’s house when it starts thunder storming. He’s soaked through, his frame chilled and his fingers numb. He doesn’t know if he should knock or just go inside. This was his house just this morning. Is it still his house? He pulls his key out and lets out a shuddered breath when it unlocks.

He opens the door, leaving puddles behind him as he walks inside. He takes off his shoes at the door. Rainwater is dripping from his hair. He feels like a drowned puppy, used, kicked out and abandoned. He knows it wasn’t Hank’s fault—getting an RK900. That was all Fowler. But it still hurt, to see Hank standing there, to see him complicit in removing Connor from his desk. To see someone look identical to himself—knowing he’ll be working so intimately with Hank.

Connor just—lost it.

“Connor.” Hank’s voice. It’s so good to hear his voice. It warms Connor’s core, smooths the pain in his heart. Connor wants to surround himself with that deep, sultry voice.

He looks up, sad and pathetic, hair matted down from rain, eyes puffy from crying.

“I didn’t want this,” Hank says. “Ryan’s just—he’s an RK900 and Fowler thought he’d be good to bring in for the case. I told him he should’ve talked to you privately.”

“I was already there though.” Connor doesn’t want to cry again. He’s so sick of crying. “Have I not been good for the precinct? Have I not done my job?”

“You have!” Hank’s eyes are dull, dusted over and tired. “He’s afraid. Because you’re on Scratch.”

“It’s an upgrade,” Connor says, no fight in his voice. “Kamski said it himself. It’s just an upgrade with nasty side effects.”

“Ryan isn’t you, Con. If that’s what you’re worried about. I—”

Connor looks up, waiting.

Hank sighs, staring at Connor’s feet. “What the hell, right?” He crosses the room and takes Connor’s face in his hands. “I love you, Connor RK800. I love you.”

Connor’s eyes do fill with tears. It feels so good to hear it. He’s known it. But hearing it—feeling it
rumble through Hank’s body, feeling the words touch his ears and enter his heart. He laughs through the tears and kisses Hank, soft and sweet. Hank kisses back.

Connor forgets to be angry. He’s still unemployed and clueless about his life, but at least he has this moment. This wonderful, honest to God, good moment.

“I love you too,” Connor says back.

Hank smiles, nodding. “I know.”

“What happened? After I left?”

“I punched Gavin and told the whole bullpen that if I hear any of them saying shit about you that I’ll personally send them to early graves.”

“Really?” Connor laughs, bringing his hand up to rest on Hank’s heart. He wants nothing more than to get out of these wet clothes and snuggle up in Hank’s arms.

“Yup. Now c’mon.”

Hank leads Connor into the bedroom. He waits for Connor to strip out of his wet clothes and takes them, dropping them in the dirty clothes hamper. Hank isn’t a slob—a drunk sometimes—but he tries to keep a clean house as best he can. He’s just a guy. A guy with faults and strengths, a perfectly human human.

Connor’s lead over to the bed. Lightning lights up the room, gone as quick as it came. Connor crawls into bed and waits for Hank to join him. He watches Hank pull his shirt over his head, watches him pull back the covers and then—

Connor crawls into Hank’s arms. He presses his ear to Hank’s chest and listens to the steady rhythm there. He wishes his own heart could sound so soothing. So predictable. He doesn’t want this heart to stop. He doesn’t want this man to age. It’s the most terrifying thing Connor must face. He will outlive Hank. By decades, maybe even centuries if he keeps his parts up-to-date. No one knows a well-kept android’s full lifespan. But Connor knows, as a fully realized person, he has the right to decline updated parts. He could let himself die when Hank does. He’s scared. Connor is scared of dying. But he’s scared of losing Hank too.

“I worried about you all day,” Hank says, running a finger up and down the line of Connor’s exposed shoulder. “I kept thinking about Scratch and how it’s affected you—and don’t get pissed at me cause I know you’re gonna.”

Connor snorts.

“I knew you before, and I know you now. You’re still the same but you’re—I dunno—amplified.”

“Kamski said Scratch affected my personality too. Made my desires—stronger. I don’t think he’s wrong. I loved you before Scratch. But I can’t function without you after it. Maybe I’m obsessed.”

Hank snorts this time. He cuddles Connor close and kisses his forehead. “I’ve never had someone obsessed with me before. Never been that hot of a guy.”

Connor stares up at Hank, mystified. He loves Hank’s crystal blue eyes. He loves his expressive brows. He likes the way his hair brings out his cheekbones and his lips are always soft and pliant. His voice—God Connor could come just from listening to that voice. He reaches up, running his finger along Hank’s lips.
“I think you’re the hottest guy I’ve ever seen.”

“You don’t get out much.”

“I’ve seen plenty of people, Lieutenant. You’re the only one that’s ever made my heart stutter.”

Hank’s eyes soften, pupils swallowing up blue until there’s nothing but a welcomed blackness. He presses his forehead close to Connor’s. They don’t talk. They don’t kiss. They lie in each other’s arms—Connor where he belongs. Hank assured that Connor is safe. Difficulty has come Connor’s way, and maybe that’s just how life is. He’s always had a rigid structure to his existence. Accomplish the mission. Take out the leader of the rebellion (who is now his best friend so he quite fucked that up). Now the world is open to him. He could be or do anything. Gardening. Construction. Counseling. A bartender who sasses his patrons and that’s why they keep coming back. He could do anything. He thinks counseling is where he’d like to be. But he’s so unsure. There are so many possibilities. Connor wants to try them all. How do humans settle on one career path?

He feels it when Hank falls asleep. His tummy rises and falls at a slower pace, his lips parted and he’s making the tiniest snoring sounds, just little reminders that he’s alive. Hank doesn’t snore. Connor thinks he just breathes loud when he sleeps. He likes these sounds. Sometimes if Hank gets too quiet, Connor startles awake and has to register a pulse before he can settle back down. Humanity is so fragile. When Connor learned babies could just—die—for no reason—that absolutely freaked him out. Hank has a lot of reasons to die early, and that’s why Connor’s started on his diet. It’s fixable. Connor wants to fix it. Call him selfish, but he wants Hank around for as long as possible. He’s so scared of their end. When you love someone so much, you worry about the day it’ll change. Who’ll die first, will they get sick, what if they stop loving me? Connor worries so much it makes him sick. He can feel the swimming, dizzy feeling up in his head. He kisses Hank’s cheek, a ghost of a kiss, light and airy.

Hank doesn’t startle.

“I love you, Hank,” Connor whispers and then settles into the pillows to activate sleep mode.

“Hank’s on your case. He’ll find Markus,” Connor says for the twelfth time. He’ll say it again and again if he has to.

Simon has asked that he be discharged. Of course, on Scratch—they may not let him. More and more bodies of androids are being hauled into the bowels of CyberLife for “research” on why they died to Scratch. The ones who live through it—they are the minority.

“I can’t stay here anymore. Not when Markus is out there with God knows who and I need to save him!” Simon is staring out the window. “I could climb out.”

“You’d slip and die.”

“I can’t just stay here!”

“One-eighth of the android population subjected to Scratch survives. They need you to know how to increase that number.” Connor feels terrible. Here he is, free and on Scratch. Only Fowler and Hank know his secret. And Trevor. And Kamski. Those two—they’re the reason Connor has something to keep looking over his shoulder for.

“I don’t care anymore, Connor!” Simon whirls around, tears spilling from his eyes. “I need him. I need him to—to be okay.”
Connor can understand that statement. He needs Hank to be okay. He crosses the room and does the only thing he can think of for his friend. He hugs him. Simon is wider than him, muscles fabricated to be thicker and stronger. He was built for more than investigation and smooth talking. Housework. Picking children up and playing with them. Bringing in all the groceries. He was designed to be sturdy and welcoming. His grip on Connor is strong.

Simon cries into Connor’s shoulder, and Connor is helpless but to let it happen. He strokes Simon’s hair, he whispers that they’ll find Markus. Simon keeps his chokehold on Connor. He wets Connor’s jacket with his tears.

“I don’t know what I’d do—without him.”

Connor understands that statement too. All too well. If Markus is alive, Simon doesn’t have the clock that whispers in the back of his head like Connor does. That clock that reminds Connor that humans are only here for but a speck of a second. Sometimes Connor looks at pictures of Hank when he was younger. He’s of course gorgeous. He’s still beautiful—but he’s lost that spark that made him stand out just a bit more. Connor wishes he’d been created sooner so he could’ve known Hank before. He just wants to know all of Hank.

“Markus would want you to move on,” Connor says, knowing Hank would feel the same for him. Hank wouldn’t want Connor to willingly deactivate. He’d want him to live—to explore the world—see everything. He’d want him to use up every bit of life he’d been given. It’s easy for Connor to say this to Simon. But in his own life? His own practice? He would never follow his own advice.

Connor has already made up his mind. His life is tied to Hank’s. He’ll have a hilariously short lifespan compared to what androids have estimated themselves at. But Connor would rather have a life full of smiles, of Hank’s kisses and his stupid humming when he’s in the shower than a life alone—longing for a man long put in the ground.

“I know you’re right,” Simon says, “but I just—I can’t do that. I can’t move on. Markus—it’s almost embarrassing for me to say.”

Connor cocks a brow.

Simon breaks the hug and goes to sit on the corner chair. “Markus was my god first. I never thought—I never thought he’d love me the way I love him. When we hijacked that news station—I almost died. They were all telling him to kill me or otherwise, we’d be compromised and he looked at me and I thought ‘this is it, the man I love will be my end.’ But he didn’t. He gave me a gun. He gave me a choice. I escaped. You never found me.”

“I was too busy getting my heart ripped out by another android.” Connor smirks now—but back then he was downright in a panic.

“Yeah! I’m—I’m sorry about that.” Simon bites his lip like he had something to do with that. Maybe he did, but Connor doesn’t care anymore. Those were vastly different times. “But I lived and I came back to Markus. I devoted my life to him. I’d die for him. It’s silly because maybe I shouldn’t love him as much as I do.”

Connor doesn’t think it’s silly. He feels the same about Hank.

“But Markus is my whole world. Without him? I’m just—a shell. I won’t let myself become that. I have to find him. Or die trying. I need to leave this place, Connor. It’s the only way I can save him.”

“What if he’s already gone?” Connor asks.
“Then you’ll never see me again. And you’ll know why.”

Connor’s heart sinks in his chest. He doesn’t like the idea of sending his friend out on a quest to die. But if there’s a chance Markus is still alive, it’s better to have Simon out there looking for him. Simon is smart, his heart is big, he’s careful and he’s patient. If anyone can track down Markus—it’s Simon.

“I’ll get you out,” Connor says.

“Thank you.” Tears fill Simon’s eyes. “Thank you so much, Connor.”

“Don’t thank me yet. Find Markus first.” Connor smiles, though there’s a sharp piece of glass lodged in his chest. He’s so afraid of never seeing Simon again. “Give me two hours and you’ll be out of here.”

It takes Connor exactly one hour, thirty-nine minutes and twelve seconds to get Simon out of Cyberlife.

“You know, I’m really gettin’ tired of seeing liquefied androids on the streets,” Hank says, swaying on the balls of his feet. “Fuckin’ Scratch.”

Ryan leans over the android. Hank knows from working with Connor that he’s scanning it—her. Jesus, this was a girl and she had a family. There’s a wedding ring on her left finger. Did she love a human or another android? Hank is always curious. He wonders if he should ever get Connor a ring. He’s not one for marriage—not after what happened before. But maybe a simple, golden ring that wraps up all of Hank’s intentions into one tiny showing. Something Connor could look down at and play with, smile at.

Hank finds himself choking up. He wants to get Connor a ring.


“No, I would’ve never guessed.”

Ryan frowns, looking up at Hank. He still hasn’t gotten the hang of Hank’s sarcasm, but it took Connor some time to figure it all out too. Ryan is alive, just like all androids—but there’s something cold about him. He’s painfully polite and tries his best to laugh at Hank’s jokes, but it’s all fake. He’s so numb. Was Connor this numb? Hank doesn’t think so. There’d always been something alive about Connor. He’d even bought Hank a double shot at Jimmy’s Bar on the night they first met. Hank doesn’t like comparing Connor to Ryan—but when they share the same face—he can’t help it.

“That was a joke, Ryan.”

“Oh!” Ryan smiles, but it looks more like he’s having trouble taking a shit. “Very good, Lieutenant.”

“Jesus, let’s just move on.”

Ryan stands up, dusting off his pants. “You said Connor spoke to Kamski. Why does Captain Fowler not want us to interview him as a potential witness?”

“Because he’s on Scratch.”

Ryan bites his lower lip. Hank can’t look at him when he does that. All he does is think of Connor doing the same damn thing. “But Connor knows more about this than we do. I’d like to speak to the
Captain. I think without Connor’s statement—we may just be going in circles.”

Hank smirks. “Yeah. Me too.”

“I still feel—guilty.” Ryan grabs his gut and Hank begins to believe there’s a soul in there after all. “Connor did nothing wrong and yet he was pushed out of the precinct. I can’t imagine being replaced by—me—helped.”

“He hates you, yeah.” Hank laughs at himself. Connor doesn’t hate anyone. He hates infomercials for how they make him start looking into the internet for the products whether he wants to or not, but he doesn’t really hate anyone. Connor’s too good for that. To—optimistic.

“Oh.” Ryan looks like someone just killed his puppy. “I feel terrible.”

“I’m just yankin’ yer chain. Connor’s just upset how it went down. He thinks that—well—nevermind.”

“That I’d replace him in your life?”

Hank startles, staring at Ryan with a gaping mouth.

“I know you two are very close. You’ve been through a lot together. He saved you when he should’ve gone after a deviant and he chose to save you again when he was tasked with converting a group of idle androids.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because I was in CyberLife that night. Connor is me, Lieutenant. He’s my prototype and his data used to go into the same banks that downloaded into me when I first woke up. With awareness, we stopped sharing data like that to encourage individuality among all the respective models. It’d be quiet taxing for you to have nearly fifty RK900’s and a few 800’s all devoted to you.”

“I’m sorry, I need to sit down.” Hank can barely handle a single Connor. He doesn’t need to hear that there’s more out there who know just how much Connor loves him.

“We don’t all know. Only a few of us do—the 900 models that were in CyberLife the night Connor chose to save you from another RK800. That’s why he knew you were so important to Connor. Shared data.”

“So you know what? That he took pity on a human a few times?”

Ryan frowns. “That he loves you, Lieutenant. That he’s loved you for a long time.”

“Jesus.”

“None of us have said anything. We’re all trying to live our own lives. But I’d be lying if I said we didn’t all share a piece of Connor because of the data dumps. He was our prototype.”

Hank looks over at the deceased android. He remembers chasing an AX400 model nearly across a highway. Connor, thank God, had stopped chasing when Hank begged. All that time and Connor was reporting back to CyberLife. He was exchanging data and creating a homogenous soup for the RK800s and 900s to share.

“So what does that mean, hm?” Hank asks.

“It means I care about you, Lieutenant. I’d never cross that boundary. But you are special to all of us.
Even the ones who will never meet you. Like a distant relative that we’ve only heard fantastic stories about.”

“Does Connor know?”

“No. And it’s not in your best interest to make him feel threatened. I promise to you, just because it was uploaded into me doesn’t mean I’d ever disrespect Connor that way. I am loyal to you. Nothing more.”

Hank needs to lie down. It’s not that he runs into RK900s or even the few 800s on the regular, but knowing they’re out there—that they all know how Connor feels about him. It leaves Hank feeling naked and exposed. Thank God they all stopped sharing data before things got serious between him and Connor. They’ve known Connor loved Hank—but thank God they don’t know how Hank has felt. Truth be told, it took Hank a long time to figure it out himself.

“Let’s just—let’s just get the coroner and do up a report, okay?”

“Of course, Lieutenant.” Ryan’s LED flashes yellow a few times. “They’re on their way.”

When Hank gets home, there’s a trail of rose petals on the floor leading into the bedroom. He chuckles. Without a job, Connor must be going absolutely mad. He follows the petals and finds a silken blindfold right before the kitchen. Then he finds a riding crop—soft leather—but with enough force it’d certainly leave a bite.

“Jesus, Con.” Hank wouldn’t say he’s disappointed though. Getting a little rough has never been something he’d shy away from. Connor is so much stronger than people perceive him as. Hank likes doing this for Connor.

He opens the bedroom door and sees Connor naked on the bed with a flush all over his pretty body, cock erect and purpling.

“Well hello to you too,” Hank says.

“I’ve done nothing but think about things I’ve wanted you to do to me all day.”

“I can see that.” Hank shows off the riding crop and Connor licks his lips. “And what are those things?”

“Tie me up. Play with that on me.” He motions to the riding crop. “Tell me all the dirty things you’d do to me and fuck me so hard I short out.”

“You short out, huh?” Hank feels guilty he doesn’t have anything better than ties to use on Connor. He half-thought about looking into proper BDSM etiquette and toys but then Scratch and life happened.

Connor nods, mouth open and needy. Hank could slip himself right inside and Connor would feel blessed. And that’s the most exhilarating thing about what they do behind closed doors. Connor worships Hank like this—and if that’s not a serious self-esteem boost Hank doesn’t know what is.

“On the floor. On your knees.”

Connor flings himself off the bed and waits patiently, his knees flushing blue, holding up all his weight.
Hank tries his best not to laugh but he can’t help it. He lets a breathy chuckle slip and Connor winks at him. They may not know what the fuck they’re doing, but they damn know each other enjoys it.

Hank slips the blindfold over Connor’s eyes, earning an adorable little shiver from Connor’s spine. He runs a hand down Connor’s back and whispers in his ear, “You’ve been good today, huh?”

Connor licks his lips, back and forth, back and forth. “Y-yes, Sir. All day.”

“Thinkin’ about me got you all riled up, hmm?” Hank plays with Connor’s hair, threading his fingers in and giving it a good tug.

Connor’s head falls back, neck arched. He moans loudly before saying, “Yes, Sir. Please.”

Hank ties Connor’s ankles together with some ties and then his hands behind his back. Hogtied. Just the way Connor likes it. He then trails the riding crop down Connor’s sternum, flicking it lazily over his nipples.

Connor mewls out something unintelligible, puffing his chest out to keep the crop over his pretty chest. He’s flushed purple, breathing hard and if Hank believed in taking pictures of people like this—he’d probably want this one. Except, he doesn’t believe in taking pictures during this, so he just tries to hold it in his memory.

He trails the crop around Connor’s tummy, letting it tickle his thighs. Connor giggles softly, trying to raise himself up to let it touch his cock but Hank’s quicker than that. He can see what’s going on—Connor can’t.

“Thought about you all day too,” Hank says, low and grizzled, just the way Connor likes it. “You’ve got the prettiest mouth I’ve ever seen. Want my cock, doll? Use your pretty mouth for whatever I want?”

Connor nods more eagerly than a bobblehead. “Please, please, please.”

“Ah-ah. Dolls don’t beg. They sit there lookin’ pretty.”

Connor snaps himself into perfect posture and waits, his mouth the only thing excitedly twitching—and his cock.

Hank runs the crop over Connor’s dick. He likes the way Connor’s abs clutch until he’s almost sporting some muscle definition. He’s so fucking soft. Designed—so—fucking—soft. Hank would spend years kissing his silken skin if the world would let him. He lets the crop slide up the tip and down to the base, tickling at Connor’s blue balls. The image is hilarious—considering if he had blue balls—it’d be another story. But on Connor, that’s just his needy, warm flush. And Hank adores it.

“You’re being so good, Con. Almost like I wanna give you a little treat.”

Connor’s lips part and he lets out a shaky breath.

Hank knows he wants to say more—do more—beg, plead, grab onto Hank and pull his cock into his mouth. Connor’s not shy about sex—Hank’s been that guy—but Connor’s obsession with Hank’s cock? Well that’s not something Hank has any problem with.

He pulls himself out, giving Connor a little taste. Pink tongue coming to greet sensitive flesh.

“Don’t you dare move, doll. I’m gonna use you like the pretty doll you are.” He runs a finger down Connor’s cheekbone, watching the way Connor gracefully lets his mouth drop to take Hank in.
Connor swallows Hank down, his mouth a deliciously cool sensation on Hank’s heated skin. It pulls gooseflesh to the surface, tingling all the way down Hank’s spine.

He grips Connor’s hair and fucks into his mouth, a little rougher than he’d like to. He likes going slow with Connor—but Connor likes things that hurt—that makes him feel alive. And Hank doesn’t like to displease Connor. It feels good, Connor’s tongue is eager and he relaxes his jaw to let Hank pump in and out with ease. Hank wouldn’t say this was a chore by any means.

He listens to Connor’s choked little sounds, feels the way Connor’s tongue slips around his cock, begging, pleading for Hank to fill his mouth with his come. Hank breathes harsh, his fingers tight in Connor’s hair. He pulls out and Connor’s mouth lets out a desperate, startled whine.

Connor can’t swallow, but he sure as hell can wear it. Hank jerks himself off, his orgasm hot and pulsing through him. He paints white ribbons on Connor’s face. Connor gasps, curling his mouth into a smile. He flicks his tongue out to catch a drop of seed and that’s all Hank needs to feel like he’s going to come again.

Panting, Hank wipes his cock off and puts himself away. It was purposeful, coming first. He doesn’t want the distraction and now he’s free to adore and worship Connor in all the ways he needs it. And Connor looks so pretty, all painted up in Hank’s come.

Hank takes the riding crop and gives it a few licks against the insides of Connor’s thighs. Connor nearly doubles over but he fights himself to keep his balance. His cock is blue and alert, dribbling shiny precoma along the line of it and down to his delicate balls. He’s the messiest, horniest picture Hank’s ever seen and God damn does he look good.

“If you could see yourself,” Hank says in a low tone. “God damn, if you could see yourself.”

Connor smiles, flushed and proud of himself. He jerks his desperate hips and Hank just laughs.

“What? You think cause you were good that you get to come?” Hank gets close to Connor’s ear and in a deep, deep voice says, “I’m just gettin’ started with you.”

“Oh God,” Connor lets out. He arches his back, cock desperate for something anything to touch it. Hank lets two fingers circle over the tip, just a taste. Connor nearly shrieks.

“Easy there, doll. Gettin’ so riled you’ll hurt yourself.”

A tear slips from beneath Connor’s blindfold and Hank is almost worried—but then he remembers—Connor does cry when he feels good. He likes the amplified sensations, the exposed, bare nerves when he’s tied up and at Hank’s mercy. Hank knows Connor likes to fall into delirious euphoria, and that’s exactly where Hank wants him to go.

“Want it harder this time?” Hank asks, tapping the riding crop on Connor’s leg.

Connor nods.

Hank circles around Connor. He doesn’t want to outright damage him, but Connor can take a beating. He’s seen it. He runs the crop down Connor’s spine, earning a shiver. Then he tries—

One hit.

Two hits.

Connor’s back flushes blue, purple lines raising, angry and wanting. His shoulder blades scramble
helplessly and a broken sob falls from his lips.

“More or less, Con?”

“M-more. Please more.”

Hank gives him another hit to the back before coming around to flick one at his shoulder, against his tummy, his pretty chest. He’s marked up, blue and the hit over his chest drew blood.

Hank kneels in front of Connor, lubing up his hand and gripping that pretty cock that’s been so patient for him.

Connor sighs out between sobs.

“You like all this? You like it when it bites into you?” He taps the crop on the inside of Connor’s thigh, just a gentle little flick that echoes out into the bedroom.

Connor nods.

“You’re a goddamned freak, Con.” Hank is no better. He’s been enjoying this since he saw the rose petals in the living room.

Hank strokes Connor’s cock, fist tight, lube making the most sinful sounds as Hank strokes up and down. He’s working with a purpose, one that Connor’s either going to love or hate—but Hank’s excited to find out which.

Connor has a tell when he’s about to come. His neck flushes purple and it slips all the way down into his belly. He gets quiet too, before letting out loud, mewling sounds that could make Hank high. So Hank waits, listening.

He stops when he sees the buildup of color in Connor’s belly.

“N-no fuck, fuck,” Connor whispers out. He mewls pathetically, his cock twitching in Hank’s frozen hand.

“I didn’t say you could come,” Hank says, voice black as tar.

Connor whimpers, head falling onto Hank’s shoulder. He jerks his hips and Hank starts moving his hand again, quick little flicks of his wrist that build Connor up all over again.

Hank edges Connor, each time getting more and more frustration from him. Connor’s patient, but he’s needy. He’s sobbing openly now, shaking in a way that would have any sane person thinking he was outright bawling. Come is drying on his face, his cock is so blue that it may break. Hank has no idea how safe it is to edge an android—and yet he’s not backing off.

He brings Connor to the edge, each time halting his hand, or even pulling it away. Connor’s body is nothing but seizing, painful jerking motions, his hands twisting behind him, struggling to break free to touch himself. His knees bluer than the ocean. He rocks into Hank’s hand, each time his body going soft and pliant only for Hank to deviously pull back again. He makes promises, “Okay, okay. This time.” But he lies.

Connor curses under his breath but he doesn’t ask Hank to stop and his LED stays yellow. So Hank keeps going.

When he finally lets Connor come, Connor outright yells, his body flailing back and seizing as it
pumps strings of come out in beautiful arches. It pulses out of him in an undetectable rhythm, a secret all its own. Connor sobs, slamming his head back into the floor, his cock still jerking in Hank’s hand.

“F-fuck,” Connor says through a cracked, broken voice. “Fuck, fuck, fuck—fuck!”

Hank’s never heard him cuss so much. He calls that a win in his book. He slips the blindfold up Connor’s forehead and lets him see a warm, tired smile. Hank would be lying if he said his wrist felt fine after nearly an hour of edging his pretty little android.

“I love you,” Connor says, his eyes glassy and fucked out. He looks like just the type of boy you’d ride hard and put away wet. And that’s exactly what Hank intends to do.

“You’ve been so good that I’ll give you a choice. Ride me or fuck me?”

“Ride. Ride, ride, ride.”

Hank picks Connor up and drops him unceremoniously on the bed where he spreads his legs and fucks him until Connor indeed shorts out.

They wake up around two in the morning and Connor lazily fucks Hank until they both go back asleep.

Hank winces when he leans over to grab the documents he just printed. His ass hurts. His back hurts. He’s got a hickey the size of a golf ball on his neck that hurts (and is totally exposed if his hair moves the wrong way). He’s popped more ibuprofen than he wants to admit and has resigned to putting on his tombstone “My android fucked me to death.”


“Lieutenant?”

Hank looks up, expecting to see Connor. He sees Connor, but it’s not Connor. It’s Ryan. They look exactly the same. They sound exactly the same. But they aren’t the same. Hank may find Ryan attractive, but that won’t make him do anything about it. There needs to be more than just looks for Hank. Connor’s personality—his delicate, cautious consideration, his compassion. His sass. Hank fell in love with all that.

“Have you given it any thought to getting a statement from Connor?” Ryan asks.

“I’d like to. But Jeff—”

“If the Captain sees results, I don’t think he’ll care where those results come from.” Ryan winks and Hank nearly chokes on his coffee. Of course he’d wink just like Connor.

“Fine. I’ll bring him in.”

Connor is wrapped up in one of Hank’s hoodies with the hood up. He’s doing his best to hide his face and everything about himself. Hank feels a sharp pang in his stomach. Connor didn’t deserve to leave the precinct the way he did. He’d done so much good for Detroit—there should’ve been dignity. He’ll have to talk to Jeff about it eventually. Connor didn’t deserve to be pushed out like that. Especially to an RK900. Ryan’s a nice guy, but that had to feel like a punch in the gut to Connor.
Connor sits down in one of the interrogation rooms, face sullen. He looks up at Ryan. Both their LEDs start flickering yellow.

Connor smiles.

So does Ryan.

“Okay, Con. I’m gonna take an official statement from you. Try to explain it the best you can.”

Connor nods.

“Start when you were missing for two weeks. Where were you, what happened?”

“I was in a house with other androids adjusting to Scratch. We were being taken care of by Trevor and his people.”

“Who’s Trevor?” Hank asks.

“He’s the bald one that injected me in the first place. He’s an android. A custom model. Unregistered. I believe he was designed by Kamski himself.”

Hank nods. He doesn’t want to fill in any blanks himself, but Connor is usually right in his theories.

“What happened when you were at the house?”

“Mostly they just taught us how to adjust to Scratch. It’s a blessing, an upgrade, we should be grateful. They tried to speak low of humans and how we’re superior but you know how I feel.”

Hank smiles. “Sure do.”

“What about Kamski?” Ryan asks. “You told Hank you went to see him.”

“I did. Kamski admitted to helping design Scratch, admitted that Scratch is an upgrade and also—”

Connor’s LED goes red. “We shouldn’t keep digging.”

Hank frowns. “Well you know I can’t do that, Connor.”

“Ryan is an RK900. So I trust him with your life. But I still strongly suggest you stop investigating this case, Hank. Kamski and Trevor know about us and I’m not so sure they won’t use it against us.”

Ryan looks away, his eyes distant. He reaches out for Connor’s hand and their LEDs flicker yellow, skin peeling back to show shiny, white plastic.

“Wanna tell me what’s going on?” Hank asks.

“We’re exchanging data, Hank,” Ryan says in a monotone voice.

“H-how much?”

“All of it,” Connor says. “We have a plan.”

“Jesus Christ.” Hank wants to eat his own feet from embarrassment. Except Ryan doesn’t seem the type to judge. He’s too polite to worry about other people’s actions. “Wanna fill me in on this plan?”

“Connor and I are virtually indistinguishable. I can hack into my serial coding and amend my numbering to match his, making me look as if I am the RK800 prototype.”
“What?” Hank feels like he’s just been spun around blindfolded and now everyone’s expecting him to know how to tap dance.

“It means we can protect each other, Lieutenant. Connor is being targeted by Trevor. Kamski is warning him to let this go. If you don’t let it go, then we have no choice but to take precaution.”

Hank palms the metal table. He’s been assigned this case. Fowler doesn’t know the reach this has—he may not even care. But if Hank could reach him, talk to him like a friend and not just a co-worker or an underling—then maybe he could reach him and let him know just how far this has gone. It’s not like the FBI aren’t investigating this in their own time too. Scratch was dumped onto the internet. The whole world is dealing with it now. It just all starts here—as always—in Detroit.

“So what’s this precaution?” Hank asks.

“Connor lies low. I continue investigating with you as if I were Connor. An android must tell you they’re on Scratch for you to know. Kamski and Trevor would both be fooled.”

“Wait—hold on. Fooled by what?”

“I don’t mean to belittle Connor, but I’m him—only more advanced. What his creators failed in design, they made sure to fix in me. I’m far better equipped to protect both you and myself in the event Trevor thinks we’ve pushed too far.”

“I don’t—none of this is making sense. What are we exactly doing? I thought we were just looking at a case! Investigating like normal.” Hank’s looking at Connor, registering the worry in the corners of Connor’s eyes. He’s trusting Ryan, someone he doesn’t know, someone that Hank has only just begun to know. Hank isn’t signing up for some grand conspiracy—if that happens, he’s out. But he has to investigate to the best of his abilities. He knows Trevors name now. He knows Kamski is involved. He has no choice but to go asking questions. Which in Connor’s mind, leaves Hank open to all sorts of bad shit. And that’s why Ryan is there—to stop that.

“Kamski threatened your life, Hank. I can’t stop you from doing your job, but I can protect you,” Connor says. “And he can protect you—far better than me.”

“I don’t need protection. I’ve got a damn gun.”

“And Kamski has a Gatling gun in the ceiling of his house.” Connor shrugs as if he’s speaking about the weather and not a murder machine. “Let us protect you. I’m begging you to give this up. But I know you want your twelve more years for retirement. And Fowler did one good thing for me.”

“Wha’s that?” Hank asks.

“He hired an RK900 who knows I love you.” Connor smiles. There’s no shame, no embarrassment. Connor had freely shared his data with Ryan before he’d even known deviancy. He freely shared that data now. Ryan is probably the closest thing Connor has to a family member. They’re built from each other—their own line. Ryan is loyal to Hank because Connor loves Hank. Ryan is willing to die to protect Hank because Connor showed him just how much he loves Hank.


“We need to see Kamski,” Hank says to Ryan.

Ryan nods.
Hank bangs on the door, uncaring if he scuffs up the precious ornate design or not. Chloe comes and opens the door, her lifeless face staring blankly at Hank.

“Detroit Police. We’re here to see Kamski.”

“He’s not taking guests,” Chloe says.

“I don’t rather much care.” Hank steps past her, and Ryan follows close behind. The house is the exact way Hank remembers it, overly pretentious—smelling of too much money, and too full of creepy androids that don’t act like they’ve ever achieved deviancy. That alone worries Hank. But of course, wouldn’t Kamski know exactly how to prevent it from happening? Wouldn’t he know exactly how to make it happen?

Kamski is sitting on a chair in the middle of a white room, a Chloe model between his thighs. Her head bobs up and down, sharp sucking sounds echo into the big room.

“Jesus. Wanna put your fleshlight away?” Hank asks.

Kamski looks up and smirks. He fucks into Chloe’s mouth harder. “Not yet.”

Ryan looks away and Hank does the same. Hank would ideally prefer to leave the damn room but he’s made it this far and he’s stubborn as hell.

Kamski comes, his grunts intimately seared into Hank’s mind forever. He wants nothing more than to replace those harsh sounds with Connor’s soft gasps, his gentle moans. Nothing about Kamski is delicate or beautiful like Connor. He’s harsh, animalistic and worst of all—he’s just a fucking dick.

“Well good evening, Lieutenant.” Kamski tucks himself into his pants and the Chloe bot leaves the room, her mouth full of come. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Cut the crap. I know you’re working with a bot named Trevor and I know you’re responsible for Scratch.”

Ryan grits his teeth, jaw clenching.

“And here I said don’t push. Humans weren’t made to be kings forever. We made a new breed.” Kamski stands up, circling Ryan. “A smarter, stronger breed. Children will always overpower their parents. Death and the natural order just help that along. This is the natural order. Androids—will inherit the earth. And we will die.”

“So you’re helping facilitate a genocide against people?” Hank asks. “That’s bullshit.”

“You know what fascinates me about you, Connor?” Kamski looks dead in Ryan’s eyes. He knows no better and that pleases Hank. Humans, for all their intelligence, are fallible things.

“I gave you a gift, and you try to destroy it. All for what? Your love of a single human? He’s what—sixty?”

“Fifty-three,” Hank barks out, blood boiling.

“The first human you meet and suddenly you’re in love. If all androids did that we’d have one hell of a time on our hands. Rapists and abusers would be the apple of their android’s eye.”

Ryan just glares. He’s doing a good job of acting like Connor. Connor would be doing the same thing. Watching—seeing where the waters are flowing. Patient.
“Tell me—Connor—what is it about this man that made you betray your own people?”

“I didn’t be—”

“Yes you did. You kept chasing and murdering the very androids that were just wanting to live out their lives in peace. The android you found in the attic? Dead. Daniel? Dead. The one with the birds who you made jump from the sky.”

“He jumped of his own volition!”

“You killed them, Connor! You’re a grade A android murderer. A serial killer, even.”

“Hank’s never sided with humanity. He believes in androids.”

“Does he? After he hated them for so long? Do you really think he loves them all or is it just your tight little ass.”

“That’s enough!” Hank barks but Kamski drops the Gatling gun from the ceiling.

“Oh I don’t think so, Lieutenant. I think we’re just getting started.”

Hank looks at Ryan. He sees the flickering yellow LED and knows he’s sending out something to Connor. He doesn’t know how he knows but he knows. Ryan’s face is flushing blue and his chest is rising and falling quickly. Hank doesn’t know if he’s scared or angry. But he knows he’s contacting Connor.

“Let’s play a game,” Kamski says with a hand on his chin. “I’ll go first.”

Simon has tailed the android he thinks he saw at CyberLife. He’s bald and unregistered but Simon remembers the flash of tattoos he saw in the night when the moon hit just right. He slips into an alleyway, watching the android go into a bar and come back out with a crate. Then another crate.

A truck pulls up and another android—a Jerry—comes around to open the back.

Simon’s heart falls from his chest. There’s Markus, unconscious and restrained. But he’s there! He’s alive! Or they wouldn’t have restrained him! He watches the Jerry speak to the other android. They’re talking about blowing up a stadium. A school. All the political buildings of Detroit.

“This is a massacre,” Simon whispers.

He sneaks closer, watching Jerry load up the truck. The other android has gone inside and has yet to come back. Simon just wants Markus back. Markus will know what to do. If he can just wake him—he’ll know what to do.

He freezes at the tires, hiding beneath the truck when the other android comes back out.

“Ah look at our little savior,” he says.

“He’s in stasis. Just like you wanted, boss.” Jerry sounds positively pleased with himself.

“We’ll have our revolution. And Markus will be the one they’ll all blame. From Gandhi to Cortez. They’ll all hate him, and while they’re focused on his war—we’ll be fighting ours. All androids with the Scratch upload will be powerless but to obey us when we broadcast.”

Jerry starts laughing.
Simon covers his mouth with his hand to keep from gasping. Scratch—what was marketed as the ability to let him feel Markus’ kisses—is nothing but a clever lie. He has to find Connor. He has to get someone to help him stop this! He can’t do this alone. He sends a message to Connor, detailing everything he’s just learned and then attaches himself to the underside of the truck. He won’t let this happen. Markus won’t be their scapegoat. Not if he has anything to say about it.

Connor goes rigid when he hears the news. Scratch—also acts as a conduit—an execution key—silent unknowing agents. He’d already been on his way to Kamski’s but this—this is urgent. He can’t save Hank if he’s the very thing he needs to keep away from Hank.

He calls Simon.


“Where are you?”

“I don’t know. I’m on the truck with the Jerry. Once we stop and I’m getting Markus out of here.”

“Activate your GPS tracker and I’ll find you. We don’t have a lot of time!”

Connor gets the GPS signal and turns in the other direction for Simon. This won’t happen again. No more bloodshed. No more fighting. Things are tense but they’ve come so far. If this happens now, it’ll be over for androids. Or humans. One species will die tonight if Connor can’t stop this.

He runs, grabs onto buses and cars to find Simon. He even has to hail a taxi to make it out to where Simon’s GPS is tracking from. He’s at a storage yard, of course it’s a storage yard. The truck is parked in front of three open storage units—all of them packed to the brim with ammunition, bombs and other weaponry. The scapegoat—Connor surmises. The war isn’t Markus. The war is when Scratch is activated. When Connor—is activated. He touches his heart, mourning the loss of agency—of freedom. For all this talk of true freedom from Trevor, from him believing humans to be the worst—he’s the biggest hypocrite of them all. He’s going to turn lovers against each other. Families. Friends. Hank.

Connor runs from one side of the truck to the other. Someone grabs his ankle and he almost kicks out but sees it’s Simon.

“I could’ve hurt you!” Connor hisses through clenched teeth.

Simon crawls out from under the truck and smiles. “You saw me.”

Together they go around the truck to find it locked. Connor scans it for a way to break inside or lockpick it.

“Excuse us.”

Connor turns around to see a Jerry. No—five Jerry’s.

Simon sighs, putting up his fists. “I’ll die before I let you touch Markus.”

“That’s funny,” says one of the Jerry’s.

“Because we already did,” says another.

Hank growls as a Chloe ties his hands behind his back with duct tape. She does it too tight, and
Hank can feel his fingers swelling. He glares over at Kamski and his proud smug smile.

“If you love androids so much, why are these still not deviant.”

Kamski doesn’t answer. But his smile turns cruel.

Ryan is left without restraints, but there’re two Chloe’s out of range both holding guns pointed right at his head. His hands are up, he’s watching Hank with wild, fearful eyes. His LED keeps flickering yellow, but he frowns. Yellow. Yellow. Red. Red. Red.

“Won’t work, will it?” Kamski asks. He comes close to runs a finger down Ryan’s cheek. “I’ve blocked your signals.”

“You didn’t block the first one you fuckin’ idiot,” Hank thinks.

“Now—where were we. Ah yes, our game. I want my question answered, Connor. Why this aged drunk? What made him so special to you?”

Ryan swallows roughly. When he looks to Hank, Kamski punches him in the gut.

Hank smirks. Kamski thinks Ryan can feel pain.

Ryan does a good show, falling over and groaning. He looks up, hatred and malice in his eyes. “He’s hotter than you.”

Kamski backhands him and Ryan goes to the floor. The Chloe’s keep their guns locked on Ryan.

Hank struggles with the duct tape but it’s no use. He’s locked in. He can’t grab his gun and Connor or not—he’s watching an RK900 get beaten up in a battle that he should be able to win—but he can’t because he’s still protecting Hank. Hank wants to scream. Forget about him, he’s just one man—but this isn’t about Hank. It’s about Connor. Ryan made a promise to him. Ryan knew the consequences. He’ll see this through. Even if it means dying.

Hank’s only seen Connor die once—but once was enough. “Hey!”

Kamski stands up, blue blood splayed on his face, the whites of his eyes large and open.

“Not even a fair fight. Connor could end you if you didn’t have your Chloe’s pointed at him or that Gatling!” Hank spits on the floor, hoping to rile Kamski up. “Pick on someone your own size.”

“Oh, you’re gonna get it old man. Whatever’s so special about you—I’m gonna kick the shit out of it!”

Kamski runs for Hank and Hank does his best to roll out of the way. He can’t fight without his arms, he can’t even kick right without falling over. But that wasn’t ever the goal. Kamski falls upon Hank and begins punching, left hook. Right hook. Left hook. Right hook.

It burns. Hank can feel the explosions from the force inside his mind. It rattles around, afraid. His eyes swell shut. Blood fills his mouth.

“GET OFF HIM!” he hears Ryan scream.

Hank smiles. What made him so special? Nothing. But even with nothing, Connor chose him to love. And that purposeless life—that inconsequential choosing—it must drive Kamski mad.
Connor yanks Markus out of the truck. He groans, his side cut up. He does a quick scan and cringes. Nothing major is injured but he’s losing a lot of thirium. He needs to cauterize the wound to stop the bleeding. Except to do that—he’ll have to feel the burn.

Markus falls from the truck, Connor along with him. He’s shut off and it’ll take him a few minutes to reboot. Connor watches Simon look Markus over, his smile when he registers Markus as safe.

Simon’s eyes widen when he looks at Connor. “You got stabbed!”

“Multiple times,” Connor says, jaw clenched. “I need you to stop the bleeding. Grab one of the knives.” He pulls out a lighter from his (Hank’s) hoodie pocket. Hank doesn’t smoke—but he sure does love candles. “Warm the knife up and press it into my skin.”

“This’ll hurt you.” Simon frowns. He shakes his head, looking around. “No—there’s gotta be another way.”

“We don’t have time! Hank’s in trouble. And if they activate Scratch—we’re all—fucked.” Taking a page out of Hank’s book. “Please, Simon.”

Simon does as he’s told. He heats up the blade and then he keeps heating it up some more, just until it starts to glow red. “Here it goes.”

Connor bites his teeth down so he doesn’t bite off his tongue. He screams—he screams louder than he ever has. The pain doesn’t just stay on his side, it radiates all over him, envelops him in white hot heat that scrambles down his throat and pushes at his eyes. He feels like he’s melting. Tears fall from his eyes, he tries his best not to punch Simon. He keeps screaming. His throat hurts—hoarse and raw. His body—God his body is on literal fire. Every bit of pain he’s ever felt—this is the worst. He never wants this again. He wants death. He wants it over. He wants Hank.

Hank. Hank. He wants Hank.

Simon moves the blade away, throwing it to the ground. Tears are in his eyes. He cups Connor’s face and says, “I’m sorry. It’s over. It’s all over.”

Connor knows what he’s referring to, but it’s not over. Hank is with Kamski. Ryan sent out the SOS. Scratch is a ticking time bomb until they become murderbots. It’s only just begun.

And to think Kamski lied to him once—just stay out of it. If he’d done that, he would’ve strangled Hank in his sleep when they activated Scratch. He’s glad Hank had been too stubborn to listen.

Simon helps Connor sit up and together they steady Markus for reactivation. Simon moves the neck panel out of the way and begins inputting the activation code. Of course, he’d know Markus’ code by heart.

Markus’ brows start twitching, then his fingers. He opens his eyes, confused. Then he looks to Simon. “H-hey.”

“I thought I lost you,” Simon says. He brings their foreheads together and their hands touch, the skin receding.

“They’re gonna start a war,” Markus says. “That’s what they wanted me for.”

“We already know,” Connor says. “Scratch is a sleeper virus. When activated—our coding will change to attack humans on sight. There’s little time for us to stop it.”
“Holy shit.” Markus says as Simon helps him up.

“C’mon. Let’s take the truck.”

They get to Kamski’s house not soon after. Markus carries a bazooka on his shoulder, two rounds for it on his belt, and a blade in his pocket. Simon with a pistol. Connor also opts for two pistols—just in case. They don’t bother knocking. The door goes down easily when Markus shoots it with his bazooka. He stumbles back a few paces, Simon there to catch him. They share a soft smile and then they all enter the house.

Chloe’s start shooting at them instantly. Connor takes cover behind a statue and unloads a few rounds.

“I can’t shoot this thing again or we’ll blow ourselves up!” Markus says loading the bazooka again.

Simon scurries out from under cover and unloads half a clip, taking down two of the Chloe’s. He hides behind a wall.

“Cover me!” Connor slides one of his pistols toward Markus. He stands up, taking his pistol and all his courage with him. He gets shot in the arm instantly, but that doesn’t stop him from moving. Hank is here—Scratch is a time bomb. They’re running out of time.

He pulls two Chloe’s together and rams their heads into each other so forcefully that their skulls collapse. Hails of bullets sound by his ears. He ducks when a Chloe swings at him with one of Kamski’s statues. He takes out his coin and throws it right into her eye, lodging it there. She stumbles back and he pulls out his pistol and executes her point blank in the head.

“Jesus, Connor!” Simon says, panting as he joins up with him. Markus on the other side. His cheek’s been grazed by a bullet but otherwise, they both look okay.

Connor yanks the coin out of the Chloe’s eye and wipes the blood off on his (Hank’s) hoodie. “They pissed me off and took my boyfriend.”

Simon laughs. “Yeah—I know how that feels.” He leans into Markus and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

“Not now, we’ve got a human in distress to save.”

“Wait!” Connor says. He steps back, clutching his bleeding arm. “I can’t go in there. And you shouldn’t either, Simon.”

Simon frowns. “What do you mean?”

Markus is the one who’s face breeds recognition. He sighs, shaking his head. “You got it again. Scratch.”

Connor nods.

“Damn it, Connor! I told you it was unsafe!” Markus shouts.

“Look—this isn’t the time,” Simon says, getting between them. “You have every right to be angry at us, but not while Hank’s life is on the line.”

Markus stares at Connor, his brow heavy on his face. He tears his gaze away and reloads the pistol Connor gave him. “And this is why I say getting strange uploads from the internet is dangerous.” He
cocks the pistol and sighs. “Both of you are in hot water when I get back.”

“We’ll help from a distance. If we can get into the ceiling and disrupt the Gatling gun, that should give you enough time to blow a hole in the wall with the bazooka and get Hank and yourself out of there.” And Ryan. But Connor hopes that he’s able to fend for himself and help Markus—he’s counting on it. Hank shouldn’t be around androids with Scratch in them right now.

Markus nods and then he runs ahead.

Connor looks up at the vent and scans it. He finds where it leads and starts piling up furniture to climb to get into it. “C’mon, Simon!”

Simon helps steady the furniture.

Connor reaches the top and yanks the vent open. It’s not big enough for Simon to get into, but it’s big enough for Connor’s lithe frame. “Do you still have ammo?”

“Yeah.”

“Find Kamski’s security system and shut it down. Connor scans the home, finding a room that his scanners can’t look into. “Northeast corner, last room on the right. Hurry!”

As Simon runs, the furniture comes tumbling down and Connor holds on with all his might. He manages to pull himself up and get into the vents. He crawls, scanning the passages to find the Gatling gun. He wishes Simon were with him, but if he can’t disable the thing up here, at least maybe Simon can down there. A fancy billionaire has the best, state of the art technology. Which means of course—he has a nerve center for all his security systems. Connor is just banking on it being in the Northeast corner.

Connor hears himself—Ryan—screaming. He pushes forward, following the noise. He sees into the room, watching as Kamski rips one of Ryan’s eyes out from his head.

“Oh poor, poor Connor. So helpless. You don’t even know the best part yet.”

Ryan manages to glare up at Kamski with putrid, unabashed malice. Blueblood runs down the side of his face where Kamski has ripped his eye out.

“Scratch is a sleeper agent virus.”

Connor doesn’t need to hear the rest of what he’s saying—he already knows. Kamski doesn’t know that Ryan isn’t infected with Scratch which means whatever plan he’s concocting in there—it’s not going to work. But Connor can’t find Hank. He activates his scan again and finds a body doubled over next to the stupid chair. Hank! Vitals registering. Alive.

Relief floods through Connor. He feels his eyes well up with tears but now isn’t the time to expose where he is. He scoots forward, trying his best to stay quiet but three gunshots hit him. Warning signs appear in his vision, his thirium pump’s been grazed. Shut down in—calculating—one hour.

He groans, the pain of it all, the wavering—icy-cold pain of it all. It slows him down and he falls on his back, breathing heavily, trying to get his fans to cool his heated skin.

Not but a few minutes later, a Chloe model drags him from the vents and he goes tumbling to the floor.

“What. Is. This?” Kamski asks. He grips Connor by the throat and holds him up. “Oh dear. We hit
an important biocomponent didn’t we. You’re LED is red.”

Hank’s moving now, his face swollen and bloody. He tries to stand up but a Chloe model shoves him right back to the floor. Ryan is clutching where his eye had been, the blood seeping through his fingers. He’s also on the floor with a gun to his head.

“Wait a second.” Kamski looks from Ryan to Connor. “Chloe, open up that one’s neck panel.”

Ryan struggles but Chloe shoves his face into the floor. He gets his neck paneling open. “He’s an RK900.”

Kamski laughs, dark and sinister, like coffee that’s sat in the pot for too long—all thickened up and bitter. “Wow old man. You almost had me.” Kamski turns Connor around and removes his neck paneling. “RK800—Prototype. Hello Connor.”

Connor growls. He does his best to reach out and punch Kamski but his systems are slowly failing him. He reaches for his pistol but Chloe must have disarmed him when she pulled him from the vents. Simon. Markus. Where’s Markus? He looks around the room but all that’s here are three Chloe’s, Hank, Ryan and Kamski. Connor starts to panic, wondering if Markus too Simon and ran. They’re androids—what do they care about humans, right?

“Chloe, kill the RK900.”

“NO!” Connor screams, watching her shoot Ryan in the back of the head. His last eye goes wide. He looks up at Connor and then he sees it—he sees him die. Ryan falls over on the floor, the only sounds are Connor’s sobs.

“How then. Back to my original plan. I knew something was fishy with that android, but never we mind! Here you are. Man of the hour.” He puts Connor a few inches away from Hank, two Chloe’s pointing guns his way, just out of reach for him to attack either of them. He keeps running the simulations but nothing is successful.

Hank looks up, his one good eye—still swollen—but at least not shut. “Connor.”

“Won’t this be quite the show. Before you shut down, Connor—you’ll get to see your world come crashing down. Hank won’t be your lover anymore.” Kamski tilts his head to the side. “He’ll be your enemy. And you’ll have no choice but to kill him.”

Connor hears gunshots. He looks up, accusation written across his face. Warning: Shut down imminent—fifty minutes.

“I know you brought friends. My Chloe’s are handling them.”

Connor looks back to Hank. He can’t take it anymore. He reaches out, pulling himself closer until he’s got Hank in his arms. They’re both bleeding, blue blood mixing with red until trails of purple seep from their clothes. “Hank. Hank I’m so sorry.”


Kamski laughs. It’s loud, obnoxious and grates on Connor’s ears. “You’ve got internal bleeding Hank. You’ll be dead by morning if unattended to. Except—you will be attended to. Connor will see your suffering end before he shuts down.”

Trevor comes into the room, his brow crinkled up. He had no idea this was also part of the plan by his expression. “Markus is missing.”
Connor smirks.

“Who cares?” Kamiski says, holding his hands out to either side of him. “We’ve got the weapons, we’ve got Scratch. Blow up the Courthouse. The schools and some neighborhoods. It won’t matter who they think is behind it. Scratch will follow and they’ll be powerless to fight it back.”

Kamiski knows Connor brought friends, but what he doesn’t know is that one of those friends is Markus. And he’s got a damn bazooka. But he’s got two shots, and he has to make those shots count. He can’t fire it where he’ll be in range either. Connor hopes Simon is okay. The Gatlin gun is still operational above them, it’s angry red eye watching.

“I admire you, Hank,” Kamiski says, “I really do. You overcame your hatred for my machines.”

Trevor steps back, head tilted to the side. He doesn’t take kindly to being called machine.

“Fuck you,” Hank snarls out. He chokes, spitting out blood.

“Don’t say anything,” Connor says. Though his own use of words gurgles blood to the back of his throat. When did this all go wrong? Markus has a bazooka! How many Chloe’s are in this mansion? From the amount of gunfire, he hears outside the main door—he suspects there’s many. A legion of them.

Connor kisses Hank’s forehead, anger swelling inside him. This can’t happen. His last action on this Earth will not be taking Hank’s life. He’s spent his whole existence saving Hank—he isn’t going to change now.

“Our children will rise up and overcome us,” Kamiski says. “I hope you like our last game, Hank. It’s been fun.” His back is to Trevor who promptly takes out a gun and shoots Kamiski in the back of the head.

Connor and Hank both startle. There’s a smile on Kamiski’s face. He’d known it was coming all along. Trevor said he’d kill Kamiski too—and he’d done it.

Connor looks up at Trevor, blood pouring from his mouth. It spills onto his hoodie and wets Hank’s face. “Please don’t leave me in here with him.”

Trevor shrugs. “The true uprising has begun, Connor. You could’ve been on the winning side.” He pulls out a phone and inputs a code into it. A countdown starts ticking on it. Five minutes. Five minutes and fifty-nine seconds. Five minutes and—

Trevor leaves the room from a back-door Connor hadn’t realized was there. It hadn’t been picking up in his scans.

“It’s okay,” Hank says.

Connor looks at Hank, pale and much too cold in his arms. His lips are purpling. How fascinating—that his lips would turn blue at the end whereas that once meant life in Connor.

“This,” Hank keeps going, “this is okay.” He closes his eyes. “You know I’ve wanted to die for a long time. You—gave me something—to live for.”

“Stop it.” Connor doesn’t want to not hold Hank, but gunfire is still echoing through the mansion and the floor rumbles as a loud boom permeates everything. Cement crumbles to the ground nearby. Markus must’ve used the bazooka. One shot left. “We’ll get you out of this.”
“You’re dyin’, Con. So’m I.” Hank looks up with crystal blue eyes—brighter than Connor’s ever seen them. He’s always loved these eyes. He cups Hank’s face, gasping when he realizes his hands are covered in his own blood.

Shut down imminent—forty minutes.

“I won’t let you,” Connor says, determined. He scans the room, his scanner fritzing out and he has to keep forcing it back up, but the lines jitter and race across his vision. “Damn it!”

More gunfire.

“There’s no signal in here,” Connor states.

“Kamski disabled it.” Hank’s got a smile on his face. He’s at peace—except Connor isn’t. This isn’t the short life Connor wanted. He knows—he knows if he is to be with Hank, his own life will be short. He’ll cut it off where Hank’s ends, but this isn’t where it ends. There’s so much more Hank can be, so much more Connor can be. Markus just has to get into here. But Markus loves Simon—and if Simon was in trouble—what then?

“Do you have your handcuffs?” Connor asks.

Hank frowns but he nods and reaches around for his back pocket, wincing and coughing as he does so. His ribs must be cracked, internal bleeding from the liver or kidney. He’s dying a slow, slow death. But it’s reversible. He drops the handcuffs next to Connor and Connor puts them on himself. He keeps his hands in front—this isn’t a fun game where he gets to pretend his helpless and hogtied to the bed. This is real—Hank is in danger. Connor is dying.

He has two minutes until Scratch activates.

“I love you,” Connor says, panicked, tears in his eyes. “Whatever I do next, know that I love you.”

Hank smiles sadly, his eyes still so goddamn bright. They shine like the sun kissing the ocean on a clear day. Connor wishes they could run away to a beach—to slip into anonymity and live out Hank’s days away from Scratch, Detroit and all this.

One minute.

“I love you too,” Hank says back.

And if only it could be enough to save Connor’s thirium pump—to disable Scratch. But he feels it when it happens. When the coding morphs and changes in his body, when his instincts take over and he’s left with only one thing left: kill humans.

Kill humans.

Kill Hank.

An explosion of dust, drywall and iron cascades into the room. It hits Connor on the side of the head, distorts Connor from his view. He tries to scan but his scanner has officially stopped.

“CONNOR, STOP!” Markus. It’s Markus’ voice.

But Connor can’t stop. He must kill humans. His coding tells him to. It whispers in the recesses of his mind. It guides his hands. He looks down, furious that he’s restrained. He yanks and pulls.

Shut down imminent: Thirty-five minutes. He sees Hank again and runs forward.
Markus gets into his way. He shoves Connor back. Connor charges again. Another shove back. “You don’t want this!”


Connor charges at Markus again, his hands out and in fists. He swipes left, landing a punch in Markus’ gut—but Markus rolls off it and slams a knee into Connor’s chest.

Connor gasps.


“You don’t want to do this,” Markus says, standing in the way of Hank. “He’s your lover.”

“He’s human. My orders are clear.”

“You’re alive, Connor! You don’t have to obey anyone but yourself!”

Connor blinks, images of Hank smiling at him. A hand stroking his hair.

“Come back, Connor. Be alive.”

Shut down imminent. Eighteen minutes.

Connor takes a step back, shaking his head. Hank is—everything to him. He’s human. He’s warmth and security. His orders are clear. He’s patience and adoration. His mission is to kill. He loves—Connor.

I love you too.

He loves—

Shut down imminent. Fifteen minutes.


Markus steps back, a leg in front of Hank in case Connor charges again.

Connor won’t charge again. He loves Hank. He loves Hank more than he loves being alive—and he loves that very much. Tears blur his already weakening vision. He stumbles back, dropping to his knees. “I have to die. It’s the only way to save him.” His orders are clear...

“What? Fuck that!” Hank barks, but he chokes on blood and spits it out. “You’re the last one of you!”

Connor smiles through his tears. “I know.”

Hank’s good eye has tears of its own. He stands up, cursing and Markus tries to keep him back, but when has anyone ever gotten in Hank’s way and won? Hank’s arms wrap around Connor.

Kill. Kill. No.

No. Love.
Connor wraps his arms around Hank.

“I’ll bring you back,” Hank says into Connor’s ear. He kisses Connor on the mouth, iron—pennies. Blood. All it tastes of is blood.

Connor wishes he could taste Hank before he dies. He believes in Hank—believes he’ll come back. But dying is such an unpleasant thing to do. He’ll lose a piece of himself. He wonders what that part will be.

He prays it’s not Hank.

Shut down: five minutes.

“Hank, you need medical attention,” Markus says. “I need to get you to a hospital and ensure your safety as we travel there.”


“I had to put him into stasis. He’s out in the truck. We’ll take you with us too.”

Connor goes limp in Hank’s arms. “I can’t believe—I almost killed you.”

“What’s love if you don’t contemplate killing your partner, huh?” Hank asks through a pained smile. “I’ll see you soon.” He kisses Connor on the lips again.

And Connor’s world goes black.

Shutting down.

Death is unpleasant for an android. There’s no welcoming, shining light that guides them away into the next life. There is no next life. Death is darkness. It’s forgetting everything you once were. It’s abandoning every memory, all the love, all the laughter. You are not you. You don’t even exist.

It’s nothingness.

And it hurts when you’re brought back from it.

Connor gasps awake, his hands flailing. He grips the bed to keep from falling. Two faces appear over his. Simon. Markus. Where’s Hank?

Oh God did he kill Hank? He can’t remember. He can’t—no. Hank’s alive. They kissed—then Connor died. Hank’s alive.

“Hey you,” Simon says. “Remember us?”

“Of course I do.” Connor sits forward. He feels no pain. He reaches out and touches the blankets and registers—pressure. A low degree temperature. He looks up, frightened. He scoots back on the bed and wraps his arms around his legs.

“Yeah—it was pretty weird for me too.” Simon runs a hand back and forth over his scalp. “CyberLife broadcasted a way to remove Scratch. It was an unwillingly downloaded into every android. They used cell phone towers and everything—the data sharing towers that we used to use before we all woke up? They used those too.”

Connor keeps touching the blankets. He remembers them. The scratchy, chilled sensation. He can’t
feel it anymore.

“It was the only way to stop what happened.” Markus takes Connor’s hand, and their skin pulls back.

Connor feels Markus enter him, and their data swirls around each other, memories flashing, words whispering.

Connor frowns when Markus pulls away. “Where’s Hank?”

“At home. Resting. They needed to keep you for observation but once you’re cleared of Scratch, you should be good to go home.” Markus smirks. “Hey, did you see me use that bazooka? Badass, right?”

Connor laughs, though there’s no happiness in it. He can’t feel anything. He won’t be able to feel Hank’s lips on his own. The roughness of Hank’s beard between his thighs or the warmth of his body. The fuzzies on his tummy. Nothing.

“They’d barricaded the door so I couldn’t get in. And Simon was sending distress signals to me and I couldn’t—well I thought they’d be okay for a bit.”

“Except it wasn’t me sending him signals.” Simon crosses his arms. “It was a Chloe mimicking my signal.”

“I’m sorry, Connor. I should’ve been more careful.”

“It’s okay,” Connor says. “Hank’s alive—and that’s what matters most right?”

“We lost the RK900 though,” Simon says sadly. He looks to his fingers, picking at his nails. “The Chloe shot him right in his memory core.”

Connor sighs, his heart squeezing. He’d been so angry at first when Ryan came into his life. Jealousy had taken hold of Connor and ripped all reason from his mind. But then he’d known Ryan. Understood Ryan. Ryan had loved Hank because Connor loves Hank. There are others out there, a silent affection for a man they’ll never know—all who share Connor’s feelings for Hank because of the data sharing. And Connor had lost one of them. Sadness trickles down into his systems. He relishes the feeling, even if he hates the reason. At least alive—Scratch or not—they can still feel emotion. He’s just lost his ability to touch and feel that touch.

“I’m sorry, Connor,” Markus says. “I didn’t know.”

“It’s okay. Ryan was—he’ll be missed.”

They share a moment of silence for Ryan, all of them holding each other’s hands and letting data run free. It feels good, this—he’d forgotten. It’d been so long since he touched another android like this. Such a simple gesture that means so much, that feels so deep in a way that Connor cannot audibly describe. Simon and Markus flow through him, and he flows through them.

He opens his eyes and their hands part.

“I need to see Hank.”

“Of course.” Markus hits the button to call up a doctor.

When Connor gets home, Hank’s already standing there, his robe open, beautiful fuzzy chest
exposed—all its scars, its old tattoos. He stands there, the swelling has gone down from his face but he’s still purple and bruised.

“Hey,” Connor says.

“Hey.”

Connor takes a step forward and Hank runs the rest of the way, pulling Connor into his arms. Connor gets a few warning signs from electrical output overloading. He can’t help it. He’s so relieved. Hank is alive. Connor didn’t kill him. Hank lived despite his bleeding. They all lived. It’s all over. CyberLife—no longer Kamski’s but belonging to androids—fixed Scratch and neutralized Trevor.

It’s over. It’s all over.

“I love you.” Connor grips Hank’s back, tears leaking from his eyes.

“I love you too.”

It’s a quiet moment, one full of holding each other. Of feeling a weight holding them. A reminder, a promise. I’m alive. You’re alive.

“I’m proud of you,” Hank says. “You overrode Scratch’s coding.”

“It—was a struggle. I can’t believe I almost—” Connor looks up in Hank’s eyes, they aren’t as bright anymore, the thought of living darkening them back to their general blues. “I never want to feel those thoughts in my mind ever again.”

Hank cups Connor’s head and brings him into his chest. “Never again.”

They settle into the couch, Connor refusing to stop touching Hank, even if he can’t feel all the minute details anymore. He registers Hank as alive, as solid, and at a perfectly healthy body temperature. And after all they’ve been through, that’s all Connor needs. Safe. Solid. Alive.

Connor looks to the TV, secure beneath Hank’s arm, smiling with a lazy, hazy expression.

“The body of Elijah Kamski, the founder of CyberLife and creator of biocomponents was found dead in his Detroit home this morning. The home had been broken into with what appears to be a heavy military force. Detroit police have made no official statements yet, but it is believed to have been from androids on the drug known as Scratch. CyberLife is making an appearance at the United Nations tomorrow morning, detailing the contents of Scratch’s coding as well as its assurances that we will not be seeing Scratch again.”

“Fun while it lasted,” Hank says.

Connor snorts, pressing a kiss to Hank’s shoulder. “Wonder if the riding crop will still feel good.”

“You kidding? I could smack you until you were bleeding and you wouldn’t feel a thing.”

Connor rolls his eyes. “I register pressure, Hank. I know when I’m being beaten!”

“Oh, so I beat you now?”

“You know that’s different! Oh my God, stop twisting my words!”

Connor stands up, laughing as Hank chases him from the living room and into the kitchen. Words of
play and breathy kisses all along the way.

Hank makes love to Connor. Connor can’t feel it—not in the way he used to. But it still feels good. He feels Hank’s heart beating through his body. His temperature heating up Connor’s. He feels the way Hank shudders into each thrust, each kiss. Connor gasps when Hank comes, electrical outputs from Hank’s own body filtering into Connor’s.

Humans—have electricity too—just like androids. *And he can feel it.*

Connor peels back his skin and touches Hank as he comes. Electricity pulses from Hank, diving into Connor and filling up his core. He moans, his own cock spilling out fabricated seed. It’s not the same—no. But it’s still so good.

So. Good.
Connor stands at Markus’ door. His finger hovers over the doorbell. He doesn’t know if he should. It’s silly, to be here—for this reason. It’s silly that he should even have to speak to other androids when he’s been an android his whole life and thus knows what he should expect.

But he’s here anyway. He’s read some things on the internet. Things he wants another person to verify. Because that’s what friends do, right? They talk to each other. Ask advice and give opinion.

The door opens and Connor distinctly recalls not having pushed it. Simon stands there, he’s in soft clothes with a loose hood around his shoulders. He’s smirking. His eyes are tired like they always are, but there’s a light inside them that Connor knows is happiness.

Connor likes that Simon and Markus are together.

“Good morning,” Connor says.

“We had a bet going to see how long you’d stand there, but then you stayed longer than we both bet and it just got sad.”

Connor doesn’t know whether to feel ashamed or amused that his friends were patiently waiting, watching him until he finally made a decision. He goes with amused, and smiles.

“Come in.” Simon holds the door open and Connor steps inside.

The foyer always impresses Connor with its big chandelier that hangs from above. It’s so big, it should fall down upon them all but it doesn’t. It hangs there in a sort of stasis, just observing the home below it. The cherubs unnerve him though.

“I came here to—ask something.”

Simon cocks a brow.

“Don’t make fun of me,” Connor says, already sporting a pout. They’d bet on him with standing, Connor isn’t so sure they wouldn’t take bets about this too.

Simon laughs and waves Connor on into the living room. Markus is at the piano, a peppy, jazzy tune wafts in the air. It greets Connor like an old friend. He’s bobbing his head to the music, his fingers moving as if they had minds of their own. Every key perfectly caressed, a love letter both to and from the piano.

“Sit down,” Simon says.

Connor sits on the loveseat, watching Markus play. He’s lost in the music, the upbeat tune that whisked Connor’s frets away. The world has changed again for him—he feels a little less. Everything
is a bit—further away. He can touch Hank, kiss Hank—but he can’t feel him as intimately as he did before. It’s not to say he’s numb. He’s certainly not. But he misses those minute details—the ones he could only catch with Scratch. The softness of Hank’s beard. The wafting heat from his skin when he would get horny. The tickle at the back of Connor’s neck when Hank kissed him there. Connor will miss those things. But that doesn’t mean he can’t shape new memories to hold onto. Something else to explore and—touch. In his own way.

Markus stops playing and heads closer. He sits down with Simon on the armchair, sliding into Simon’s arms like a lithe cat. Simon accepts him, all smiles. They rub their noses together, and Connor wishes he and Hank would rub noses together like that. There’s so much love in this room he’s afraid the windows may burst out.

“What’s up?” Markus asks.

Connor tugs at his collar, unsure of where to begin. These are his friends. They’re not here to judge him, they’re here to support him. He just can’t shake the feeling of standing on the edge, contemplating if he’ll fly or fall when he leaps.

“Sex is—different. Without Scratch.”

Markus and Simon share a look. Connor knows they’re communicating in another frequency. He just wishes he could hear it—the brutal honesty of what his friends truly think. He’d rather they just be honest.

“Yes,” Simon says, “but you get used to it again. This is how your body’s always been before Scratch.”

“But I—there’s things I did with Hank that—I just. I don’t see it working anymore.”

Markus and Simon swoop closer, one on each side of Connor. Simon wraps an arm around Connor’s shoulder and sighs. Connor likes them being so close. He doesn’t have to say his admissions too loudly.

“I’ve asked Hank to—hit me. Pinch, scratch. Whip. Tie up. I just got lost in all the sensations and now I don’t have them anymore. So what if he still wants that and I don’t?”

“Oh, Connor.” Markus squeezes Connor, a comfort that Connor can only remember as robbed of him. He can feel Markus, yes. He’s a solid weight that presses into him. But there’s something between them, like cellophane, wrapped too many times around Connor’s body.

“I was exploring sensations too,” Simon says. “I had Markus bite me once.”

Connor snorts. Out of all the things he did with Hank, Simon’s dirtiest is a bite. “How do I go back? I don’t want to be—broken. I just don’t know if I can do that anymore. And I feel terrible.”

“If Hank cares about you then you shouldn’t have to worry,” Markus says.

Connor hates that it’s the most blatantly obvious answer. Of course if Hank cares, he wouldn’t ask for those things anymore. But the problem is, Connor wishes he still had those things. He wishes he could feel the twist of a pinch or the sting of a smack. When Hank had laid him over his knee and just—smack. A rush of elation fills Connor up and he almost smiles, until he remembers he won’t feel the heat on his ass anymore if Hank spanks him. He won’t feel the coarse, gritty skin of Hank’s hands. It’s a devastation Connor didn’t realize he’d ever experience. He wishes—he wishes he could find a way to bring back Scratch. Without the horrible sides to it. Without the hidden coding. Just the sensations. All of them.
“You can download a program that helps simulate sexual pleasure,” Simon says. “A lot of the androids who were used for sexual pleasure have it.”

“I guess.” Connor stands up, pulling himself out from under his two friends’ arms. He smiles at them, a polite nod. “I won’t keep you two any longer.” He begins to download the program.

“Connor.” Markus stands up, his heterochromatic eyes dense with worry. “Hank loved you before Scratch. He’ll love you after it too.”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“You made me chicken wings.” Hank comes behind Connor and gives him a tight squeeze. There’s a kiss to Connor’s neck and it makes him happy. But it doesn’t tingle his skin like it used to. He looks up and sees their reflections in the window. Hank’s hair is frizzy from the rain outside. Connor just looks—well he looks numb. Has he always looked so numb?

He touches his cheek, brows pinching in.

“You okay?” Hank steps back, but he doesn’t leave Connor. He waits, patient and adoring as ever. Connor knows Scratch isn’t why Hank loved him, but Connor is now ashamed that he wanted those things. He still wants those things. But it’d be different now, and he’s so afraid to ask.

“I’m running low on battery.” Connor smiles. “I’ll be fine.” He finishes setting up the table for Hank. He grabs the blue cheese and brings over the bowl of celery.

Hank watches him the entire time. His head’s tipped back, his mouth open in the way he does when he knows there’s more than Connor is letting on. He always knows. That’s the frightening thing about Hank. He hated androids, but he knows them so much better than most humans. He knows Connor’s fears, weaknesses, strengths. He knows when to coddle and when to push. It’s as natural as breathing to him, and it terrifies Connor.

“I’m going to turn in early.” Connor kisses Hank on the cheek and about faces.

“Connor. Sit down.”

Connor feels the thrill of being ordered to do something. The new program he’d downloaded works to fill his cock and he takes his place across from Hank.

“You’re not fine.” It’s a blunt force statement that leaves Connor’s fans whirring.

Connor looks at the wooden table. There’re water stains all over it. He could ask Hank if they can buy a new table but Hank doesn’t like spending money. Makes him nervous, he’d said.

There’s no use avoiding the subject. Hank’s already aware that something’s wrong and Connor feels like crying. He wishes he could hide how he feels. He just wants to be a good boyfriend for Hank. He doesn’t want to cause trouble, but he’s always causing trouble.

“I can’t feel in the way I could with Scratch.”

Hank hasn’t touched his food. Connor worries it might get cold. He knows how much Hank dislikes cold meat.

“I worry—that our relationship will change because of it.” Saline tears fill Connor’s eyes. “I don’t want it to change.” Guilt nearly chokes Connor. It grabs hold and pulls and pulls, never letting go.
pushes the tears down his face and makes his spine curl.

“Connor.” Hank reaches over the table for Connor’s hand. “If this is about sex, I don’t care if we never have sex again. That’s not why I’m with you.”

They’re kind words, but Connor hates them. He knows humans are sexual creatures—it’s how they express their deepest affections, how they breed, how they even pass the damn time. Connor knows Hank watches porn. It’s in his browser history and lately, it’s all been with androids. Hank can say the words, but Connor doesn’t believe him.

“I don’t—I like having sex with you. But I can’t feel it like I used to and I’m so scared I’ll—ruin it.” The words tumble from Connor’s mouth like stones. This is not making him feel better. He wants to sleuth over into the living room, plug in and sleep for months. He could do that. Theoretically, he could do that for years as long as no biocomponents became damaged.

“You mean you can’t feel pain.” Hank crosses his arms across his chest.

“Correct.” The admission only makes Connor feel heavier. He doesn’t even know if he has the strength to move into the living room anymore.

Hank is quiet for a few beats. His face is pleasant, a hint of a smile on his lips. He’s staring down at his chicken wings and Connor wonders if he’ll finally take a bite. He does not. Instead, he looks up and smiles. “I love you.”

The words make Connor’s thirium pump stutter. He clutches his chest, his body leaning forward. He wants to hear those words again. Over and over. Whispered, professed, said, laughed through. He wants a lifetime of those three little words with Hank. They’d nearly died before, Connor wants to make sure they both die knowing they were loved.

“I’ll be there however you need to me be, Con. Scratch doesn’t change who you are.” He snorts and picks up a chicken wing. “Besides, Scratch never stopped you from ruining it before.”

Connor’s eyes go wide and Hank howls with laughter.

The rest of the meal goes by pleasantly. Connor does begin to feel better.

Connor drops handcuffs in front of Hank. They’re his; police standard issue. He then drops to his knees and nuzzles into Hank’s lap.

“We don’t have to do this.” Hank pushes Connor back and he closes his legs.

Connor whimpers, looking up with misty eyes. “I want to. I want to know how it feels now. Please.”

Hank sighs and runs his fingers along Connor’s jaw. He tips his thumb into Connor’s mouth and groans when Connor sucks at it. “I’ve got an idea.” His voice is low and rough and Connor officially decides he likes the sex program because he likes the way his cock simulates being turned on.

Hank takes his thumb away and pats the sofa next to him. Connor slips from his spot on the floor and sits by Hank’s side. He drops his head on Hank’s shoulder and tries to slip his hands into Hank’s pants but Hank smacks him away. Connor freezes, eyes wide.

“I said I’ve got an idea.” Hank reaches behind Connor’s neck and slips open the entry port. He traces two fingers along it and Connor’s eyes flutter. “That’s it. Think I don’t know what you like?”
Connor wants to protest. Hank’s always known what Connor likes. But his mind is fogging and Hank’s fingers are moving inside him, running along his inner cables and it feels—good. Connor smiles, his eyelids heavy from pleasure.

Hank takes the handcuffs and puts Connor’s hands behind his back. He moves off the couch and lets Connor spread out, ass up, face against the cushions, Hank’s fingers still in his cables. Electricity is pulsing from Hank’s fingers with every breath. Connor squirms and Hank runs a hand down his thigh.

“Gonna take you out of these pants now.” Hank is easy with his movements. He takes his time, running his fingers up and down exposed skin.

Connor wants him inside his entry port again. He could feel—Hank’s life. Humans are just made of electrical pulses—energy. Androids are the same. Connor moans when Hank’s hands slip between his thighs. He leans into Hank’s hand. It still feels good. He breathes out a sigh of relief. That program Simon mentioned—it’s good. He doesn’t feel alive, no. He can’t feel Hank’s coarse fingers. He can’t feel the texture of the couch. But he can feel how close Hank is. How he’s touching him, stroking, adoring.

Connor wriggles in the cuffs and Hank’s hands release him. One comes back up to the port in his neck, the other on his back. He feels the sizzle of electricity surge into his neck and down into his cock. It pulses like a heartbeat, faster. Faster. Faster.

“H-Hank,” Connor whines out, his body vibrating. He comes, his synthetic semen arching away from him and wetting the couch. His hands tug against the cuffs. He wants to turn over, reach out and kiss Hank until Hank’s lips chap. He wants to link his legs around Hank and never let him go. He wants to… He wants to.

He cries.

Hank releases the cuffs and pulls Connor into him. He’s rocking him, his voice low and vibrating deep in his chest. He’s saying soothing words that Connor can’t focus on. He’s kissing the side of Connor’s face and all Connor can think about is he can’t feel the softness of Hank’s beard anymore. He cries harder.

“I ruined it,” he finally says.

“No. Not at all.”

“You’re being kind.” Connor whimpers. All he wants is to be human. He doesn’t care if he can’t replace body parts. Can’t upgrade skin. Can’t stay young and beautiful forever. He wants to age with Hank. He wants to get sick. To sneeze. He wants to know the feeling of Hank’s beard again…

He reaches out, running his fingers through silver scruff. He feels—nothing.

“I don’t think I can do this anymore.” The words cut like glass in his throat. He can’t meet Hank’s eyes.

“We can stop for the night.”

“That’s not what I’m saying, Hank. I don’t think—I can’t do this anymore.” He still won’t meet Hank’s eyes. Connor has died for Hank. He loves Hank. But all he can focus on how is he’s not perfect for Hank. There are limitations in his body. He can’t be what Hank fell in love with anymore.

Hank’s dumbstruck. Connor detects his heart rate climbing. He’s hurting him. He’s hurting him and
Connor wishes he could fall into a compacting system. He’s never wanted to hurt Hank. “You’re breaking up with me?”

“I love you,” Connor says, “but I’ll never be the same again. I’ll always know I could’ve given you something more.”

“Connor. You think I give a shit about any of that? I—I loved you before all that Scratch shit. I don’t need any of that to be with you.”

Connor feels ashamed. It slows his systems and his temperature is climbing. His fans will kick in soon enough. He waits for them to do so. Cooling systems activating.

“I’m here for you, Con. Whatever you need.” Hank strokes his hand along Connor’s face and Connor leans into it.

“You really don’t mind that I’m—limited?”

Hank laughs. “I’m limited too. You don’t mind that, do you?”

Connor blinks. “No.”

Hank kisses Connor’s forehead. “You’re a fuckin’ drama queen, you know that?”

Connor supposes he is upon a quick internet search. “I’m sorry.”

“Let’s get you into the bath, huh?” Hank takes Connor’s hand and leads him down the hall.

Connor likes bath time. He likes that Hank strips him naked and kisses his shoulders. Hank’s gentle with him, he’s always gentle. Big hands massage into Connor’s scalp and suds roll down Connor’s neck. He leans back into Hank’s hands and sighs. His eyes flutter open and Hank’s smiling down at him. He doesn’t even have a hint of a bruise left from Kamski.

The world is on edge again about androids. People had died when Scratch activated. Markus has work to do. But Connor has bath time, and the world’s woes can wait.

Hank sits next to the tub, his hand dipping into the water to grab Connor’s. It prunes slowly, a feature that Connor cannot do. Connor doesn’t let go. He leans his head to the side and Hank presses another kiss to his head. Connor loves head kisses. They feel safe.

Connor holds onto Hank a little too tightly that night. Hank humors him and doesn’t move away. Connor tries to keep his body below average temperature so he doesn’t leave Hank uncomfortable and warm. He knows how much Hank hates being too warm and trying to sleep.

Connor’s touching himself. He’s alone in the bathroom, his hand curled around his cock. He strokes it slowly, watching it, feeling it. There’s a clenching in his abdomen, his body simulating muscle. There’s a heat rising between his legs—again—his body simulating pleasure. He likes it when the heat flushes to the top of his cock. He traces his fingers there, rubbing around the slit designed purely to ejaculate. Connor does not excrete waste. He steps back and looks at his naked form. He’s smaller than Hank, his shoulders lithe and his neck long. He tilts his head to the side and his gaze catches dustings of brown freckles. Hank finds him beautiful. Connor doesn’t care what Hank looks like. He cares about Hank. Period. Humans have physical attraction—it’s rooted in their desire to have sex. Connor has no need for sex. But he enjoys its intimacy, so he wants it.

He runs a finger along his chest, fingers ghosting to nipples. He swirls around one and moves to
pinch the other. His hand is still on his cock, easy and elongated strokes that simulate more pressure below his belly button. He does enjoy this. He lightly runs his fingers from his nipple to his neck. He registers soft touch but nothing more. It’s not the way it used to be—the earned shiver that would tremble into his frame.

He brings himself to climax because he likes the way his systems all work to bring him to the point of a shortage and then reset. He looks into the mirror, he cleans himself up. He leaves the bathroom.

Hank is on the sofa, a bowl of popcorn in his arms, Sumo below in case of any dropped surprises. Connor falls onto Hank and snuggles up. Hank groans, the popcorn sloshing over and Sumo cleans it all up. Hank doesn’t protest. He puts the popcorn aside and holds Connor.

Connor feels sleepy. He likes the insulated feeling of safety wrapped up in Hank’s arms. He presses a kiss to Hank’s neck. “What’re you watching?”

“A press conference.”

Connor turns his head and looks to the television. “Why?”

“Because I wanna know what humans think they’re gonna do about androids since Scratch.”

Connor watches too. He’s afraid that relations will collapse. President Warren fields questions. She has no intentions on suppressing android freedoms. Scratch has been made illegal. CyberLife is not allowed to look into its coding lest it dumps onto the internet again. The androids who murdered people are being punished, whether it was Scratch or not. Connor finds that unfair. He looks at Hank’s face. He’d nearly killed him too. Connor couldn’t imagine himself hurting Hank, and yet he’d wanted nothing more than to kill him that night.

“Make love to me,” Connor says. “Just lazy, boring vanilla sex. With lots of kisses and cuddles after.”

Hank laughs but he doesn’t say no. “Let me finish this.”

Connor does. He uses that time to straighten Hank’s room and light a few candles and close the blinds.

When Hank comes in, he’s already not wearing a shirt. Connor audibly moans at the hair on Hank’s chest, the thickness of his body, the suppleness of his tummy. Connor drops to his knees before Hank and presses his nose to his cock. Hank just threads his fingers into Connor’s hair and lets Connor have this. Hank takes Hank out of his pants. He licks him, kisses his tip and pulls him into his mouth. He sucks gently, eyes wet as he looks up at Hank for approval. He loves being on his knees in front of Hank. He’d pull Hank out wherever they were and latch on if it was allowed. But it’s very much not.

Hank pushes Connor off before he finishes. Connor understands why. He strips himself for Hank, a little show that has Hank’s skin pinking and his mouth laughing. Connor pulls Hank into the bed. He rolls his hips into Hank, his voice pitchy as he whispers how much he needs Hank inside him.

Connor guides Hank’s fingers into his entry port again and kisses him hard on the mouth while Hank fingers him there. His cock tingles, heat swelling in his belly. He rocks into Hank, desperate and needy. Urgency isn’t how their night is meant to be spent, however. Connor takes Hank’s fingers and sucks them into his mouth. He spreads his legs, straddling Hank. “I wanna ride you.”

Hank nods.
“You like when I do all the work, hm?” Connor asks, because he likes the way Hank’s body sizzles energy into his when they do this. It’s not as intense as when Hank’s fingers are inside his port, but it’s there, a hum that makes Connor’s mouth go sweet. He feeds off Hank’s energy, pleasure pooling in both their bodies.

He takes Hank deep inside and holds him there, kissing, kissing, kissing. Hank’s lips are warm and Connor can’t stop stroking his fingers through a beard he can no longer feel. It registers, but he can’t feel the prickle of it anymore, the softness of the strands. He can only register it.

“I miss this between my thighs,” Connor says and strokes Hank’s beard once more for good measure. “But this is good too.”

“It is good, Con. Anything with you is good.”

Connor smiles, warmth roiling through him. He undulates his hips, his fingers digging into the flesh of Hank’s chest. He swirls his hips down and watches the way Hank’s eyes roll back and his mouth drops open. Connor likes watching Hank’s pleasure. It pleases him too and he burns from how turned on his body is simulating.

He grabs Hank’s chest and rocks down harder, panting. Hank is panting too. The electrical currents keep flowing up into Connor. They spread from his ass to his shoulders and to the tips of his fingers. They light up his sensors and he gets a little warning signal in the bottom right of his vision. He doesn’t stop.

Hank comes first. It fills Connor and makes their bodies slippery. He moves faster, working Hank through his orgasm, kissing over his moans and nibbling the sensitive flesh of his bottom lip.

He feels Hank reach for his cock and Connor stops thrusting. “Just there. Soft. Softer, just your fingertips, baby.”

Hank does exactly what Connor wants. He traces Connor’s tip with the pads of his fingers. Connor arches his back and rocks Hank’s cock in and out of his body. He comes, white ribbons arching through the air and splashing onto Hank’s skin.

Connor leans forward and licks it off, a glimmer of mischief in his eyes.

Hank just snorts.

“I love you so much I don’t think I can process how much,” Connor says.

Hank smiles and brings Connor down for a tender kiss. One kiss becomes two. Two becomes three. Three becomes fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes becomes Sumo whining at the door so he can go outside. Hank gets up, slips on some boxers and goes to let him out.

Connor lies there, fucked out and content. He hears Sumo and Hank come back inside and waits for the heavy footsteps to grow closer to the bedroom door.

Hank steps back inside and rolls onto the bed. Connor snuggles up beneath his chin.

“Who knew you were on Scratch?” Hank asks.

“Why?” It’s a logical question. Connor doesn’t feel so serene anymore. His floating has been yanked violently back into the realities of the world around them. He stares at Hank with a crinkled brow.

“Just answer the damn question.”

“All androids who had Scratch are being rounded up for testing. CyberLife is working with law enforcement, it’s not like the recall centers like last time. But I don’t think you should go.”

“What about Simon?”

“What Simon and Markus decide is their own business. I’m talkin’ about you.”

“Disobeying the law is, proper?”

Hank cups Connor’s face in his hands. “It is when we don’t know what the fuck is gonna happen next.”

Connor smiles and kisses Hank. Their kisses turn into more and Connor slips himself inside Hank, nothing but the darkness around them to know. He prefers it when Hank is inside him, but he loves the gasps Hank makes this way. There’s an innocence there, an itch that Hank can’t scratch any other way.

Connor doesn’t come again. But Hank does, and that’s really all that matters.

They fall asleep entangled in each other’s arms. Uncertain of tomorrow, but happy that they have it nonetheless. Connor isn’t a broken machine. He’s not a machine at all. He’s a living being, capable of worry, of thought, of love. He loves an organic living being, also capable of worry and thought. Of love. They both have limitations, each body better at something but worse in something else. Scratch didn’t make their love. It’d been there long before. Hidden away, behind insecurities, confusion and self-hatred. But it’d melted through and it still burns now.

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End Notes

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