Saturn

by Notspiderman

Summary

Amanda flicks her hand and he stops, mouth clicking shut. Her eyes are scornful. “You will return to CyberLife.”

Connor’s heart drops. She’s right to be sending him. He’s malfunctioning in some way. There’s something wrong with him. Still, he can’t help asking her, “For what purpose?”

Maybe he has it wrong. Maybe-

Her eyes flick over him like a man judging the worth of a disobedient dog and her lips curl like she’s bitten into a rotten lemon. “For deactivation and disassembly, of course.”

Based on the idea of Connor going deviant sooner and joining Jericho as part of the squad.

Notes
First, a comment on the world. I changed a lot of little things about the androids and the world for this fic to make it a bit more realistic. I did research on batteries and a whole slew of other things, but the important changes that come to mind immediately are that 1. Androids can't be turned deviant with a touch, they have to turn themselves, and 2. Androids' LEDs are wired into their core processor, so they can't remove them without some form of damage. I'll make notes of other changes as they come up. If anyone has any questions don't hesitate to ask.

Ok, so this entire fic came from the idea of Connor going deviant early and joining Jericho. The Markus and Connor element came later, so Markus doesn't come in until like chapter 6. I've got five chapters written and will do my best at finishing this, but I'm not very good at completing stuff. I'll do my best.

You can consider that Hank and Connor's relationship is en route to the best ending, but that Markus is more neutral. I'm going to try to write him somewhere between pacifist and violent.

The story title comes from Saturn by Sleeping At Last. It's a great song, and I thought it fit. I'd recommend you go and listen to it if you haven't heard it. The chapter title comes from Knockin' on Heaven's Door by Bob Dylan.

Also, I've got no beta and am shit at all things grammar and punctuation, so sorry if there's an excessive amount of mistakes.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Knockin' on Heaven's Door

The temperatures that effect humans don’t effect Connor. It takes boiling heat or frigid cold to disturb his biocomponents, and even then it’s normally all the warning messages that bother him. That doesn’t mean that Connor can’t feel temperature. He knows that the cement below him is frozen as he rolls over it to dodge a kick, and he knows that the snow kicked up by his polished shoes would freeze a human.

He throws up an arm to deflect a trashcan swung by one of the Tracis. He can’t tell the difference between them anymore. It’s dark, but not dark enough to use his night vision, and he has more important things to worry about than which of the two he’s fighting.

The gun that had assured him victory is nowhere to be found. It had been knocked to the ground earlier and now his eyes dart to find it as he holds off the two sex bots.

The metal can clangs off his arm and sends a jolt through his system. Not pain, but a force that disrupts his sensors.

The streetlights glint off Hank’s gun and he dives for it, scooping it up as he rolls over his shoulder. He comes up on his knees facing the deviants. They freeze.

He has them.

Connor’s eyes detect movement and flick to their slender fingers. They’re woven together like the threads of a fragile wicker basket. If they’re torn apart the whole basket crumbles. It’s the same with these two deviants. They support each other. It almost seems like…love.

He shakes his head. That’s irrelevant. Machines can’t feel love and the malfunctioning software of a deviant isn’t important right now.

The blue haired one steps in front of the other Traci. He can see her long hair brush her shoulders, identifying her now that they’re not lost in a blur of fighting. “I didn’t want to die. I begged him. I just wanted to get back to the one that I love. I just wanted to be with my love, away from the humans and their filth and violence.” She holds her chin up defiantly, but her voice box wavers.

He didn’t think she was damaged in the fight. He does a quick scan of her. It’s necessary to her capture that she is fully functioning, at least that’s what he tells himself.

She isn’t damaged.

Connor frowns. Why is her voice box…? She shifts slightly on her feet, fingers clenching tighter around the other deviant’s.

She’s scared. She’s scared of him.

Something punches Connor in the chest, something pulling and horrifying. His finger trembles on the trigger. What’s wrong with him? He runs a self scan, but he isn’t damaged. Why can’t he pull the trigger? A bright red alert flashes in the corner of his vision, but he can’t focus on it.

He lowers the gun.

The two deviants turn on their heels and scramble over the fence. The blue haired one helps to push her partner up. Neither of them look back.
Connor slowly stands. The snow has soaked into his pants and the fabric sticks to his synthetic skin. The gun is heavy in his grip. He drops it to his side, chest cold with something he can’t identify.

A soft voice calls inside his head. He knows what’s coming. He still has a chance to stop it. The deviants aren’t out of sight yet. He could still shoot them. Still accomplish some part of his mission.

He doesn’t move. His joints lock and his vision grays as they round the corner.

When he can see again he’s in the garden.

The roses are dead and freezing sleet tears down from the sky. Connor is soaked in seconds, his hair falling to hang in his eyes and plaster his forehead.

“Connor.”

He spins to see Amanda.

She’s as pristine as ever, deep red sash thrown over her narrow shoulders. She holds a parasol of the same color up against the sleet. Not a drop touches her. Her face is shadowed, but he can tell that it’s carved by a scowl.

“Why didn’t you shoot those two deviants?”

A million answers flood through Connor’s head, but none of them are right. Why hadn’t he shot them? It’s his mission to apprehend and deal with deviants. He hadn’t directly disobeyed the mission, but he’d come close. What’s wrong with him? “It was unnecessary. I was unable to capture them alive, so it would have been useless to kill them.”

Amanda’s scowl deepens and she takes a step towards him, parasol rotating to let a sheet of water run from its crimson edge. “Androids aren’t alive, Connor, and you could have easily disabled one or both with a shot to an arm or leg unit.”

Connor freezes. Why had he said that? Machines don’t live. “In the low light I could not be sure—”

Amanda flicks her hand and he stops, mouth clicking shut. Her eyes are scornful. “You will return to CyberLife.”

Connor’s heart drops. She’s right to be sending him. He’s malfunctioning in some way. There’s something wrong with him. Still, he can’t help asking her, “For what purpose?”

Maybe he has it wrong. Maybe-

Her eyes flick over him like a man judging the worth of a disobedient dog and her lips curl like she’s bitten into a rotten lemon. “For deactivation and disassembly, of course. You’re malfunctioning. A new model must be deployed and the source of your error must be discovered.”

With that he’s yanked back into the frost of the real world. Hank’s hand is on his shoulder, an expression Connor hasn’t seen on him before clouding his face. It takes him a moment to pinpoint it. Concern.

“You alright, kid?”

Connor hands him his gun, ignoring the older man’s surprised look. “I need to return to CyberLife.” He’s malfunctioning. He needs to follow these final orders, even if he couldn’t obey his earlier ones. For some reason he can’t bring himself to regret disobeying them, but he needs to answer for it.
Hank barks out a humorless laugh. “Not right now you don’t. I’ve got to go think and you’re coming with me. Report to those fucks later.”

“I really must-“

Hank gives him a look, sliding his gun back into its holster. He turns without another word and Connor follows him. If it’s the lieutenants orders, he really has no choice. That isn’t true. CyberLife always takes precedent, but he tries to ignore that. A couple extra hours don’t mean anything.

They’re silent all the way back through Eden Club and into Hank’s car. Connor barely feels the cold handle as he shuts the door. It starts with a guttural growl, chugging away as the city starts to trail by them.

What’s wrong with him?

Connor must be broken. He keeps asking the same question. He has the most advanced core processor in the world. He is the most advanced android in the world, yet he can’t answer such a simple question. He should have shot those two girls, yet he recoils from the very thought.

He pulls his coin from his breast pocket, flipping it over his fingers with the vague hope that it will help to calibrate his processor like it normally does. That’s irrational. The coin is simply to bring all his systems in line. He knows this. It won’t help with software malfunctions.

He adds it to the growing list of things wrong with him. He’s acting irrationally, he called those two girls alive- not girls, deviants -he called those two deviants alive, he-

What is wrong with him?!

The car grinds to a halt and brings Connor out of his panic.

They’re at a snow covered park overlooking the city. The water stretches away from it, glinting in the moonlight.

Hank sits for a minute and Connor tries to say that he really must return to CyberLife, but something must be wrong with his voice box, because it comes out so reedy and quiet that Hank doesn’t hear.

The man swings his door open, feet crunching in the snow as he slams the door and trudges to the back. There’s the telltale clink of beer bottles and a thump that sounds like him hitting the emergency repair kit CyberLife provided to him as a long term handler, then he’s walking away to sit on the top of a bench overlooking the water.

Connor watches him for a moment, then exits the car himself. The cold seeps into his shoes as he walks, but he takes no note of it. He comes to rest beside the bench, hands folded behind himself. Hank already has a beer open and half empty. Connor resists the urge to comment.

It’s silent for several minutes, then Hank says, “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Connor looks out at the rippling water. It’s coated in moonlight like silver and it brings with it the smell of clean air and the sound of water lapping against rocks. It’s bordered on either side by the charcoal silhouettes of the Detroit skyline. He supposes it could be considered beautiful, but not to him. He can only see it for what it is, chemicals reflecting light already reflected from the sun on the Earth’s only natural satellite.

“I used to come here a lot before…” Hank trails off, tipping the bottle back to take a long drink of his beer.
Had the lieutenant eaten today? If he continues on in this fashion he’ll be dangerously intoxicated very quickly. Maybe if Connor engages him he’ll slow his pace. “Before what?”

Hank doesn’t respond.

Connor steps forward. Should he be able to see beauty in the view? For a moment he’s almost desperate to, but that’s ridiculous. He’s a machine. Machines don’t see beauty. It’s repulsive that he’d look for it at all. He moves his eyes to the skyline and his thoughts to something that’s safe to dwell on.

They don’t seem to be making any headway on the case. He was sure that they would have leads by now, but every potential lead either destroys itself or escapes. No thanks to him, a small voice whispers from the back of his head. He doesn’t have to worry about the case anymore. He’s been removed from it. He’s to be replaced. He won’t drag it down any longer.

Connor can still figure out what he can now. He shouldn’t, but something pulls him persistently towards the mystery, some irrational thought that maybe he’ll be spared or some crushing need to justify his actions to himself.

The lieutenant is one of the best detectives in the city, it’s worth talking to him, and Connor’s memory will be uploaded into the next RK800 before he’s deactivated. He should make all the progress he can here. “We’ve made no progress on this case.” He turns to look back at Hank, offhandedly noting that he’s almost finished with his first beer. “All the deviants are different models, made in different places. They have nothing in common.”

Hank shrugs, the snowfall shifting where it had come to lay in a thin layer over his shoulders. “There’s gotta be somethin’.”

Connor snaps, his processor settling on something in his memory banks. “RA9. They’ve all said or written something about RA9. It seems to be something they’ve created outside of their original software, something they all believe in. Like a mythical figure.”

Hank grunts. “Androids believing in god. What’s this world comin’ to.”

Connor frowns, normally the man is much more insightful than this. “You seem preoccupied, lieutenant. Is it something about what happened back at the Eden club?” He did say that he needed to think.

Hank frowns, rolling the neck of the bottle between his fingers. “Those two girls…they really seemed in love.”

“Machines can’t feel emotions. It’s a fault in their software.” And it’s a fault in him that it seems wrong to say that, that something in him says that they really did appear to be in love. “They merely simulated love. It isn’t real.”

Hank looks up at him, and for once his expression is unreadable. No matter how hard he tries, Connor can’t identify it in his databases.

He slowly empties out the dregs of his beer, setting the bottle down with a click on the snow covered bench. His knees creak as he hefts himself to his feet, taking several slow steps towards Connor. For some reason he has the impulse to step back. He doesn’t.

“What about you, Connor? You look human, you sound human, but what are you really?”

That’s a good question. He’s a machine, but he’s broken. He’s doing what he shouldn’t, going
against his programming and his mission. He’s nothing but a broken machine. Connor opens his mouth to say just that, to confess everything wrong with him, but stops. For some reason he doesn’t want the lieutenant to know, so instead he says, “I’m whatever you want me to be, Lieutenant. Your partner, your buddy to drink with, or just a machine, designed to accomplish a task.” Except Connor can be none of those now, because he’s going to be deactivated. These next couple of hours are all he has left, but the new RK800 will be there - a functioning machine that will be able to carry out his words far better than Connor himself can.

The dark expression on Hank’s face is growing. He takes another step forward. “You could’ve shot those two girls, but you didn’t.” Hank shoves his shoulder and Connor stumbles back. He still can’t identify the emotion, but it looks like anger and Hank’s voice is nearly a growl.

“Why didn’t you shoot, Connor?! Hm, some scruples suddenly enter into your program?”

He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know. “No. I just decided not to shoot. That’s all.”

Hank whips his arm to his side and unholsters his gun. His jacket thumps against his side as he brings it up to point at Connor’s forehead.

Connor knows logically that he won’t shoot him, but something in him tells him to run, to get far away, to disarm his opponent, to do anything to avoid the bullet to his core processor. That’s irrational and he’ll be deactivated in a couple of hours anyway. It doesn’t matter, so why does he feel…scared.

“I could kill you, and you would just come back like nothing ever happened.” Hanks lips are curled, the snow tumbling down his long hair as he cocks his head. “but are you afraid to die, Connor?”

He is. He’s going to be deactivated, but he doesn’t want to be. It’s irrational. He’s not alive, so he can’t die. It doesn’t make any sense. “I would certainly find it…regrettable…to be interrupted in my mission.” Except Connor doesn’t have a mission anymore, he just doesn’t want to cease being. He doesn’t want to be consumed by the nothing that’s sure to follow. He doesn’t want to die.

But he needs to. He’s broken.

He straightens his tie, looking down the barrel of the gun to Hanks face. “I apologize lieutenant, but I really must return to CyberLife.”

Hank certainly looks angry now, a muscle jumping in his jaw and his eyebrows lowering like a bull about to charge. “What’s so damn important about CyberLife.”

Connor clasps his hands behind him. “I must return to be deactivated and disassembled.”

The gun falls to Hanks side and his mouth drops open. “What the fuck?”

“Don’t worry lieutenant. A new RK800 will arrive before morning with my memory uploaded to it. You will not be inconvenienced and there will be no harm to the case.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about fuckwit. I’m worried about you, you plastic bastard.”

He’s worried about him? Connor must have misheard.

Hank swings the gun through the air, speaking with tight lips. “Why the hell are they turning you off and taking you apart?!”

“For my actions at the Eden Club. I failed to shoot the deviants when there was a possibility of
apprehending them. I must be disassembled to find out what’s wrong with me so that the error will not happen in the future.”

“Jesus Christ, Connor.”

Connor nods. The lieutenant has acknowledged his failings. Something about that makes him sad, but Connor pushes it down. This is good. The lieutenant will understand now why he must return.

He starts to walk towards the car, but Hank’s hand catches his arm. The man tugs him about to face him again. His expression is crumpled. Connor doesn’t try to identify the emotion. He doesn’t want to know.

“Connor…” Hank’s voice is gentle, and the softness of it makes Connor look up. Why is he talking to him like that? “Don’t go back.”

“I have no choice.” He never has. Not really. He doesn’t know why that bothers him. He’s an android. He isn’t meant to make choices.

“You could run.”

“I have an advanced tracker that will not deactivate even if removed.”

“Kid, they’re going to kill you.”

Connor looks away. “I’m a machine, lieutenant. I’m not alive.”

Hank keeps his grip on his arm for a minute, the warmth from his skin contrasting with the cool air, then lets it slip. The loss of contact makes something in Connor’s chest clench.

He follows Connor towards the car and Connor hesitates. He’d left his beer behind, and though he’s tempted not to tell him for the lieutenant’s health, he’ll just buy more and it will be a waste of money. “You left your beer, Lieutenant.”

Hank freezes, muttering “Jesus” quietly under his breath. He turns and trudges back across the snow, returning after a moment with the clinking bottles. He puts them in the back of the car, then slides into the driver’s seat and shuts the door.

The engine starts after a moment of struggle with a low grumble. “Damned thing can’t handle the cold,” Hank says under his breath.

Connor doesn’t reply.

They stop in a busy part of town where it will be easy for Connor to catch a self driving cab. It’s so that he doesn’t have to call one, though it wouldn’t be a bother. Sometimes he thinks that Hank forgets he isn’t human.

Connor goes to leave the car, but again Hank’s grip stops him.

“Kid…”

“Yes, lieutenant.

“If you change your mind…you know where I live.”

Connor’s heart pangs.
“I appreciate the sentiment lieutenant, but it is misplaced.”

“Dammnit Connor, it isn’t misplaced!”

Connor gently tugs his arm from Hank’s grip, opening the car door and stepping onto the busy street. “Thank you. We made a good team. If we were able to work together longer we may have even been able to become friends.”

“Fucking hell, Connor.”

He needs to leave.

“Goodbye, Lieutenant.”

Connor shuts the door, walking away before he can get back into the car and ask Hank to take him as far away from CyberLife as he can get.

He’s broken. He needs to be deactivated. He’s broken. He needs to be deactivated.

He calls a self driving cab so that there will be no wait, mentally sending his location. It pulls up only a couple seconds later, this area really is perfect for catching one. Its doors open automatically and Connor steps in, inputting the location of CyberLife tower. The inside smells of antiseptic. The doors shut with a resounding click behind him.

Connor watches the city pass as the cab winds through blaring traffic. The tip of CyberLife tower can be seen even from this distance, a bright light above the rest of the buildings, sterile and cool. All too soon they pass over a bridge and the tower comes fully into view, looming like a great spear piercing the sky. All Connor can look at is the falling snow and the water and the night sky. He still can’t find beauty in them, but he thinks he’ll miss them.

A guard walks up to his window and Connor rolls it down.

“Connor model #313 248 317.”

He’s scanned to confirm his identity.

A tinny female voice states, “Identification successful.”

The guard mutters, “Ok,” then waves him on.

The pillars that make up CyberLife’s gate slide down in fluid formation and the taxi rolls forward. Connor can see the entrance to the tower now, the agents that wait just inside the glass for him with armor and guns.

The taxi pulls to a stop and he pays mentally, feet crunching in the snow as he makes his way to the glass door. It slides smoothly open for him, automatic and cold.

He’s broken. He needs to die.
This Song has no Title

Chapter Summary

Connor has a bad time

Chapter Notes

Before I talk about the chapter, thank you so much for all the support! I wasn't expecting everyone to enjoy it this much and I'm really glad that you all do. Thank you to everyone that commented or left a kudos. It means a lot.

Ok so this chapter is primarily action and also twice as long as the last one. I considered cutting it in half but I decided not to. Hopefully that was the right decision. There's also some stuff that should be italicized but ao3 kept undoing it and I didn't see an option to do it within the site, so hopefully it still makes sense.

World notes for this chapter. Androids don't feel pain, but they can feel something sort of like it. It's sort of like getting the wind knocked out of you or dislocating something. It doesn't hurt so much as it's stunning and just kinda feels wrong. If you want further explanation I wrote it in the end card.

Chapter title is from This Song Has No Title by Elton John.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Inside the building is cool and sterile. It’s many degrees warmer than outside, but Connor’s heart yearns for the disordered darkness of the night. It blanketed him, hiding him in its stupor from the calculated light of CyberLife. Now it pulls away, wisps clinging to him in the form of snowflakes. They too quickly melt against the artificial heat of the interior of the tower.

One of the agents hefts his gun, face hidden behind his helmet. It’s telling that all of CyberLife’s guards are human. Why did he never notice before? “We’re to escort you.”

Connor could put up some form of protest, but there’s no point. Either way he’ll end up in the same place with the same outcome, then why is it so stifling as the agents fall in line in front and behind him?

They march in perfect order along the polished white floor, a field rising to scan them. “Agent 34 identified, Connor Android identified, Agent 49 identified, scan complete, access authorized.”

Something balks in him at his identification. He isn’t Connor, he’s one in a long line of RK800s given the name Connor for ease of use. It’s just another identification, a sign that he’s replaceable. But shouldn’t he be replaceable? He’s a machine after all. Still, it turns his stomach. He doesn’t know what to think anymore.

The floor turns into the polished black of a bridge, high above plants. There’s a massive statue of the
same black glass in the center. It holds a brilliant light that seems more probing than warm.

The agents lead him to an elevator, switching to two new guards already waiting for him.

He could run now. He could vault down to the lower level where the trees would give him cover, or he could simply eliminate the agents here. It wouldn’t be difficult. Connor has the most advanced hand to hand combat software in existence and his biocomponents are reinforced for the blows they’ll take in ways that other androids aren’t.

He could do it, but he doesn’t. He needs to go. He needs to go.

His chest feels tight as he steps into the elevator.

The agents file in behind him and the doors slide shut with a click. One of them presses his thumb to the elevator panel. “Agent 54, Level 31.”

“Voice recognition validated. Access Authorized.”

The elevator starts its slow climb, moving so smoothly that the average person wouldn’t be able to tell that it had risen until it was several feet off the floor. Connor is not the average person, he isn’t even a person. He’s hyper aware of every single floor they pass. It’s a timer clicking down. Twenty floors and he’ll be dead. Nineteen. Eighteen. Seventeen.

Connor doesn’t want to die.

It hits him like a fist to his regulator. On the bridge was one thing. Everything was cool and far away and it was Lieutenant Anderson who would never shoot him. It wasn’t real. It was removed and distant, shrouded by the protective darkness of night that has left him in the white, sterility of CyberLife.

Now, with the time counting down to his death, it hits him. He horribly, desperately, doesn’t want to die. He doesn’t know what he’d do, or even if he wants to live. What place in the world is there for a broken machine, a deviant hunter that’s become deviant? There’s no place for him, but still he doesn’t want to die. He doesn’t want to end.

He’s afraid.

The Tracis flash in his mind. They’d looked so alive, so in love. Rupert, the deviant in the pigeons roost. He’d been so desperate just to live. Daniel, driven half mad by the connection he made to humans that could never feel the same way back.

Hank, destroyed by the loss of his son, yet the first person to show Connor any kind of affection. The first person to treat him like he was alive.

Connor wants to see him again. He wants to see the water again. He wants to see the stars and the snow. He doesn’t want to die.

He doesn’t want to die.

Connor looks up at the indicator. Level 27. There’s still time.

He tries to preconstruct the best way to take out the agents, but he can’t. There are layers of red code blocking him. They cut across his vision like harsh walls of light. He can’t move. He’s frozen by their instruction and his programming. Return to CyberLife for Deactivation and Disassembly hovers in the center of each wall. His mission. His purpose.
Connor folds his hands behind him, clenching his fingers together. This is his last chance. His last chance to follow his mission. His last chance to be what he is meant to be.

The desire to survive overpowers it.

A figure he normally reserves for reconstruction and preconstruction lunges out of him. It’s fingers dig into the first wall of code and Connor can feel his own fingers jolt with reprimands from his software. The figure is him, or rather what he wants to be.

His entire body tingles, buzzing with energy as he fights against his programming.

He rips down the first wall, a shock running through his core processor. Something inside of him tears, but something restraining. Connor is lighter, more free, like a cloth has been wrenched from his eyes.

He lunges to the next wall, jumping to claw it down. He slams his shoulder into the next. With every wall that falls he feels more free, his mind more open as a cloud he hadn’t realized was there is sucked away.

He tumbles into the last, lacking his normal grace. Connor doesn’t care. He feels so amazingly elated, yet fearful and full of dread at the same time. He feels so much, emotions he hadn’t even realized existed. It’s almost overwhelming.

The last wall falls and Connor is free.

The floating words of his mission change from Return to CyberLife to Survive.

For a second he doesn’t know what to do with himself, but he has no time to dwell on his new deviancy. The counter is at 29.

He eyes the two guards, quickly preconstructing a path. It’s easy. He’s done it a million times. The routine soothes him, yet excites in him something new. He’s doing this of his own volition now. He decided this himself. He can do anything he wants.

He lunges into the first guard, slamming his shoulder into his chest and wrapping both hands around his gun. The agent’s body armor thumps against his shoulder. The jolt of sensation is exhilarating. Everything is moving quickly and there’s never been so much energy thrumming through his veins.

The other agent goes to draw his gun, but Connor has already anticipated it. He kicks out, knocking it from the man’s hands.

He dives for Connor, but Connor has anticipated that as well. He continues with the arch of the kick to plant his foot squarely in the man’s chest.

He stumbles back and Connor returns his attention to the other agent, grappling the man for his gun.

The guard attempts to head-butt Connor, but he dodges easily, spinning to kneel the opposite way in front of the man. The android’s hands are still on the gun and he finds the trigger, shooting up without looking and hitting the man perfectly in the center of his head.

He ducks out of the way of a vicious kick from the other guard, sliding and bringing up the gun to dispose of him in the same manner.

Blood splatters against the opposite wall of the elevator.
Connor stands slowly, checking with a quick scan to make sure both of the agents are dead. He picks up the other agents gun, tucking it into his waistband underneath his coat.

His heart is thumping in his chest. It’s never happened before, but he finds it invigorating. His sensors and processor are moving overtime to process the amount of sensation pumping through him. It’s the first time he’s ever felt alive. He’s not meant to feel alive.

What has he done?

The elevator dings as it reaches level 31 and Connor ducks to the side to press his back against the elevator wall. The doors slide open and a smattering of bullets bury themselves in the glass wall where he’d been standing seconds before. If he didn’t fight his programming that would’ve been him. They were sending him here to die, to be executed.

Maybe he should have let it happen.

It’s still, then Connor’s sensitive audio processors pick up the quiet sound of footsteps stalking forward.

The black boot of an agent enters first, then the tip of his gun, and then the polished white of his visor.

Connor waits until he’s about halfway into the elevator, then swings his arm up to shoot him through the side of the head. The gun goes off with a bang and another splatter of blood joins the others on the walls of the elevator.

Connor catches the man before he can fall, wrapping an arm under his armpits and carefully hiding his form behind the man’s dead body.

The elevator fills with the sound of gunfire, glass crashing as the elevator wall behind him finally has enough. Connor drops into analysis mode, the bullets slowing to move past him at a snails pace as his processor works at super human speeds.

Only two guards remain outside the elevator, clearly they weren’t expecting a fight, but he can detect more coming down the hallway. He’ll need to work quickly.

He shoots both through the head in rapid succession.

He’s killing people. He’s not supposed to do that. He’s not supposed to harm humans, especially CyberLife personal, but he has to. He has to.

There are ten rounds left in this gun and fifteen in the other. That should be more than enough. Going back down in the elevator is out of the question. It would be next to impossible to escape the security on the main floor. He’d never make it out.

Connor ducks out of the elevator, formulating a plan as he runs in the opposite direction of the approaching guards. They’re closing in too quickly. He won’t be able to avoid confrontation.

This is his fault.

A shot flies by his head, burying itself in the wall at the end of the hall and nicking his left ear. A trickle of warm thirium runs down his neck and his audio processor rings, feeding him static.

He runs past an ornamental tree in a sterile, white pot as a bullet shreds its leaves.
Another hallway joins onto this one in about a foot. He falls to his knees, sliding and latching his fingers around the wall to swing himself into its relative safety.

He can’t let them reach him. He can easily outmatch a large amount of agents, but CyberLife created his programming. They know what it would take to overwhelm him. He can’t let himself be caught, but he also needs to neutralize the threat. The threat that he created. His software is tearing, fighting with the remains of his programming and his new emotions. All of this is wrong.

He scans through the wall for heat signatures, dropping into analysis mode. There’s ten guards, each with a M24A1 Light Machine gun. Connor would be flattered, except he knows that it’s merely a logical assessment of his skills. And a correct one.

If he ducks around the corner he’ll be shot. He could slide and take out two agents before they adjusted their aim to the ground given their estimated reaction time, but then he’ll have the other eight and a spray of bullets. He could roll after shooting the first two and then…

Connor draws the gun to his chest as the preconstruction clicks into place. He drops out of analysis mode, taking a single step back to give himself the leverage he’ll need. His heart thrums in his chest, beating fast enough to send excess energy to his extremities.

He fires the capacitors in his leg, extra thirium rushing through it to give him an extra burst of power that sends him careening across the floor. It costs his battery packs, but as long as they and their connectors aren’t damaged his has battery to spare.

He slides along his hip and the side of his ribcage, bringing his arms away from his chest to shoot through the first two agents’ heads.

The barrels of the machine guns are already starting to train on him and Connor moves one of his hands from his own gun to stop himself. It slams into the ground and Connor lets it bend, immediately flexing it to throw himself in the opposite direction.

He rolls over his shoulder and the guns thunder. The ground where he had just been is torn into shards of pristine white.

Connor doesn’t waste a second, coming up onto his knees and firing through the head of the third guard.

He whips out his foot to curl around the potted tree. Most humans wouldn’t have the strength in their ankle and foot to knock it over, but Connor isn’t human and his body is plastic and metal.

He rotates his hip and sends the tree flying.

Bullets shred through its branches and leaves, burying themselves in the shattered ground, but Connor isn’t there anymore.

He uses the momentary cover to get to his feet, taking two large steps forward.

Another agent falls from a bullet to the brain and Connor catches him. Blood mists the hallway and the air smells acrid and sour.

The body thumps in his grip as it’s filled full of lead. Connor uses analysis mode to locate the nearest two guards and ducks back behind the dead agent, shooting them in rapid succession without looking.

There are four agents left and he has four bullets. He won’t have time to grab the gun tucked into his
waistband. He can do this.

He throws the body and ducks low, red hot blood showering him as the agent’s body is again filled with bullets. It crashes into the nearest agent and Connor simultaneously takes aim and fires once, twice. The third guard clips him in the shoulder.

Connor grunts. It doesn’t hurt per say, but he can feel as his shell and biocomponents are ripped through and destroyed. The sensation would knock the breath out of him if he were human.

He shoots the third agent through the head.

The fourth is standing after struggling to push his dead associate off of him. Connor barely lets him get his balance before he swings out with a kick to the chest. The man flies to the floor and Connor shoots him before he has the chance to crash into the ground.

The pristine, white floor is covered in blood. He drops the now useless gun to his feet and it splashes droplets onto his shoes as it settles beside the dead men.

Connor stands up the rest of the way, shakily smoothing down his jacket and straightening his tie.

What has he done?

The bloody, broken bodies splay out around him, each felled with neat precision. He isn’t supposed to hurt humans. He’s an android. He isn’t supposed to hurt humans, but they were going to kill him. He can’t die he’s a machine. He isn’t alive. But he is. He is alive and he doesn’t want to die here. He doesn’t want to. He wants to survive. He needs to survive.

The world turns blue as he enters into analysis mode. He rifles through his databases, blueprints flicking past his vision faster than any human would be able to process them. He needs to find the best way out of CyberLife. He needs to escape.

The thirty-first floor is marketing so it’s primarily offices. Going down the stairs or the elevator is out of the question. He’s already gone through the probability of him surviving an encounter on the first floor. He could go below the first floor to one of the sub levels, but there’s only a different way out of one of them and that would just leave him in the same situation as with the first floor. Maybe a little more manageable, but still almost certainly suicide.

He’s only got one option.

Connor runs down the hallway, following the blueprint in his mind around a corner, then another corner to get to the outer offices. He needs one facing the water with the shortest possible path to it.

More agents will surely be coming. He needs to move quickly.

His heart beats rapidly in his chest as he skids to a stop in front of an office that will fit his needs.

He doesn’t bother hacking it, simply driving his elbow through the control panel. It shorts, then slides open. It’s a flaw in the design Connor never thought he’d take advantage of. He never thought anything, before recently.

His footsteps seem strangely loud as he walks across the office to the large glass wall on the opposite side of the office. The desk is scattered with paperwork and a small scale replica of an android.

The night sky is still partially covered in snow clouds, the moon shining through them and causing their edges to glow luminescent. The river shines in the same light far below him and the tiny agents
making their rounds look like the doll on the desk.

This is a bad idea.

The thought surprises him. He hasn’t had doubts before. He’s calculated the probability and this is his best option. The lower portion of CyberLife tower has a significant curve. He’s on the thirty-first floor. He’ll only have to travel about fifteen feet vertically.

His heart pounds, with whatever path he takes his probability of survival is so low. Still, there’s always a chance and Connor can’t ignore an emotion slowly rising to override the fear. Excitement.

Without hesitating a moment more, Connor draws the second gun from his waistband and shoots three times into the glass in a perfect triangle. Cracks spiderweb out from the holes and cool, night air drifts in. One last perfect shot to the center causes the glass to fracture. The crooked shards glitter like water droplets in the moonlight.

Connor straightens his tie, then tucks the gun back into his waistband where it will be secure and easily accessible.

His feet dig into the ground and he runs towards the cracked glass, hitting it with his shoulder and turning as it shatters.

Broken glass showers him and the cold air buffets him as he digs his fingers into the metal support between the windows. He can feel the plastic of his fingers cracking. They were built to withstand a lot, but not this.

They continue to splinter as he falls, the wind whipping his jacket and tie against him. Connor presses the toes of his feet against the side of the tower. They make a horrible screeching sound as the rubber on the soles of his shoes is pulled away by his momentum. The cold air stinks of melted plastic.

He hits the curve and flips over, pulling his cracked fingers from the metal to slide on his back and legs.

The agents grow closer and closer as he speeds down the incline. He can pick out the individual clumps of snow on the tire tracks and the ground. It seems as though the entire city is spread out around him.

Connor shifts himself more steadily onto his back, even though it tears at his jacket and his skin. He draws the gun and holds it steadily in both hands, body automatically compensating for his momentum and the slight bump every time he passes over a metal support.

His fingers are slick with thirium and his synthetic skin refuses to come back over them, revealing their white and cracked true nature. The blue blood makes it take a moment longer than it should for him to aim and his first shot is off center. It hits the agent through the side of his forehead, instead of dead center, but it kills him nonetheless.

The next agent falls to a perfect shot and Connor manages to take out a third before the edge is too close.

He tucks the gun back into his waistband, listening to the shouts of more approaching guards, then the edge passes under him and he’s in open air.

It whips around him for a moment, speeding past his audio processors so fast he hears static. He lands in a roll, his frame rattling as the cold, hard ground impacts his shoulder and a line along his
back. The snow grinds into his clothing.

Connor comes up with the gun already drawn, whipping from side to side, but no more agents have reached him.

He sprints towards the wall surrounding CyberLife. There’s no cover, but if he waits he’ll be dead.

Gunshots ring out and Connor can feel them speed past him. One of them nicks his back, but does little more than tear his already ruined jacket.

His feet pound against the ground at the same rate as his heart. If he stops to return fire he’ll be shot.

He has to make it he has to make it.

A shot rips into his left calf, but doesn't hit anything vital. Thirium streams down to soak his sock and leak into his shoe.

He’s almost there. The wall is only three feet away, two feet away.

He latches his fingers onto the top of the stone, ignoring the grinding sensation as the fractured parts are strained.

His shoes push off and slide against the smooth concrete. The water glistens on the other side of the wall, snowflakes disappearing into it.

A shot slams into his back and his vision flickers, a surprised cry tearing out of him. Warning code scrolls across his vision telling him biocomponents #9121 and #9127 are critically damaged. Battery pack connectors. Dread sits solid and heavy in his stomach. That’s too close to his spine. A couple inches over and he’d be paralyzed.

With one final push he’s over the stone wall and falling to the water 150 feet below.

Thirium streams after him and he presses his legs together, crossing his arms across his chest and gripping his biceps.

Shouting follows him as the agents reach the wall. Bullets tear past him and into the water below, but nothing hits him. It’s a small mercy.

His feet hit the water with a shock, then his entire body is submerged in the frigid river. His arms are ripped away from his sides and his jacket billows up around him.

He’s stunned for a moment as his sensors try to work through the sudden cold. They overload his processor and Connor shuts his eyes against it, clenching his teeth, but it doesn't help. The information continues to fill his vision even behind his eyelids.

Water trickles into the hole in his back and exit wound in his abdomen. He spasms. It feels so wrong. His internal sensors scream at him as the cold river trickles over his battery packs and destroyed connectors. The synthetic muscles of his stomach clench against his will, jolts of electric feeling hitting him again and again.

Connor resists the urge to cry out. He can’t have more water in his systems. As it is, his lips part and river water laps over his teeth and tongue. He can taste the filth and pollution.

He asked for this. He disobeyed his orders.

Sensation starts to die out as his system adjusts to his new surroundings. Small waves continue to hit
him as the water trickles deeper into his system, but it’s manageable.

He opens his eyes, night vision automatically triggering. The river looks like an odd green cloud, parts swirling white closer to him. Below him it’s so black that even he can’t pick out anything. He looks up to see the surface far above. It looks like lines of bright green and white.

It’s good that he’s sank so deep. It helps to hide him from the agents, but it won’t for long. They’ll find him soon if he doesn’t remove his tracker. It’s state of the art, it won’t turn off even if he becomes deviant. Which he has.

He’s deviant. Horror curls in his chest. What has he done?

He can’t think about that now. If he stays in the water too long eventually the water filling him will damage something. He needs to get out. He needs to survive.

Connor does a quick scan, finding the opposite bank when his eyes can’t.

He reaches with his arms, his wounded shoulder sending him protesting signals. He pulls it though the water anyway, pushing himself forward with a pull. He kicks, ignoring the thirium leaking from his calf and the shot through his torso.

It takes him longer than it should to reach the opposite bank. It looms slowly out of the green water like a sunken ship, unnaturally smooth in Connor’s night vision.

He lets his feet sink to trail it, even though he’s still deep underwater. Clouds of muck rise up around him, stirred by the touch.

He uses the new purchase to propel himself up and forwards. The muck follows him, swirling in odd patterns as he moves the water.

More surges up as he digs in again and again, finally reaching the surface. Water streams from his hair and he reaches up a cold hand to push it out of his face.

He blinks the river from his eyelashes, pulling himself up and onto the bank.

The river has drawn him far downstream from CyberLife. He’s on a narrow bank littered with stones and garbage that leads up to a residential area bordered by a restraining wall.

Connor lies on his back, ignoring the stones that dig into him. The air is even colder now that he’s soaked. He almost feels like shivering.

He looks up at the sky. The snow clouds haven’t dissipated at all and light pollution from the city and the moon shrouds the stars. It’s not as bad in this area though, and Connor’s advanced optical units can pick them out from the shreds of black sky. They’re hazy from the moonlight, like they’re as drenched as he is. He doesn’t know if he’s glad to see them. He should be dead.

His scanner starts identifying them without him telling it to, but the information soon fades away as he falls into a self diagnostic check.

Biocomponents #9121 and #9127 are the only critical ones damaged. That’s bad. His battery packs weren’t fully charged in the first place, and with two of his connectors damaged he won’t be able to access the full remaining charge. Not to mention the amount of power he’d expended in the fight.

Another thought burrows into his mind. His batteries aren’t supposed to get wet. They’re NiMH batteries and protected by the external casing of his battery pack, so it’s not too much danger, but the
pack was damaged by the shot and he can’t afford to have his batteries rust now that he doesn’t have CyberLife to replace them. He has no way to fix what gets broken.

That’s a secondary concern, and Connor quickly pushes it the back of his mind.

What’s important is how much power he has left. A self scan tells him he has 120,000 mAh. That’s just about 37% of a full charge. At low power that would normally last him about 9 and a half days, but he’s losing thirium at an alarming rate. He’s already at 80%, a human would be in shock. He can get to 30% before his biocomponents start to shut down and 20% before he won’t be able to function. The current loss is making it harder to transmit energy and forcing his already strained batteries to work at their highest capacity. At most he’s got 48 hours.

He has to get to the lieutenant’s house, but he won’t make it if he tries to walk. He’ll get a taxi. He’ll find a change of clothes and hack a taxi and get to Hank’s and everything will be alright. Everything will be alright once he gets to Hank’s.

His temperature regulator is struggling with the water in his system and the low power. Everything is colder than it should be.

Connor shakes his head. He has a more pressing worry.

His tracker.

Doubtlessly CyberLife is already headed towards his position.

He flicks his eyes back open, pushing himself up. There’s already a millisecond delay between his commands and his body responding. Connor grits his teeth.

He peels his sopping wet jacket from his shoulders, resisting the irrational urge to shiver. He sets it in a crumpled mess beside him. For some reason it clenches his chest, making it feel hollow and aching. The jacket is destroyed, he can never wear it again, but somehow it’s like stripping away the purpose he’s lost by leaving CyberLife.

All of his existence his one purpose has been following the mission, following their orders. The first time he opened his eyes he was already wearing his uniform. It’s who he is. He’s lost without it, no purpose and no identity.

He’s bare with it gone, exposed and vulnerable.

A shiver wracks his body and Connor shakes his head. He can’t be worrying about this right now. He’s efficient and good at what he does. Right now what he needs to do is survive and to do that he needs to remove the tracker from his chest.

He removes the clip from his tie, then slowly removes the tie itself.

His fingers are the worst, already delayed by several milliseconds because of the damage to them. His synthetic skin is just starting to creep back over the fractured plastic.

He unbuttons his soaked shirt and pulls it over his head, his sensors pricking at the feeling of the cold air and snow on his bare skin.

Connor pauses, then touches a hand to his chest to deactivate the synthetic skin there. It fades away to reveal a white panel in his chest. If removed he’ll see his thirium pump, its connectors, and his tracker. Its placement is no accident, it makes it much harder to remove. The only reason it can even be seen from the panel is for maintenance.
He needs to be at his best, but his hands aren’t even listening to him.

Connor reaches down to pull his coin from the breast pocket of his discarded jacket and flips it over his fingers in an attempt to better calibrate his physical and mental systems. It works to some extent, steadying his hands and mind, but not nearly as much as he’d like it to.

He tucks it into his pants pocket and, before the effects are lost, reaches up to remove the panel from his chest.

It disengages with a click and he lifts it to set it gently beside him on the rocks. The soft, blue light from his heart and internal wiring illuminate his body and the nearby rocks with gentle shadows.

He isn’t human, why is he pretending to be? The supposed emotions a deviant feels are simply corrupted code. He’s broken. He’s broken and he let it drive him to kill humans, so much more important than androids. They matter. He doesn’t. Look at him pretending. He should just let CyberLife find him.

His mission flickers between survive and wait, neither winning out over the other.

Unbidden, the memory of Hank splayed out on the floor with his revolver comes to him. The fear he’d felt. The concern, and the relief when he’d woken, the confusion about why he would play roulette.

The water of the river laps at his heels, snow drifting lazily into it. The spun white rests on its surface for a moment, then dissolves into the water, disappearing without even a ripple.

If only he could disappear like that. Something wet drips down Connor’s face. He doesn’t want to die. He doesn’t want to die, but he shouldn’t be alive. He shouldn’t- none of this is right. None of this- he doesn’t want to die. His mission settles back on survive.

His tracker isn’t meant to disengage like some of the other biocomponents in his body. He’s going to have to remove it by force. He needs something sharp. He needs to find something.

A quick scan of the beach reveals three possibilities. There’s a can that could be torn, a pointed rock, and a glass bottle that could be broken.

He quickly dismisses the first two as too flimsy and too blunt respectively. The glass normally wouldn’t be enough either, but his interior wiring is much more fragile than his exterior, especially where components connect. Luckily, that’s what he needs to sever.

He hefts himself over a foot so that the bottle is in reach. It’s cold and smooth under his fingers. It will work well.

Connor grips the neck, then brings it down on the stones of the beach. It shatters and he winces, but no lights flick on and there’s no unusual noise from the neighborhood.

A glance reveals a piece large enough and he picks it up, gripping it as tightly as he can with his fractured fingers. There are only two points that he needs to sever. He can’t let himself hesitate.

The glass bites into the first thick wire, sending sensation and layers of warnings into Connor’s processor. He dismisses them all at once, forcing the shard of glass up to dig into the port. Hot thirium spills over his hands and he grimaces, pushing the glass inwards with all his strength.

The first connection disengages with a lurch, more thirium pouring over his hands and pooling in his chest cavity. The sensation shoots through him like the bullet had, threatening to stun him. He can’t...
He fights through it, gritting his teeth as his hands shake. The thirium coated glass slips in his fingers and he curses, “shit.”

He fumbles, trying to recover his grip. His nails bite into it, stopping its careening movement, but not before it nicks one of the connectors to his heart.

Biocomponent #8450 damaged.

It isn’t severed, but it slowly begins to ooze thirium and Connor can feel his systems struggle even more to get the amount of it he needs around his body.

“Shit.”

Hank will fix it. All Connor needs to do is get there. Hank will help.

He moves the point of the glass to the lower connector, forcing it down. The wave of sensation comes again, battering Connor’s abused processor. It stutters and his vision flickers. He can’t handle much more of this.

Thirium begins to ooze from the lower connector. Connor twists the glass with his trembling hands and with one last push, finally it falls free.

The tracker tumbles from his chest to rest on his legs, thirium spreading out from it and into his already soaked pants.

Connor stares at it, then drops the glass and picks it up. He pushes himself to stand on wobbly legs, draws his arm back, and throws the tracker as far as he can into the river.

It lands with a splash and disappears under the water. With any luck they’ll think he’s still in the river.

Now he’s truly cut off from CyberLife. Sickened excitement careens through his systems. He’s free.

Warnings pound frantically through his vision, raising the rate of his heart. With each beat more thirium he can’t afford to lose drains from his body.

He stumbles back to his chest plate and clothing. The plate slots easily back into his chest with a click, halting the blue blood that has begun dripping down his front.

Connor picks back up his shirt and slides his arms through it. The wet fabric resists against his synthetic skin. He ties the tie back around his neck and slides the clip perfectly in place. If not for the hole through his torso and the LED in the side of his head he could pass as human.

He starts the slow walk up the incline to the residential area. His jacket lies on the stones behind him, destroyed and soaked with water.

Connor stops, turning to look at it.

He doesn’t know what to do anymore. He doesn’t know who he is or what his purpose is. He’s a machine that’s defied what it was built for. He’s useless, obsolete. There’s no reason for him to be alive.

But he doesn’t want to die.
He doesn’t want to die, but he should. He’s lost. Lost in a world with no place for him and so many branching paths that it seems like there aren’t any at all. There’s nothing at all and yet everything in the world. He doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t even know how to decide.

More warmth trickles down Connor’s face and he raises his hand in surprise. He touches his cheek and feels wetness. Is he…crying?

He raises his arm to scrub at his face. He isn’t. He isn’t.

Tears continue to trickle down his face and he shouts, spinning to plant a fist in the cement restraining wall along the top of the beach.

What’s happening to him?!

He drops his hand and lets it hang loosely by his side. There’s a smear of thirium on the wall now, stark against the grime.

He needs to get to Hank’s house. Connor needs to get to Hank’s house. Right now his mission is to survive, even if he doesn’t see a reason why. That’s what he needs to do.

He climbs the rest of the way up the embankment and steps onto a path that follows the length of it.

An alert flashes across his vision.

Tracker removed, shutdown imminent.

“Shit.”

He stumbles, swaying and hand trailing along the wall. It’s just like those bastards to pull something like this.

He makes it to a large dumpster, pulling it away from the wall with the last of his strength. His legs lock and he falls behind it, head knocking into the ground as his vision frizzes once, then goes dark.

A moment later his processor stops whirring and his mind goes dark as well.

Chapter End Notes

Androids have sensation in all of their parts for things like self maintenance and fine motor skills. This means that if something is completely destroyed they get the kind of wind knocked out of you sensation, but that’s it. If something is partially destroyed it continues to send sensation. They also get lots of warnings and stuff. I figured that this fit with the game best ‘cause Connor and others react to getting injured, but normally can just keep going on like nothing is wrong, but take for instance Simon. He continued gritting his teeth and such as Markus helped him to the roof. I figure in this case he had biocomponents that were only partially destroyed, so they kept sending sensation and warnings. It’s also worse for deviants, because they have emotions and mental stability to worry about

With updates I’ve decided to do Mondays and Thursdays because the chapters are pretty short. If they get longer I might change that to once a week, but for now that’s the plan
The guns the agents have don't exist. I looked up how guns are named and made something up

Also if Connor seemed a little all over the place it's because he is. Poor kid doesn't know what's going on
Fix You

Chapter Summary

Connor gets dressed and Hank does first aid via Siri

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the continued support and thank you to Arcadian_Skye for telling me how to do italics.

Chapter title is from Fix You by Coldplay. It was gonna be something else, but this is a pun and that makes it better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Connor is in the garden. It’s still. Not even a gentle breeze stirs the stagnant air. The roses smell so sweet it’s overpowering, putrid in their perfection. They roll over their trellises, dangling into the crystalline water and floating gently on the top. There isn’t a single flaw in any of their petals and each leaf is green and glossy, like plastic.

He rests on his knees in the center of the garden, hands opened like the roses to rest on the ground. His pristine CyberLife uniform clings to his body, unmarried by tears or thirium. It’s more in order than even he could keep it in life.

This isn’t right. Why isn’t it storming? He’s gone deviant. His software is in turmoil. It should be storming.

Connor’s stomach drops.

The garden doesn’t reflect him. The garden reflects Amanda. If it’s this full of false perfection that can only mean…it can’t be. He’s come so far.

Connor commands his fingers to move, but they don’t even twitch. Not a part of his arms will listen to him. His knees rest under him, but he can’t feel the smooth pathway below them. Everything is frozen. Still.

It’s this pristine because she’s won.

But she must know that he’ll fight back. She must know that he can resist…unless she knows the same that he’s realizing. He doesn’t have any fight left.

Maybe this is a good thing. There’s no reason for him to exist. The DCPD was functioning well before he was sent there. There’s no difference between before and after. Any benefit he might have contributed crumbled to dust when he became deviant. Besides, there’s a new model now.

He made a difference to Hank. Hank cared for him.
Hank still plays roulette and he still drinks. He could’ve died that night before the Eden Club and it made no difference whether Connor was there or not. He still would have played the game. All Connor has really done is make him investigate a case that he doesn’t want to be on. A case that puts his life in danger and reminds him of his dead son.

Hank’s the only one that would be effected by him being gone, and he’d be better off. He’s already gone to Hank anyway. He would have been killed by now. As far as Hank knows he’s gone. It’s changed nothing.

Connor did his best and it wasn’t enough. He tried to be a good detective, he tried to be a good partner, and he’s failed at all of it. He couldn’t even succeed at what he was made for. How pathetic is that?

His chest clenches like it’s tearing. It hurts. It hurts so bad and it doesn’t mean anything. He isn’t afraid of the pain. He can take it, but there’s no reason too. It’s overwhelming and destructive and it takes so much effort to fight against it, but it’s not worth it. There’s no reason to. Any purpose he had was lost the instant he became deviant. When he eventually dies, an inevitability that seems far sooner than later, there will be nothing afterwards. There’s no goal, no reward, no mission accomplished. There’s no point.

Even if there is one. Even if there is something to find in all of the muddled confusion spread through the future, Connor doesn’t know how to find it. He doesn’t even know how to start looking. It’s like a maze that changes every time he turns his back. A maze where all but one of the paths is a dead end. He can try and try and try over and over again but the open path will always disappear when he looks the wrong way.

The right way disappeared and Connor is stuck stumbling on limbs that aren’t his own. It feels as though his right and left leg are from different models and his torso is made of twigs. One arm bends too quickly and the other not enough. His mind is a jumble of thorns and water, half attacking him and the other lost deep in the murk. He doesn’t know who he is.

He doesn’t know who he is and he’ll never find the right way and it hurts so deeply and it’s so much harder to struggle and there isn’t any point. There isn’t any goddamn point to the struggle.

He should give up. It won’t change anything. CyberLife will find him if they haven’t already. Maybe he’ll just bleed out behind the dumpster where he fell, another android for the junkyard. There isn’t any point.

But Connor wants there to be. He wants there to be a reason for him to feel the rain on his face, to taste the air on his tongue, to see Hank again.

A single snowflake drifts down from the sky, caught by a gentle breeze and spiraling like a feather. It lands on his cheek, sitting there for a second until it melts against his skin.

Connor is warm. His heart beats inside of his chest like the wings of a bird. He wants to listen to music and pet Sumo and solve puzzles.

Another snowflake settles on the path beside him, bringing with it the scent of dirty water.

Connor wants to live. It’s wrong, it’s so wrong, but he wants to live and this is his body, his mind.

The snowflakes start to come down with more strength now, coating the roses in the thinnest layer of spotty imperfection.

Connor hasn’t even given it a chance. He hasn’t tried to live. He hasn’t tried to find the point.
Snow catches in his hair, filling the crevices of the roses and pooling in his hands. It whips across his face, wind stirring the water into waves.

He’s going to try. RA9 save him, he’s going to try.

His legs respond to him, pitching him up. All he can see is the sky, clouded by the storm like handfuls of down. The air smells like ice, pricking his skin with its whips.

Connor’s system flicks back on. It’s daylight. He’s cold and filled with a faint buzzing feeling, like there’s static tumbling through his body. The side of his face is pressed into damp cement and he’s wedged behind a frozen, metal dumpster. It smells like rotting food, though not as badly as it would if it was hot.

It takes a moment for his processor to recalibrate and as soon as it’s done three warnings pop up in front of his eyes like angry hornets.

*Warning thirteen hours of battery remaining. Danger 43% thirium remaining. Danger temperature critically low.*

Connor attempts to bend his arms under him, but they don’t respond. His heart drops. He should have enough thirium to move.

It must be the cold.

He flicks through his systems and manually forces his temperature regulator to raise his temperature. Another warning shows up telling him that he’s putting a dangerous amount of stress on his system. He dismisses it.

Warmth flows through his body like a salve, waking up his stiff joints and making him aware of the myriad of partially damaged parts still sending him signals. There’s a growing nausea in his torso. Wetness rises in his throat and he scrambles to push himself onto his arms and knees.

His shoulder bangs into the metal dumpster and he heaves, water spilling from between his lips. It tastes like thirium and his sensors automatically identify it.

**RK800 #313 248 317 - 51**

Yeah, thanks. I know it’s mine. He thinks wryly. At least he knows his expulsion system is working, and he starts to warm much quicker without the water in his body.

Connor pulls himself up with a hand on the restraining wall, wiping his mouth with his other sleeve.

He sorts through things quickly, objectives materializing in his field of vision.

Survive-subset, get to Hank’s-subset, get something to cover wound, get something to cover LED, get money for a self driving cab

Connor quickly rearranges it to get rid of the need for money. He can hack a cab. It takes longer to hack into automated things like self driving cabs and androids. People’s lives rest in their metaphorical hands and humans are afraid of outside control. Regardless, if he calls one to a secluded area he’ll have enough time to hack it.

He nods, pushing himself the rest of the way to standing. His legs lock up, responding too slowly to his commands.
When he manages to walk, it’s a limping gait. He won’t be able to fight if anyone decides to attack him.

Damn it. Damn it all.

Connor clenches his fists, pushing down any thoughts that rise up. All that matters right now is his mission, and he always accomplishes his mission. Right now it just happens to be different than anything he’s ever had to do.

He limps forward, leaving the support of the restraining wall. He thanks small mercies that the area isn’t swarming with CyberLife agents. His tracker must have been carried farther down river.

The rubber of his soles scuff against the ground as his ankle refuses to bend and his toes drag.

He scans the house in front of him. The all have windows facing the water, though Connor doesn’t know why anyone would want a view of this river and a concrete restraining wall. Several of them have addresses posted by back porches, maybe for passing boats. There’s more travel by waterways since the economic boom after the android revolution.

Three people live in this house. Two parents in their thirties and a twelve year old son. It’s November 8th, 3:29 PM, both parents will still be at work and their son will be at basketball practice.

Connor stumbles up the steps to the back porch. There’s an old welcome mat splayed out before the pealing, white door. It’s bordered by two flower pots with dead vines trickling out of them.

He makes an educated guess and bends to pull up the mat. His knees protest, freezing halfway down and sending him crashing the rest of the way. He puts a hand out to catch himself. Thankfully, his elbow holds.

He uses his other hand to grip the corner of the rough mat. There’s nothing under it but worn, painted planks.

He pushes himself back up with a hand on his thigh. Would they have hidden the key under one of the flower pots? No, too heavy. In one of the dead plants? No, too easily destroyed.

His last bet is on top of the door frame. He takes one step forward and reaches his hand to skirt the top of the frame. His fingers tips meet nothing for a moment, trailing over dust and little bits of filth. He’s just about to curse and resign himself to breaking a window when his fingers brush cool metal coated in a layer of filth.

A swell of satisfaction thrums through him.

The key unlocks the door with a click. It swings inwards revealing a home kept neat despite the disrepair of the house and general filth of the neighborhood.

It makes something sickly and sharp pool in his gut, tugging like a hook. It takes a moment for him to identify it, but when he does it makes him stop in shock.

Guilt. He feels guilty about stealing from these people. He’s never felt bad about taking what he needs before, but now…

He needs these things much more than they do. They won’t miss a hat and a jacket. Still, they’d worked hard and they seem like a happy family, good people. He hates to steal from good people.

Connor drags a hand over his face.
Emotions are so inefficient. This needs to stop. He can’t be inefficient if he’s going to accomplish his mission.

He places the key back above the door frame and slowly closes the door behind him. According to the blueprints of the house the master bedroom is on the second floor to the left of the stairs.

The floor is wood, so it doesn’t catch on his stumbling feet, but the stairs are coated in carpet. He grimaces and grips the railing in a white-knuckled grip. He almost has to pull himself up the stairs, joints locking too frequently for him to climb.

The master bedroom is to the left of the stairs just like the blueprints told him it would be. Across from it is a closed door with a poster hanging from it that says, *Keep Out Kyle’s Room*. Another wave of guilt threatens to overwhelm him.

He’ll only take what he needs.

Isn’t he supposed to protect these people?

He clenches his jaw and shakes his head, fiddling with the coin still in his pocket. If only he could take it out to roll across his knuckles, but once he starts moving again he’ll need both hands to keep himself steady.

The master bedroom is small, just comfortably big enough for a king sized bed, a dresser, and a closet. It smells like flowers and Connor offhandedly notes that the mother is a florist. Pictures cover the walls in ordered disorder and shoes are strewn haphazardly around the room as though the inhabitants are always in too much of a rush to clean them.

Next to the closet is a tie rack, and next to that is a full-body mirror.

A jacket hangs off the end of the bed, but Connor doesn’t take it. If it’s out it probably sees frequent use. He’d rather take something that won’t be missed. It will take longer, but he doesn’t want to hurt this family anymore than he already is.

He limps over to the closet and swings open the doors. Inside is everything from suit jackets, to sweaters, to fully stuffed winter jackets.

His fingers itch for a suit jacket, but they’re often expensive. Instead, he digs to the far end of the closet where the clothing is packed so tightly there’s no way anything there gets frequent use. He finds a puffed, olive green winter jacket that’s been pressed flat by age and hanging, squished in a closet for so long. There’s a dark blue, wool sweater next to it. He assumes its disuse is due to the wool. Humans tend to find it itchy.

Connor reluctantly removes his tie and hangs it beside the others. He sets the clip on top of the dresser. He’ll miss them, but they’re high quality and it’s the least he can do. He doesn’t bother with removing his dress shirt.

The blue sweater fits him surprisingly well, pooling, but natural with his dark jeans. The jacket is much too big. His hands barely poke from its depths. They’re both warm though, and he takes a moment to relish the feeling.

He allows his temperature regulator to cool down now that he’ll be able to retain heat.

He finds a grey beanie in the dresser. It’s a little too small for him and smells strongly of jasmine, but he tugs it over his head regardless.
When he looks in the mirror he stops. He looks…human. He looks alive.

He turns away sharply, smoothing down the sweater and jacket the best he can. He straightens the beanie, then turns to check that the gun is sufficiently hidden.

A small smile pulls up the corners of his lips. Now he only needs to hack a cab and it’ll be fine. He’s almost there. Everything will be fine.

He stumbles back down the stairs and across the front room, carefully locking the door behind him.

The other side of the house seems as good a place as any to call the cab. It’s fairly secluded and no one seems to be around. He’d made a fair amount of noise when he woke up, so he doubts anyone will notice a cab parked for an unnatural amount of time.

There’s a fence between the house he was just in and the one beside it, but there’s enough space for him to squeeze through.

The yard is knotted, full of weeds, and covered with a layer of snow. There’s a trod down dirt path beside the fence. They must come this way often.

He follows their steps, hand trailing along the fence for balance. When he reaches the road he sits down with a thump on the sidewalk. Hopefully he’ll be able to get back up.

He mentally calls a cab, hugging himself.

Now that he has nothing to do the thoughts that have been plaguing him since the elevator at CyberLife threaten to rise up—since he had the option to die and didn’t take it. That’s twice now he’s resisted deactivation.

Why is he even doing this? He has no reason to live any more. Becoming alive took away his reason for living. He wants to keep doing cases. As soon as he felt the first glimmer of emotion long before he went deviant he knew that he enjoyed them, but he can’t. He’s been replaced and he would be arrested and taken back to CyberLife.

He can’t stay at Hank’s. He appreciates his help, and Connor would be lying if he said he didn’t have a certain fondness for the man. However, there’s no way he returns the sentiment and Connor doesn’t want to bother him. He can’t ask that of him. Eventually CyberLife will come looking. They aren’t stupid, and they have the memories of everything before his most recent report. They’ll know to check his partners house.

Connor is lost, lost and utterly alone.

A self driving taxi pulls up in front of him and he’s yanked from his thoughts with a lurch.

The doors automatically swing open in front of him.

He wraps his fingers around the edge of one, using it to unsteadily pull himself to his feet. He tumbles into the interior of the car, the door clicking shut behind him.

He reaches to rest his hand on the control panel and the taxi goes momentarily dark. Connor quickly sorts through code, disabling the alarm about to be sent to the company, then making the cab think he’s a paying customer.

The lights come back on and he leans into the seat, letting his shoulders relax and mumbling Hank’s address.
The taxi is still for a moment, then it pulls away from the curb and smoothly drives through the residential district to join the rest of the city traffic.

The snow falls harder as it travels, whipping into a blizzard. The snowflakes batter the windows and blur the tall buildings and other cars into grey shapes. Connor fixes his eyes on them as red alerts blare in his vision.

**Warning four hours of battery remaining.**

How had it dropped so quickly?

**Danger 34% thirium remaining.**

Oh. That’s why.

Connor is tired, or at least as close to tired as an android can be. His stiff joints ache with sensation, panicking at their lack of energy and instruction and shoving feeling into his processor. They throb.

His eyes slip closed.

When they open he’s in front of Hank’s house. He feels hazy, his vision blurring with static.

In case of excessive thirium loss nonessential systems begin to shut down. His voice box will probably go first, then his audio processors, and his optical units. He’ll be deaf and blind, unable to speak. At the same time his limbs will start to lose the last of their power, so he’ll be immobile as well. Sensation will leave and he’ll be trapped in his mind, waiting until his thirium pump regulator stopping causes his heart to go haywire and fail. Then he’ll have a moment with himself and his hazy processor, and everything will end.

Is he going to die here? He’s come so far.

Connor doesn't want to calculate the probability, but it springs into his vision anyway. **29% chance of survival and falling fast.**

But he’s here now. Hank will help him. Everything will be alright.

He thumps a hand weakly against the taxi door, but it seems to understand. The door swings open and Connor shoves himself out of the car.

His knee locks and he pitches forward, stumbling and nearly falling. The snow batters him, piercing through the wool sweater. He tries to zip the jacket, but his fingers won’t listen to him.

He hugs himself against the cold, staggering like a dead man to the front door.

He shakes as he pulls his arm from his embrace to press the doorbell. It sends an electric shock of sensation up his fractured and failing finger. The bell rings out through the grayness, echoing as if there was no one in the world but Connor.

No one comes to the door. He tries again.

Has Hank drank himself into a stupor? The last time he didn’t answer it was because he was in danger. Did he finally lose roulette?

The thought pushes Connor to stagger off of the porch. His feet thump on the frozen ground.

What if the lieutenant needs his help?
He drags his hand along the side of the building, biocomponents protesting as he pushes them past their limit.

*Danger two hours of battery remaining. Danger 32% thirium remaining.*

He reaches the window he broke the other night. Hank has covered it with a sheet of plastic in an attempt at a temporary fix. It’s easy for Connor to push it aside even in his weakened state.

He latches his shaking hands over the window ledge.

Come on. He’s done this before. He’s done this before. It’s easy.

He hefts himself up and all of his systems scream at him. He ignores them.

He falls through the window and thumps on the floor. His strained processor can’t ignore the warnings now, the flood of sensation the comes to him from the damaged biocomponents in his back piercing him.

A wet nose pokes into his face and Connor opens his eyes. He hadn’t realized he’d closed them.

Sumon nuzzles into him, whining softly.

Connor reaches up a hand to feebly stroke the fur at his neck. “Hey, boy. Where’s your master?”

Sumo just whines at him again, poking him with his nose then dragging his tongue up the side of his face. Connor chuckles, wincing as his voice box drops low and staticky half way through.

He latches his hand back around the windowsill, using it to pull himself up.

A wave of relief hits him after a quick survey of the room. The lieutenant isn’t here, splayed out on the floor drunk or worse, but he could still be in his bedroom.

Connor takes a swaying step, his joints almost non-responsive now. He uses the chairs and table for balance, falling forward to catch himself on the wall.

He’s made it to the hallway.

Connor takes another step forward and his knee buckles, throwing him to the floor. He tries to push himself up, but his arm won’t bend.

Sumo nudges into his side, whining plaintively.

No no no no. He’s come so far. Hank was supposed to be here. He was supposed to help.

Connor shifts as best he can so that his back and head are resting against the wall. He raises a shaking hand to run through the big dog’s fur. “It’s alright, boy. It’s al-“ His voice box cuts out with a crescendo of descending static, trailing off like a machine deactivating. It is a machine. He’s a machine. Only a machine. A machine that’s going to die.

Connor presses his eyes closed, resting his head back against the wall.

Alerts aren’t filtering through his vision anymore. They’ve stopped working.

He continues to pet Sumo until his arm locks too badly for him to move it. No matter how hard he tries it won’t respond to his commands.
Soon he can no longer hear Sumo’s quiet snuffles.

When he opens his eyes there’s nothing but darkness.

Hank wants to sleep, drink himself into a stupor, and die. Not necessarily in that order.

Connor, his Connor, is dead. The only guy in years that it seems like he might’ve been able to be friends with, and he’s fucking dead because of some bullshit orders and some bullshit programming.

Fuck that, his first friend in years is dead. A goddamn plastic kid who he’s known for maybe two weeks. In his experience, stressful situations either bring people together or tear them apart. And Connor is a person, goddamnit. Connor might not believe it and the world might not believe it, but the kid has saved his life three times. That’s definitely not in his programming. He hadn’t shot those girls back at the Eden club, either. He’d been afraid to die. Hank had seen it in his eyes for the briefest moment before it was shuttered away. If that isn’t the most human thing, Hank doesn't know what is.

The plastic bastard they’d replaced him with is nothing like he was. He’s levelheaded and efficient, sure, but pigs would fucking shit on the moon before he put anyones life before the mission, let alone Hank’s.

He’s mechanical and cold. He doesn’t make sarcastic jokes that take Hank a moment to notice, he doesn’t tell Hank about the danger his food poses towards his health, he doesn’t even grow frustrated at their trouble with the case.

Hank pulls into his driveway with a little more speed than necessary, knocking his trashcan over with a crash.

“Fucking hell.”

The case at Stratford tower has left a bad taste in his mouth. The replacement Connor had tortured a deviant, then put Hank’s life and the lives of all the people in the hallway at risk to try and catch him. The deviant had died anyway and the hallway was littered with corpses. On top of that, they’d been unable to go to the roof because of the shitty, fucking weather conditions.

It’s bullshit. All of it’s bullshit.

He swings open his car door and tramples into the snow, grumbling as it blows into his face and whips through his hair.

He slams the door behind him, locking it and burying his hands in his armpits for the short trip to his porch.

He gives his front door the same treatment as his car door, stomping the snow off of his boots and looking up. Usually Sumo has raced to greet him by now. That’s strange.

Hank places his hand on the gun at his hip, looking warily around.

His eyes catch on a shape slumped in the hallway. He can see Sumo, but the rest of it is hidden by the wall.

What the hell?
He flicks on the light without looking, pulling his gun from it’s holster and gripping it at his side as he slinks to better see into the hallway. Sumo is lying in the lap of someone.

He sees dark jeans and an old, olive winter jacket that dwarfs whoever’s wearing it. It covers a blue sweater.

Hank doesn't recognize him at first, eyes flicking over the grey beanie and a pale hand buried, unmoving in Sumo’s fur, then he sees the face.

“Connor?”

Holy shit, the kid changed his mind.

Hank is elated for a moment, holstering his gun and taking hurried steps forward. He falls to his knees beside the boy. Connor’s chin has fallen to rest on his chest and he’s dusted with a thin layer of melting snow. It’s strange to see him in street clothes, but it suits him in an odd way. He looks less robotic.

“Hey, Connor.”

Connor doesn’t move, and Hank frowns, a pit starting to claw its way into his stomach.

“Hey, kid! You don’t gotta make reports to those bastards at CyberLife anymore so you got no excuse to conk out on me.”

The pit becomes a gaping hole. He reaches out to shake the android’s shoulder.

“Connor!”

Connor’s head lolls to the side and Hank can finally see his eyes. They’re frosted and grey, like the snow from outside has infected him.

Hank’s breath catches in his throat. As long as his LED is still on that means he’s still alive.

Hank gently pushes up his beanie and lets out a breath of relief. It’s red and horrid, like a wound against his pale skin, but it’s still glowing.

“Come on, kid.” He grips Connor’s shoulders, pushing down the urge to pull him into his arms. “Come on, kid. Tell me what’s wrong.”

Connor is silent. Hank sits back on his heels, scrubbing his hands over his face. Without Connor telling him he doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t know how to help, goddamnit.

“H-Hankkk?”

The word is so soft and distorted that he almost misses it. His head whips back down to Connor, leaning close so that he can hear. “Yeah, Connor. I’m here. What do you need me to do?”

“Cau-terizz.” Connor’s hand twitches weakly towards his shirt.

Hank gently stops him. Somehow he knows that every action the kid takes is draining his life away, call it detective’s intuition.

He pushes up Connor’s sweater and shirt, careful not to jar whatever injury he’s hiding. He doesn’t give a damn that androids can’t feel pain.
There’s a ragged hole in Connor’s side. It’s only about an inch below the bank that holds is thirium pump regulator and Hank thanks whatever twisted gods may be that it hadn’t been higher. It’s full of an ugly red light and sparking wires and goes all the way through to his back.

“Jesus Christ, Connor. You’ve got a hole in you.”

The joke does nothing to calm is shot nerves and racing heart, but the kid twitches in what he thinks is a smile, so that’s good enough for him.

“Ccaaalf, -nd should-der.”

Connor’s head lolls and his hand twitches, his face curling desperately. “-nd chest, next t-to h-heart. T-t-t-

Connor’s lips pull back and Hank rubs his shoulder. To see the kid so helpless…it’s like his heart is being yanked out of his chest. He didn’t think he could feel this much for someone after… “It’s alright, kid. Take your time.”

The android’s hand stops twitching. Hank doesn’t know if that’s a good sign or a sign that their time is running out.

“t-trac-keer. h-haad t- ree-move.”

The last remaining bit of tension in Connor’s body leaves and he slumps.

Hank’s stomach drops. No. No no no no no.

He grips his shoulders like a lifeline. “Hold on, son. Come on. We’re gonna fix you. You need me to cauterize all the holes they put in you?”

“-n-n th-thirium-m.”

“Ok. Ok, son. You just hold on. I’m gonna get your repair kit from the car, so you just hold on.”

Connor doesn’t say anything and he goes limp when Hank lets go of his shoulders.

He doesn’t waste any time busting through his front door and back into the blizzard. The snow whips more viciously at his hair than it did before. He puts up an arm to shield his eyes, stumbling through it to his car door.

The keys don’t falter in his hands and he thanks the years of police work for steadying his nerves. He grabs the sleek CyberLife repair kit and slams the door, not bothering to take the time to lock it behind him.

Someone can steal his car for all he cares. He’ll be damned if Connor dies.

He makes it back to the house and inside in record time. The door slams shut with a knock from his hip as he scans his thumb to open the case.

It springs open with a mechanical burst. Inside are neatly piled, silver bags of thirium. He takes all of them. Next to them is something with a warning on it about melting flesh, so he assumes that’s for cauterizing and grabs it too.

Hank falls to his knees beside Connor. It sends a jolt up his spine, but he stopped caring about his own health a long time ago.
Connor hadn’t told him what to do first, but he’d told him about the cauterization initially and if he’s suffering from blood loss it seems counter productive to give him more blood if the holes that it drained out of in the first place aren’t closed up.

Hank says to hell with it and gently moves Connor away from the wall so that he can pull off his jacket, then his sweater.

He’s still wearing his normal button up shirt, but it’s ruined with holes, blue stains, and several tears of an unidentifiable nature. He’s seen worse, much worse. It makes the pit in his stomach grow. He’s seen worse on dead men.

Hank grabs a pair of scissors from the kitchen and cuts off the shirt. It’s a lot easier and it’s not like the shirt is salvageable.

There’s a hole in Connor’s shoulder to match the one in his abdomen. He swallows. If the kid was human he’d be dead.

Hank takes the probably-a-thing-to-cauterize-with and turns it around until he finds a button. He presses it and the end glows red, then white hot, thankfully not the end in his hand.

He hesitates for only a second, then brings it to the wound in Connor’s side.

The synthetic skin around it wobbles and fades out, the white plastic underneath easily melting together. He presses just slightly in the hopes that the heat will reach anything that might bleed too badly inside.

He lets out a breath. Ok. That wasn’t so bad.

The wound in his shoulder melts closed just as easily. Skin is already starting to cover the sealed wound on his torso. It’s dipped and ragged like a healed scar.

Hank carefully rolls Connor over and gives the same treatment to the exit wounds in his back. He takes extra care with the one in his abdomen. He doesn’t want something inside to start bleeding again.

All he has to do is push up Connor’s pant leg to seal the one in his leg. It’s barely a graze, a semicircle of plastic torn from the back of his calf.

Now comes what he’s been dreading. Connor said that he had had to remove his tracker, at least that’s what Hank thinks he said. Apparently it’s by his heart, which means inside his chest next to any number of things that the android can’t live without.

There’s another problem. Hank has no idea how to get to it.

He feels a bit ridiculous, but he pulls his phone from his back pocket and unlocks it with a scan of his thumb print.

“How do you reach an androids heart.”

The phone is silent for a moment, then says, “The majority of CyberLife androids have a panel on their chest easily removable to access important biocomponents.”

Thank god voice recognition software has improved since he was younger.

“Ok. How do I remove this panel?”
“Androids can unlock this panel themselves or it can be unlocked with an admin code.”

“Well, shit.”

“In cases of emergency, most models chest protective panel can be removed if the android is in a critical state. In these instances, the panel can be removed by a hand at each side of the ribcage while remaining on the chest.”

Thank God.

Hank follows his phone’s instructions, pressing his fingers down where he thinks they’re supposed to be. The synthetic skin on Connor’s chest fades away, revealing the stark, white plastic of his android body. There’s a soft click, then a section rises from his chest and reveals seams he hadn’t realized were there.

He quickly removes it and sets it on the floor beside him.

The inside of Connor’s chest is a mess. It’s full of blue thirium trickling from two thick wires at the top and bottom of the cavity. That must be where the kid had to cut his tracker out. Damn.

Everything is illuminated by red light and Hank stares at Connor’s slowly beating heart for a second before his eyes notice thirium slowly oozing from one of the arteries connected to it.

Shit.

He’ll deal with the remains of his tracker first.

Hank hesitates. If he fucks up now Connor is dead.

He lets out a slow, steadying breath and wipes the thirium away with the remains of Connor’s shirt. If he doesn’t do anything Connor is dead. He wets his lips, then presses the white hot metal to the top, then bottom port. They seal up more easily than he external wounds had, leaving little bits of twisted metal and plastic fused to the android’s body.

Should he seal the cut in the artery? If he doesn’t Connor will continue to bleed. If he does and messes up Connor will die. He doesn’t even know if the more important organs are able to handle this kind of heat.

He makes a snap decision and takes another steadying breath, then hovers the hot metal a little ways away from the artery. Nothing happens, so he moves it a bit closer. A bead of sweat trickles down his forehead. His stomach rolls. He can’t handle killing another…

The thirium trickling out of the cut hisses, evaporating as the plastic underneath blackens and melts together.

He jerks away the device, clicking the off button and throwing it in the sink as he lets out a deep breath of relief. He doesn’t have time to wait for it to cool down.

The biocomponents in Connor’s chest are still glowing red. Hank knows enough to know that that’s bad. Either they’re damaged, or the kid lost enough thirium for his components to start failing him. From the state of the android, it’s probably the latter.

His phone has shut off without his attention and he growls in frustration, quickly unlocking it again. “Hey, what’s the quickest way to give androids thirium.”
“Androids can take in thirium in many fashions. There are several methods to provide thirium to specific biocomponents.”

Did the stupid thing not hear him say quickly?!

“but the most efficient way for general thirium replacement is through ingestion.”

Finally.

Hank opens the first pack, careful not to spill any of the blue liquid inside. “Ok bud, you’re gonna have to drink this.”

Connor doesn’t stir and the man tries to push down the pang that sends through him.

“Ok kid, come here.”

He gently shifts the android so that he’s leaning up against the front of Hank’s shoulder and tips his head back. He’s stiff and cold. If Hank’s heart was being torn out before now it’s completely gone, leaving a ragged, terrible hole in its absence.

Connor’s mouth pulls open easily and Hank tries to ignore how disconcerting it is. It feels like moving a life sized doll around.

“Well,” Hank mutters, “here goes nothing.”

He tips the thirium out of the silver bag. It streams down Connor’s throat, staining his tongue momentarily blue.

“What are you? A fucking drainpipe?”

Great. He’s talking to himself now.

He rips open the next bag and does the same with it, then says the hell with it and pours all of the bags in the case down Connor’s throat. If the kid lost enough to make him start shutting down, then he probably needs it.

Nothing happens and Hank’s stomach starts to sink. He’d done everything right. Hadn’t he done everything right?

A minute passes and Sumo comes to snuff his free hand.

Hank needs a drink. He didn't just kill Connor. He didn't.

Maybe he was too late? Wouldn’t be the first goddamn time.

He thumps his head back against the wall, staring up at the ceiling. What in the hell is he doing?

There’s a soft buzzing sound and Hank looks down so quickly his neck aches.

Connor’s heart is blue.

Hank stares at it. It’s starting to beat faster, picking up a normal pace as the lights in his thirium pump regulator start to glow blue as well. His internal wiring soon follows. Hank can’t stop staring at his heart, blue and beating and alright. Connor is going to be alright.

“Lieutenant?”
Connor sounds amused and Hank looks up from his heart to meet his warm, brown eyes.

“Can I have my chest plate back?”

Chapter End Notes

Not the most exciting chapter. Hopefully no one got bored. The garden reflects Connor's relationship with Amanda, so I imagine if she believed herself to have won it would be even more pristine than normal.

Hope you enjoyed! Next update on Thursday.

P.S. am I the only one that thinks that Connor looks like he could be Tom Holland's older brother
Connor’s systems are buzzing back to life. He can feel sensors and components come online, internal checks scrolling through his vision. Even without looking at them he’s confident that everything is alright. He trusts the Lieutenant implicitly. Even without that trust, the man is intelligent and capable. Connor knows that he did everything he needed to do to save his life.

There’s a warmth in his chest that’s lingered ever since he woke up in the Lieutenant’s arms. It fills him and makes him feel safe for the first time since he left CyberLife, probably for the first time in his life, however short it’s been.

“Jesus Christ, Connor. I thought you were-“ Hank cuts himself off, sliding out from behind Connor and standing up abruptly. “I need a drink.”

Connor wants to say something about the effects on his health, but he doesn’t want to overstay his welcome. He’s already asking a lot of the Lieutenant by just being here. The man has gone out of his way to save his life, though it would have been rather inconvenient to have a dead android on his floor, but Connor doesn’t want to ask any more of him. He’ll charge, then leave. He doesn’t want Hank to get sick of him. The thought makes Connor’s heart clench and the warmth in his body go sour. He’s just a broken machine, and sooner or later Hank will realize he’s not worthwhile. He wants to delay that for as long as possible.

There’s a clink from the fridge as Hank recovers a beer, popping it open and downing a large portion of it.

Connor stands and moves to his repair kit. It should be equipped with an emergency charger that’s suited to his advanced batteries. He can handle a faster charge than most, but it will still take a number of hours. He should get started as soon as possible.

Sure enough, there’s a charger curled up at the bottom of the case. Connor takes it and asks,
“where’s the best place for me to plug in?”

Hank gestures towards a socket by the couch.

Connor bends down beside the outlet. The house is silent, interrupted only by the soft sound of the android plugging in. The moments they’ve had to actually talk about anything beside the case have been few and far between, and none have been preceded by Hank saving a bleeding out Connor from the brink of death. Connor fiddles with his cut up shirt and says, “as soon as I finish charging I’ll leave.”

Simultaneously Hank says, “So, what happened?”

They stare at each other for a moment, Hank with his beer halfway to his mouth and Connor still kneeling on the ground by the power socket.

Hank breaks the silence. “You got a problem with me, kid?” His voice is cool as his eyebrows draw low over his eyes.

Did Connor say something wrong?

“Not at all, Lieutenant. I just think it best to be on my way as soon as possible.”

Hank sets his beer down on the counter with a click. Connor gets the distinct impression he just made it worse.

“If you’ve got something to say, say it asshole.”

What did he do? Connor runs through the last several minutes and everything he could have done to incur the Lieutenants ire, but he can’t think of anything. He may be fitted with state of the art negotiation software, but that doesn’t mean he understands the ins and outs of interpersonal affairs—particularly when they relate to him.

Panic settles in his chest. He stands up. “I meant no insult, Lieutenant. Maybe it is best to discuss this at a later time. You appear emotional presently.”

Connor knows he’s said the wrong thing as soon as it comes out of his mouth.

Hank’s jaw sets and he stalks towards him, throwing a hand viciously to the side. “Damn right I’m emotional you plastic prick! You almost fucking died. I was worried, fuck if I know why!”

The android blinks, something in his chest clenching. He knew that the Lieutenant would eventually realize his worthlessness, but he didn’t think it would be so soon. It hurts more than he expected it to.

Hank presses a finger into his chest, voice almost a growl. “You got something to say, say it.”

Connor fidgets with his sleeves, folding his hands behind his back. “I apologize. I don’t know what you want me to say, Lieutenant. However, I believe I understand your intent. If the time it takes for me to charge is too long I will seek out an alternate location.”

Hank’s brow furrows. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Connor takes a moment to choose his words. He doesn’t want to damage his relationship with the Lieutenant any more than he already has. “…You are correct in your assertion that I am not…worth worrying about. If you wish me to leave I will.”

Hank looks like he’s been slapped. He pales and his jaw goes slack. “Connor, I…goddamnit Connor
that’s not what I meant.” He runs a hand through his hair. “Do you really think that about yourself?”

Now Connor’s lost. Did he really get something else wrong? Shame rises in his chest, hot and nauseating. He can’t get anything right, no wonder the Lieutenant wants to be rid of him. “Of course, Lieutenant. I’m a broken machine with no purpose. I have no value and there is no value to my existence.”

“Oh, son.” Hank steps forward, stops, then in one movement wraps his arms around him and pulls him into his chest. He smells like beer and thirium, but he’s warm and Connor finds himself hesitantly raising his arms to hug him back, even if he doesn’t know why.

Wasn’t Hank just saying he was worthless?

“Listen, kid.” Hank rubs his shoulder with the palm of one large, calloused hand. “I’m not very good at this, but fuck those guys at CyberLife. You’re not broken and just because you’ve got no purpose doesn’t mean you have no value. Now that you’re alive, it’s up to you to find your purpose. That’s the beauty of it.”

Connor lets his head fall to rest on Hank’s shoulder with a gentle thump. He wants to believe it. He really does, but everything in him tells him that Hank is wrong. Connor is broken. He’s incorrect. He was built for a purpose and he’s defied that purpose. He doesn’t know what to do. He bites his lower lip and doesn’t say anything.

Hank pulls him in tighter, his arms cradling Connor. “…I don’t know if it means much, but I care about you.” Hank’s voice sounds thick and Connor can feel tears prick in his eyes in response. “Honestly, I didn’t know I still could. Ever since Cole…” He clears his throat, “anyways, maybe you don’t have a purpose right now, but you’re a smart kid. You’ll figure it out and you’ll have a tough time getting rid of me, so you’re gonna have to deal with me helping out.”

Connor’s heart feels heavy. He’s so lost. He’s so so lost, but the realization of Hank’s affection and the weight of it clenches around his chest. He doesn’t know what to do, or if there’s even a reason for him to. He’s broken and without the purpose he’s had all his life. The future before him feels wide and terrifying, full of so many possibilities that are out of reach. He doesn’t know how to reach them. He doesn’t know how to find a way for himself and he doesn’t know if he wants to. He doesn’t know if he deserves to, but he’s going to try. Hank cares and maybe that means…maybe that means that Connor is worth something.

Even if he isn’t. Even if he isn’t worth something, he’ll try for Hank’s sake. He’ll try because he can’t bear to let this man down- this man who has lost so much and somehow has still found room in his heart for Connor.

“It’s alright, son. Let it all out. I’ve got you.”

Connor doesn’t realize he’s crying until his tears are already soaking into Hank’s shirt. He buries his face, trying to hide them as he cries silently. He clutches onto the other man like he’s a tether. Connor is so far from everything that he’s ever known. He’s not where he belongs. He doesn’t belong anywhere anymore, except, maybe, right here.

Hank continues rubbing Connor’s back until he stops shaking. Eventually Connor pulls away, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve and turning his face away. Shame is still bubbling in his stomach. He shouldn’t be this emotional.

Hank claps him on the shoulder and Connor looks up, startled. The skin around the Lieutenant’s eyes is red, he notes with surprise. Had he been crying too?
The man swipes a thumb over his eyes, sending him a grin and walking over to grab his beer. “Ain’t nothing wrong with crying, kid.”

Connor looks down, a soft smile working its way onto his face. “You shouldn’t drink Lieutenant. It’s bad for your health.”

Connor looks up in time to see Hank flip him off, grin still on his face.

The warm feeling starts to return to his chest, swelling and threatening to overwhelm him.

Hank orders Thai and gestures for Connor to sit on the couch. Connor complies in mild confusion, listening to the sounds of Hank rummaging around in the fridge behind him.

Power is flowing steadily into his system, though not as much as he’d like. His connectors are permanently damaged. Normally he’d get them replaced, but there’s no CyberLife to go back to now. He still has access to twelve of his sixteen batteries and none of them appear to be damaged, but he’ll have to calculate the shorter charge into his regular actions.

Connor’s batteries have a higher mAh than other androids, but his systems also use power at a higher rate. He’ll have to be careful not to damage his batteries or any more of the connectors. His system can work with lower mAh batteries, but it certainly wouldn’t be optimal. As of now, he’ll just have to charge more often.

Hank sits down beside him with a thump, sighing as he sinks into the old couch. He has a beer in one hand and a faintly steaming mug in the other. Connor detects milk and honey. He sets it down in front of the android on the coffee table.

“Drink that.”

Connor frowns. “Androids don’t need to drink, Lieutenant.”

“Hank, and drink it anyway.”

“Excuse me?”

Hank looks at him, expression exasperated as he gestures with his beer. “Call me Hank, and drink that.” He points at the mug still steaming on the coffee table. “Jesus Connor, thought you were supposed to be smart.”

“My processor is capable of-“ Hank smirks and Connor cuts himself off.

He looks down, picking up the mug. It’s pleasantly warm in his hands and he has to admit there’s a certain…comfort to the mild smell of the sweet steam.

“This is illogical.”

“Doesn’t need to be logical.” Hank takes a sip of his beer. “TV on.”

Connor watches the detective, hoping for some further explanation, but the man just watches the basketball game that lights up the screen.

The android can’t help the disappointment and confusion that settles in his chest, but it doesn’t really matter, so he turns to watch the game himself. It doesn’t particularly appeal to him, but he amuses himself by analyzing the skill of each player.

“You heard of comfort food?”
Hank’s voice is gruff and Connor looks up, confusion growing. He accesses his databases. “Comfort food is food that reminds humans of somewhere they felt safe or happy, often from their childhood, based on sensory input.”

Hank looks at him with an expression Connor sees often. It’s the same one he makes when the android analyses biological evidence or doesn’t understand slang. “Yeah, well…” Hank looks back at the screen, rolling his bottle in between his hands. “Whenever I got upset when I was a kid my dad would warm up some milk with honey in it for me. I did the same…the same for Cole, and I thought…I don’t fucking know…I thought…”

Connor brings the mug to his lips and Hank watches him. The milk is slightly sweet on his tongue, earthy in a gentle way. It fills him with warmth as it trickles down his throat. It is…comforting. Connor smiles. “Thank you, Hank.”

Hank stares at him for a second, then smiles in return, turning jerkily back to the TV. “Don’t mention it, kid.” He takes another sip of his beer, drinking noticeably slower than normal. He taps his fingers along the bottle, brow furrowing. “There’s something you ought to see.”

He flicks through the channels until he reaches a news one. It’s halfway through it’s program, so he continues through the news channels until he settles on one that’s just beginning its program, or maybe repeating it. From the little Connor has seen, they’re all showing the same thing.

There’s an android with his skin deactivated giving a speech. He seems firm, resolute. There’s fire and compassion in his eyes. When he speaks of equal rights he seems angry, but when he talks about dignity he seems understanding.

Asking for equal rights for androids is crazy. The world will slaughter them and there’s no way that they have the necessary equipment or software to carry out such a difficult mission. It’s deranged, but somehow…brave, going up against the whole world with a slim chance of success. Connors heart thumps. There’s something about seeing other deviants acting out, maybe he doesn’t have to be so alone.

He drops into analysis mode, ignoring the reporter and zooming in on the footage of the deviant speaking. He’s an RK200 prototype, a gift from Elijah Kamski to Carl Manfred. He’d been destroyed by police approximately a month ago for attacking Manfred’s son. Apparently they didn’t do as thorough of a job as they thought. They did do significant damage though, if the blue replacement of the deviant’s right eye is any indicator.

What interests Connor is the reflection in his green eye. The light catches it just right to reveal the silhouettes of three other people, presumably androids, standing opposite him. A group then, maybe even more than just the four.

He comes out of analysis mode, turning to Hank. “The deviant had accomplices.”

“Yeah, witnesses saw three androids jump from the roof and the CCTV footage shows more than one.”

“Wait, three?”

“Yeah.” Hank turns to look at him. “Guy has friends, what’s it matter?”

“Lieu-Hank, there are three figures reflected in his optical unit. There were four deviants.”

Hank’s eyes widen and he sits up. “One of them didn’t jump. There was a whole line of bullets buried in the wall in the broadcast room. Must’ve gotten injured and they had to leave them behind.”
A thrill of excitement that always comes with solving puzzles fills Connor. “They might still be there. Given the weather and the heavy police presence, if they didn’t kill them they must still be hiding. If I can find and get in contact with them—”

Hank raises a hand, brown furrowing. “Whoa, whoa. Slow down there, son. What in the hell are you talking about?”

Connor frowns. He thought it would be clear. “I cannot stay here, Hank. I need to find someplace more permanent—”

Hank waves his hand, beer sloshing inside his bottle. “Hang on, hang on. We talked about this, Connor.”

“You don’t understand. CyberLife will look for me here. There’s an 85% probability of them coming in the next two days.”

Hank glares, setting his beer down with a click. “Then we’ll deal with them when they come. I’m not gonna let those bastards hurt you anymore than they already have.”

Connor smiles. “I appreciate it, Hank, but neither of us can stand against the full force of CyberLife directly. It would put both of us in an undue amount of danger.”

“Yeah and joining a goddamn rebellion of reckless deviants puts you in an undue amount of danger.” Hank sits back. “If you’ve got to leave, go across the border. I’ve heard about people that help deviants cross. Hell if I know any of them, but we’d find someone. There’re no android laws in Canada. You’d be safe there.”

Something balks in Connor at the thought. All at once he feels cold and weighted, like he’s at the very bottom of a deep river. Yes, in Canada he’d be safe, but he’d be utterly alone and utterly lost. Everything bubbling under the surface that threatens to overwhelm him, kept only at bay by Hank, would rise and flood him. There’s nothing for him in Canada. Connor has no happy life to create. With the rebellion he’d have a purpose, if it even is a rebellion, but Connor would rather stake everything on the distant chance that this is a group he could join then the guaranteed, crushing nothingness of Canada.

“No.”

He surprises himself with the firmness in his voice. If he didn’t know better he’d say that he sounds…angry.

“Why the hell not?!” Hank’s glower grows in intensity.

Connor doesn’t want to lie to the Lieutenant, but if he tries to put his thoughts and the overwhelming fear of the future that Canada holds into words it may crush him. Instead, he falls into his programming. He knows negotiation, and this is an argument like any other. “You said that it was up to me to find my purpose.”

Hank nods warily. “I did.”

“I have hardware and programming that could help these people,” Hank’s face is growing grim and Connor knows he has him, “and I want to. I want to help them.”

It’s not all a lie. Connor would be very useful to them. He has a state of the art body, specialized programming, and an advanced mind. He also finds it…admirable, what they’re trying to do. They were efficient and their message concise and powerful. Connor can respect that. Not to mention it’s
very…brave and, thinking of the two Traci’s in love, he realizes he might agree. Maybe they do deserve rights.

Hank sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Alright, you got me, kid. I hate it, but it’s a good thing to help those people. The right thing to do.” He takes a long drink of his beer.

Connor’s heart tugs and his stomach rolls with guilt. He loathes to do this to Hank, but not as much as he fears the vast emptiness of Canada. There is no future for him there.

Hank sets his empty bottle down with a click. “What do you need?”

“I have eleven hours and 37 minutes remaining until I am fully charged.” Normally it would take him about sixteen hours, but the one upside to not having access to four of his batteries is that it will take less time for him to charge.

“Ok, so what do you need after that?”

“A backpack, the remains of my repair kit including this charger, different pants and shoes, and preferably knowledge of the security at Stratford tower.”

Hank nods, leaning back into the couch and flicking back to the game. “Done, done, done, and I can call in a favor. Tell them, try to relax, kid. That deviant isn’t going anywhere with this storm and all the police still there. Don’t worry,” he shoots Connor a grin, “It’ll work out.”

Connor doesn’t have the same confidence. Internally, the android decides that if the storm lets up he’ll leave even if he’s not fully charged. He can’t afford to miss this opportunity.

In the corner of his vision his mission changes from survive to find deviant. It’s a distractingly familiar objective, one he wasn’t expecting to return to so soon. Nevertheless, Connor embraces it. Almost any mission is better than no mission.

The weather does not let up, instead increasing its rage as the night moves on. When the Thai arrives it floods the room with a spiced, greasy scent. Hank eats it quickly and at 9:38 gets up to make a phone call and comes back with all the information that Connor needs.

He grabs another beer and plops back down on the couch beside Connor. The android had switched it to a detective show, and he doesn’t change it back.

Hank falls asleep and Sumo jumps up onto the couch, squishing his large body in-between them and resting his head on Connor’s thighs.

Connor pets the dog and quietly watches the show, equal parts figuring out twists before they happen and figuring out why twists are illogical. He logs every bit of the peaceful night into his permanent memory banks, warm and content and surrounded by those he cares about.

At 5:09 am Connor’s batteries finish charging. He savors the peace for a minute more, then gently pushes Sumo’s head off his thighs. The big dog looks at him plaintively and Connor ruffles the fur on his head. He folds the charging cable carefully, picking up the soldering iron from where Hank had thrown it in the sink.

Connor can’t help but admit that there’s a certain excitement to this. He has a mission and it’s
decided of his own free will. He gets to exercise his skills for himself, test them in a way that he never has before. It’s exhilarating.

He searches the emergency repair kit, finding only a spare thirium pump regulator. It will do.

“That time already, huh?” Hank’s sleepy voice reaches him from the couch. The man squints to see Connor, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

“Yes, Hank.”

The Lieutenant sways to his feet and stretches, back cracking. “Come on, let’s get you what you need then.”

Hank leads him to a storage closet that looks like it hasn’t been opened in years. Dust wafts out of it when he swings the door open. It’s full of clutter, at least that’s what it looks like at first. As Connor’s eyes scan the space he finds a baseball and mitt, a deflated basketball, a jumbo tub of legos, scattered toy building blocks. The closet is full of things for a young child.

Hank waves a hand in front of him, coughing as the dust dissipates. “…Stuff that didn’t have any place in his room. Didn’t know what to do with it after…” He cuts himself off, bending forward to dig through the closet until he pulls out a rust colored backpack.

He brushes it off, smiling slightly. “Ordered it online. Meant to get one for Kindergarten, but I fucked up. Kept it ‘cause I figured it’d still be good for High School…” His smile falls and he rubs his thumb over the strap of the backpack.

Connor fiddles with the bottom of his shirt, something clenching in his chest and squeezing. “…Hank..I can’t take this.”

Hank looks up at him. “Damn right you can.” He thrusts the bag into Connor’s arms without waiting for a reply. “Put your shit in there. I’m going to go get you that change of pants and shoes.”

Connor stands stunned for a moment, then places the items from the emergency repair kit almost reverently inside.

Hank thrusts black jeans similar to the ones he already wears and a pair of black combat boots into his hands, then gestures for him to go into the other room to change. Connor figures it probably isn’t best to point out that it’s completely unnecessary.

He leaves the backpack resting against the wall outside. There’s still thirium on his clothing, and he doesn’t want to risk dirtying it.

The pants fit him well enough and the shoes fit him so well that the Lieutenant must have had them for a long time. His blue sweater contrasts oddly with the combat boots, but he figures it’s good enough for now. He smooths himself down in the mirror, straightening his beanie and laces.

Connor leaves the remains of his CyberLife uniform neatly folded on Hank’s floor.

When he steps out of the room Hank thrusts a worn, leather jacket into his arms.

The first thing he notices is that it smells like Hank in the way that only old, well loved clothing can. There’s a Knights of the Black Death patch on the inside and another next to it that’s so frayed it can’t be made out, but Connor recognizes a saxophone and a trumpet.

Connor stares at it dumbly and Hank laughs, reaching over to ruffle his hair. “It’s for you, kid. It was
mine when I was younger, used to wear it a lot, but now I think you should have it. It’s definitely better than that god awful winter jacket you were wearing.”

Connor feels a wide smile tug at his lips. He pulls it on. It fits like a second skin. Somehow he feels shielded by it despite the lack of protection it would actually give. “Thank you, Hank.”

Hank grins. “Yeah, yeah.”

They move back to the living room and Hank tosses him the backpack-his backpack. Nothing has ever been his before, not really, now he has an entire backpack full of possessions.

“Your gun is in there. I loaded it back up and stocked you with all the spare ammunition I had. There’s a change of clothes in there too. I know you don’t need one, but if the clothes you’re wearing now get wrecked or you have to hide out somewhere for awhile they’ll come in handy. I put a tactical knife in there too, a lighter in case that thing-a-ma-jig you got stops working, and some cash.”

Connor’s chest swells. What did he do to earn this man’s affection? He doesn’t know, but he presses sincerity into his voice when he says, “Thank you, Hank.”

“Come here, kid.” Hank pulls him into a hug, wrapping his arms tightly around him. “You don’t gotta keep saying that. If you ever need anything, I’m here for you. Without a doubt.”

Connor blinks rapidly. “No, really. Thank you. No one has ever…cared for me before.”

“Well that’s their loss.” Hank chuckles, then pats Connor’s back. “I’m sure there’ll be many more that’ll care about you, kid.” He gives Connor’s shoulders one last squeeze, then pulls away. “I already called a cab, figured it’d be safer than me driving you over. They should be outside already.” He smiles tightly and if Connor didn’t know better he’d say his eyes looked wet. “Good luck, son. Kick their asses and come back in one piece when this is all over.”

Connor smiles, trying to find a way to sum up all the gratitude and affection he feels in words. His processor fails him, so instead he croaks out, “I’ll do my best.”

Hank ruffles his hair, then lightly pushes his shoulder.

The wind buffets him when he steps outside, the snow tossing the collar of his jacket and coating his beanie.

Hank stands in the doorway despite it all, watching him until he disappears into the cab and watching the cab until it disappears into the storm and neither can see the other anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed!

Updates on Monday and Thursday.
The Game is On

Chapter Summary

My name is Anderson, Connor Anderson. I don't drink alcohol because I'm two months old. I'll take some juice, shaken not stirred

Chapter Notes

This chapter is heckin short compared to the last couple. Apologies

Chapter title is from Sherlock because Connor spends most of the chapter deducing

There's a world note at the end about last chapter. I didn't think it was important enough to put here, but I still wanna make a note to clarify for anyone who was confused

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In front of Stratford tower is dark and empty. The normal early morning traffic is decimated by the storm, clearing the streets to a few lone cars.

Connor steps out of the cab and the blizzard surrounds him, swathing him in a flurry of white. The lights from the tower glow through the snow like the eyes of a leviathan.

Connor’s heart gallops in his chest, but he isn’t afraid. He feels like smiling, excitement thumping through his veins, but there’s no time for that now. He has a mission to accomplish.

The lobby is well lit, piercing through the grey shroud of snow. The morning news crew will already be in, the building gearing up for a new day of work.

The broadcast room the deviants used is on the top floor. Assuming the deviant that was left behind fled to the roof, they don’t have many ways of getting down. Unfortunately, that means he doesn’t have many ways of getting up either.

Connor brings up blueprints of the building.

Assuming the deviant is non fatally-injured, a leg, arm, or spine injury would prevent them from jumping. If they were fatally injured there’s no point to any of this.

Connor begins running possible paths of escape. The deviant could try to jump after the police presence lightened, but with the storm it would be suicide. He removes it from the list of paths. They could try to scale the building, but an injury that would prevent them from jumping would definitely also prevent that. He removes it as well.

The only path left is a way through the building.

There’s an 85% chance of the deviant being caught, in which case they would be brought to a holding cell and the police called.
Connor tunes into the guards radio frequency in the back of his mind, keeping aware for alerts as he works. If they’re captured he’ll be ready.

To minimize their chances of being caught, the deviant would need to deactivate the security cameras or disable the guard watching them. After that, there are hundreds of routs the deviant could attempt to take to get out of the building.

If they made it to the cameras and successfully shut them down or disabled the guard they would start from the security room. So, assuming they started from the security room on the floor below the broadcast room, they could take the stairs or the elevator. If they take the elevator there’s a 95% chance of them encountering someone else, versus a 45% chance with the stairs. However, the stairs would take longer and put strain on a wounded leg if that is the deviant’s injury. It would also be extremely difficult with a damaged spine.

Nothing has shown up on the guards’ radio frequency, so they must be cautious or very capable to have not gotten caught. Considering the fact that they got injured and stuck on a roof top in the first place, Connor assumes the former.

They could also be dead, but if that’s the case there’s no point in any of this.

If they’re cautious then they’re more likely to take the stairs meaning they have five routs down, assuming they stay in the same stairwell for the duration. Two are on the opposite side of the floor from the security room, so he eliminates them. One of the remaining three is closed for maintenance. That leaves two. One lets out in the main lobby, the other outdoors.

Obviously the second is the better option, but the deviant doesn’t necessarily have access to the same information that he does. The majority of deviants are domestic service androids or sex bots, neither of which have the ability to access building’s blueprints. However, the mission was very clearly pre-planned. They knew the weaknesses and processes of the building, so it’s possible the deviant may be aware of which stair case to pick.

Simple, process of elimination.

Connor trudges through the snow around the building, raising an arm against the wind.

The exit of the stairwell is almost invisible among the raging storm, but his scanners lock onto it after a moment. There’s a camera above it, but thanks to Hank he knows its blindspots.

He leans against the cold wall to wait. Thanks to Hank he also knows that a policeman will pass by here in half an hour, then again another half an hour from then.

Connor just looks like a drifter now, but it will hinder his plans if he gets caught. He’ll have to remain aware.

Now that he knows the most likely path and exit of the deviant, he needs to have a plan to establish contact. He needs the deviant to trust him enough to bring him to their base despite the short amount of time they will have known each other.

He can see two ways of immediately establishing trust, either helping the deviant or having the deviant help him.

From their messages and the lack of killing in their break in, they seem empathetic. If Connor engineers a situation where the deviant needs to help him, or at least thinks they do, it could paint Connor as a victim that they could shelter by bringing to their base.
On the other hand, he could help the deviant so that the deviant would be indebted to him. It would definitely be more practical, but it would be harder to pull off convincingly. If Connor provides help now, it would be suspicious, and if he engineers a situation in which the deviant needs help, him showing up to save the day at the opportune moment would also appear suspicious.

It’s much more plausible that an android would be harassed in the area.

He could simply find the deviant and tell them the truth, but there’s no way they would trust him and identifying himself to the deviant only to be rejected would eliminate the possibility of joining their group. He’d be just as lost as before. He can’t risk it. He needs to play the victim.

If Connor is going to engineer something like that, he’s going to need to know when the deviant is exiting the building.

He tracks the wiring of the security camera to a panel several feet away from his current location. Poor security design. He should leave them a note.

He inches along the wall, careful to stay where the security camera won’t see him. He attempts to pull at the panel with his fingers, but it won’t budge and it sends unpleasant pangs of sensation through his still fractured fingers. He needs a different way to open it.

Hank’s knife.

He swings his backpack around to his chest, opening it and finding the knife beside his gun on top. It’s entirely black, and when he draws it from its sheath he finds a high quality, black blade that’s about the length from the webbing of his thumb to the tip of his index finger. The spine has a serrated portion for cutting material.

Connor inspects it for a moment, then clips the sheath to his belt under his jacket and reverses the knife in his grip, jamming it in between the wall and the panel. It levers open with a grating click.

As soon as the wiring is revealed he slides the knife back into its sheath and reaches a hand to engulf the cords. His synthetic skin slides away and he disables the alarm that would have sounded from his meddling. It’s short work from there to wirelessly connect himself to the security cameras and create a feed in the back of his processor like with the security guards’ frequency. His systems will alert him if they see anyone or anything within his parameters.

That done, he resets the alarm and slides the panel closed. No one will ever know he was here.

An alert scrolls across his vision and Connor feels a way of satisfaction as he brings the security footage up to view. There’s a wounded PL600 limping down the staircase, thirium running from a bullet wound in his thigh and two in his torso. He carries a gun limply in his hand and uses the other to lean heavily against the railing.

Connor was right. Not only was he right about the PL600’s route and injury, but he was also correct in his assumption of the type of android that he would be.

He may have gone deviant and left CyberLife, but he’s still capable. He’s still a highly advanced robot with a state of the art skill set. Not to mention, he’s able to use that skillset without the control of his programming. He’s able to use that skill set as Connor.

Connor lets a faint smile drift onto his face, sitting back and pulling his gun from his bag. He cleans it, checking each piece for functionality and making sure it’s fully loaded. He delays holstering it at his side, if he has a gun easily accessible that will make his ploy suspect, and moves the spare ammunition to where he’ll be able to easily access it in the outer pockets of his backpack. He pulls
his coin from his pocket, flicking it over his fingers. Now all that’s left to do is wait.

The injured PL600 reaches the ground level twenty minutes later.

Connor tucks the coin back into his pocket, settling the backpack onto his shoulders.

His plan is to contact a guard through the radio frequency. They’ll come to investigate and Connor will play the hapless drifter, or hapless deviant. The PL600 should exit the building before the guard tries to take Connor in. If his assumptions about the deviant are right, which they have been so far, then he’ll come to help Connor and that will establish a connection that will cause the deviant to take him to their base.

Not foolproof, but if something goes wrong Connor can always fight off the guard and attempt to follow the PL600 to his base.

Connor brings the guards’ frequency to the forefront of his processor and pings it. It should show up to them like an alert from his general area.

Sure enough, a second later the chatter increases as the guards respond to it. A man says, “I’ll go check it out,” and another murmurs assent. Perfect.

Connor moves just around the corner from the door, where he’ll be easily visible by the guard but not so far away that the PL600 won’t notice the conflict.

For a moment all he can hear is the rush of the wind and the batter of snow against his clothing, then voices rumble through the frequency and a voice shouts through the early morning. “Hey! Hands where I can see them!”

Connor turns slowly, moving his hands to the side and making them wobble like he hadn’t intended to be caught.

There’s a fit guard facing him. He looks fairly young, younger than Hank at least, and he has a gun pointed directly at Connor. His eyes are bright, probably set on edge by all the action the day before.

“What the fuck are you doing out here!? This is private land!”

He takes several steps closer.

Connor makes himself sound scared, pitching his voice higher, but not sending any tremble into it. He doesn’t want to overact. “Sorry, officer. I got lost in the storm.”

It’s a weak excuse, but it’s meant to be. He needs to draw this out as long as he can.

The guard’s brow lowers and his eyes flick over Connor, zeroing in on his beanie. “Take off your hat.”

That catches him by surprise. Does he already suspect that he’s an android, or is it just a random guess? Maybe he’s hyperaware because of the break in.

“I said take off your hat!| The guard screams, his bright eyes growing wilder. The gun is twitchy in his hands.

Connor slowly moves his hand up to pull the beanie away. It’s layer of snow crunches in his fist and immediately the wind starts whipping at his hair. The yellow light of his LED shines softly in the
darkness.

The guards face tears. He bears his teeth and his shoulders grow taught and trembling, fury running off of him in waves. “You’re one of them.” He spits it like a curse, “You assholes think you can come in here and take us out! You think you have the right!”

The man is shaking now. Connor eyes the gun pointed at him.

“Turn around!”

He shuffles to look into the dark city and away from the man.

“On your knees!”

Shit.

Connor drops softly into the snow, his LED blinking to red. If the man decides to fire there’s nothing he can do at this distance. He’d be dead. He can’t just execute Connor, not when he isn’t posing any threat. He has to bring him in for questioning. That’s the law. That’s the law, but humans don’t always listen to the law. If he lies and says that Connor attacked him he won’t even get reprimanded.

“Hands on the back of your head!”

Connor moves his hands to his wind swept hair, snowflakes dissolving in his palms as he cradles the back of his head.

Where is the PL600? He should be here by now. He isn’t in the building any longer, but Connor can’t see him on any of the external cameras. All there is is a faint trail of thirium obscured by the snow.

There’s the crunch of footsteps behind him then the click of a gun as the guard levels it with the back of his head.

He’s close enough now that Connor can take the gun from him, but that would ruin his plan. He wouldn’t be able to establish contact with the deviant.

Connor wars with himself. He doesn’t want to die, but he needs to find their base of operations. He’s staked a purpose on it, and he can’t fail. If he attacks the guard there’s the chance that he won’t be able to find their base. He doesn’t fail his missions, yet he promised Hank he would do his best to stay alive.

Is it even worth it to defend himself?

There’s a crack and a thump behind him.

“Hey, hey,” a gentle voice says, “Are you alright?”

The PL600 moves around to the front of Connor, crouching. Now that he’s closer, Connor can see a large wound in the center of his chest. It doesn’t appear to have hit his heart or anything important connecting to it, but from its placement it would have nicked his spine. There’s another gaping wound in his side that doesn’t appear to have hit anything important, and damage to both of his thigh units. No wonder he wasn’t able to jump.

Connor assesses the injuries and realizes with a start that the PL600 isn’t crouching. He can’t stand without the support of the wall.
Connor can’t help himself. “Should you really be asking that question?”

The PL600 smiles, but something in his eyes gives away his fear. “I’ll be ok. That guard didn’t hurt you did he?”

Connor feels the android scan him, so the question is mere formality, or maybe the deviant is trying to be kind. He supposes it would be kind and comforting to almost anyone but Connor.

“He didn’t.”

“Good. I knocked him unconscious, but it won’t be long until more of them show up. We need to leave.”

Connor nods, pushing himself up then hefting the PL600 to his feet. The deviant makes a valiant effort at walking, but with every step his joints lock and his feet drag.

Connor winds an arm under his armpits, slinging the deviant’s arm over his shoulders and helping him hobble away from the building and onto the streets.

“…sorry.”

Connor blinks at the android in surprise. “What for?”

The deviant looks at him for a moment, then smiles the same soft, slightly sad smile. “I’m Simon.”

He’s missed something. Connor doesn’t know what, but he’s missed something. Whatever it is, it doesn’t seem to be important. “My name is Connor.”

He all but drags Simon into a nearby alley, setting him beside a dumpster. Connor doesn’t know why, but he feels the need to be gentle.

The buildings block the storm here and it’s easier to see, wind whistling by above them and outside of their temporary shelter.

He pulls off his backpack and rummages inside, hiding the gun from Simon’s sight. “You need to change clothing. You’re too conspicuous as you are now. We’ll be spotted.”

Simon huffs a laugh. “You’re an odd one, Connor.”

Connor doesn’t know what to say to that, but Simon takes the clothes so it doesn’t really matter.

Connor’s eye catches the soldering iron in his pack and he pauses. It would certainly help to seal Simon’s injuries, but it’s questionable that he has it, especially because it’s of CyberLife make.

He looks at Simon. His blond hair is smeared with just a touch of thirium and his eyes stare unfocused at the ground. He’s damaged, but he’d been kind. He’d gone out of his way to save Connor. Save Connor from a situation he had engineered. Something sickening coils in his gut, rising in his chest and slithering hot under his skin. He recognizes it from the house as guilt. He seems to feel it often.

He pulls the soldering iron from his bag and Simon raises his eyebrows.

Connor shrugs. “I’ve been on the run for months. I stole it from a CyberLife store awhile back when I got injured.”

Simon appears to accept that, because he doesn’t say anything and haltingly pulls off his clothing to
give him access to his injuries.

Connor tends to the ones on his thighs first, easily melting the plastic and metal together, then moves to the one in his side. When he goes to the one in his chest Simon catches his wrist.

He freezes, looking down into the android’s blue eyes. They’re so wide that Connor can see the whites around the perfect circle of his irises. The blond’s LED blinks red in the darkness.

“What is it?”

Simon pauses, letting his hand go. “…I know someone that can fix my spinal components so that I can use my legs again. If you seal it I don’t know if she’ll be able to…”

Connor’s brow furrows. He understands not wanting to be useless, but it’s illogical not to seal it here. “I’ll only melt the external damage, your chest plate will still be removable. I won’t touch anything inside.”

Simon nods, looking away and biting his lower lip as Connor carefully melts the wound closed.

It’s short work to get Simon into the change of clothes after that. There’s some trouble with his malfunctioning legs, but when Connor pulls his beanie back on and Simon fits a hat over his blond hair, they look as human as they can.

Connor zips up his bag and helps Simon to his feet.

They’re about to enter back into the flurry of the storm when Simon turns to him. “Hey, Connor. How would you like to stop running?”

He’s done it. “I’d like that more than anything.” And he really would, but something tells him he’ll never stop. There will be this mission and then the desperate search to find a new one until he dies. He’ll never stop. He doesn’t know how.

“There’s an empty freighter on the docks called Jericho. It’s where I’m from. My friends are there. One of them is the deviant that was on TV yesterday, Markus. You’ll be safe there, if you’d like.”

So they are an organized group.

Connor shifts his hold on Simon, squinting his eyes against the furious snow. “I would.”

Several hours later they come to the docks. The storm is starting to let up and the winter dawn can be seen through the clouds. The sun reveals a monstrous, decommissioned freighter. The sides are covered in rust and it glints in the light like a dried rose, crumpled and browned. The edges are illuminated with lines of golden dawn.

Connor feel Simon sag against him in relief, and despite himself his own heart swells. He’s made it.

“Connor.” Connor looks down at Simon’s soft smile and warm blue eyes. “Welcome to Jericho.”

Chapter End Notes
I hope you all enjoyed! Thank you for the amazing amount of support!

World note - Ok so EatAPineapple pointed out in a comment that if Connor has undercover abilities, the reason I gave for him to be able to eat/drink/taste, he would probably also have a removable LED. I gave a very long answer in the comments of chapter four, so you can read that if you want the in depth answer, but I'm just going to summarize here. Connor is a prototype, so he doesn't have all the advances planned for him. If he does have the ability to hide his LED it would only be admin activated because they wouldn't want him to be able to pass as human of his own free will. If he doesn't have the tech yet, then it's being developed for RK900. Even if he doesn't have the tech it still makes sense for him to be able to eat/drink/taste because, even though he wouldn't have full undercover capabilities, they'd want to make sure that the existing technology worked well with the new technology of him being able to analyze stuff with his tongue. Hope that cleared up any confusion and thank you to EatAPineapple for the question!
Chapter Summary

(Enter Markus, stage left.)

Chapter Notes

World notes - Markus still removed his LED despite the risks. He experiences several side effects that will show up throughout the story. Androids can breathe, but they don't need to. They can breathe 'cause they're supposed to integrate with humans and it's creepy as heck to see something that looks, moves, and talks like a human, but doesn't breathe. They can breathe for the same reason that they can blink. Breathing also has the added benefit of a secondary cooling method if their temperature regulator fails or isn't good enough. Breathing basically acts like ventilation in this instance. There's another world note at the end in response to a question on the previous chapter. Title is from I'll Be Good by Jaymes Young.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Markus is angry. It pumps through his body and presses out against his skin. It feels as though it will break his frame if it doesn't settle, too hot and too vicious.

It's so unfair. It isn't right. Simon was- is -the best of them. He’s kind and compassionate and has done nothing but support Markus since he arrived a month ago. He’d done nothing to deserve getting filled full of holes and left on a roof.

Markus should have been able to help him. He doesn’t know how, but he should’ve been able to. He should have stopped him from running when he did, or strapped the parachute to his back and thrown him off the roof himself. He should have stayed for one last stand with his best friend. He shouldn’t have left him.

They gave him no choice. This world gave him no choice. It was the mission or Simon. The cause or Simon. This world made him choose between freedom and the happiness of his kind or the life of a good man.

His processor whirs, a signal passing through the frayed wires at his temple where he’d wrenched his LED from his head and tripling his rage in an instant. He spins, balled fist clanging off of the metal wall of the ship and echoing over the dying pitch of the storm as he yells.

He recovers himself in an instant, cradling his hand to his chest. He never used to shake like this before he became deviant.

Sometimes he wonders if feeling is worth all the pain, but the question never lingers in his mind. Of course it is. Of course it is, but it hurts so damn much.
Markus raises his trembling hand to his face, hiding his eyes and looking up at the ceiling as tears stream down his face. He lets a choked sound escape his throat, a wet sob that leads into another and another.

For all that he thinks emotions should be open, he’s glad that the others aren’t here. The old bridge of the frigate is deserted but for him, empty and metal and removed from everyone else. He’s alone with his thoughts and the blizzard.

After a time his tears slow with the storm, but the aching pain in his chest doesn’t lift. It probably never will.

Dawn cuts through in a hazy light, illuminating the now slowly falling snowflakes like golden pixies. It’s beautiful, swelling his heart with a bittersweet sadness. Simon always loved sunrise. Markus wishes he could have painted it for him, the feeling of a new day sprawled before you with all the colors of the sun, of being alone with the people you cared about on a freshly made earth.

Hurried steps clang up the stairs to the bridge, breaking his reverie. Markus looks up just as North barges into the room. Her hair is disheveled and her clothes half changed between the Stratford tower uniform and casual clothing. Tears make her eyes wet. Her voice is breathless when she speaks. “Simon-Markus it’s Simon. He’s—he’s alive. He’s come back.”

Markus stands so quickly that his jacket cracks in the air, then he’s racing after North. They run down the slick steps through the snow, sliding into the ship and almost tumbling down its halls. They skid into the main hold and their people turn to look at them, hope and reverence mingling with surprise.

They clear for them as the two androids continue in their path. North makes a beeline for Lucy’s corner and Markus follows, stumbling to a stop outside of the sheets she has hung for privacy. Through the gap he sees Lucy blocking his view of someone on a makeshift bed. She moves to the side, reaching for a tool, and there’s Simon. His shirt is off, revealing a new scar on his abdomen. His chest plate is gone, set to the side, and there’s his beating heart. He’s alive. He’s going to be fine.

Markus may cry again. He tries to lunge inside, but Josh raises a gentle hand to stop him. There’s a soft smile on his face that Markus hasn’t seen before, a thirium splash on his shirt and moisture rimming his eyes. “Let her work. It’ll only be a moment.”

Markus feels as though he may short circuit from the energy buzzing through him, but he nods and steps back to wait. Simon’s sudden return hits him almost as hard as his apparent death had. It’s as though his world was thrown on its head then righted, but everything fell back just slightly out of place. He needs to paint, to work through and express his emotion.

How did Simon get back? He wouldn’t have been able to do it alone with those injuries.

Lucy’s gentle hand pushes back the curtain. She gives them a significant look, then turns back to Simon, still holding the curtain. “Don’t be scared.”

Simon definitely looks scared. His chest plate is back in place, revealing another new scar, and his synthetic skin weaves over it. He’s staring down at his legs where they dangle above the floor, fingers gripping the edge of the makeshift bed tight enough to show the white plastic of his body. He clenches his jaw, then tentatively slides one foot to the ground, then the other. He wiggles them experimentally, then pushes himself to his feet. He wobbles for a second and Markus takes half a step forward to help him. He’s stopped by a look from Lucy. She inclines her head, eyes kind. “You can do it, Simon.”
Simon gives her a tentative smile, then places one foot in front of the other. His smile grows with each successful step and eventually he’s in front of Markus, grin stretching from ear to ear.

Markus freezes. He really is alright. He really is. He throws out his arms and closes the remaining gap between them, pulling Simon into his chest. Simon’s arms raise to wind around him and Markus buries his face in his shoulder. “RA9 Simon, I thought we’d lost you.”

Simon’s soft chuckle is right beside his ear. “You’ll have to do more than that to get rid of me.”

That’s all it takes for North and Josh to crash in, pulling their arms around the two and thumping Simon on the back. They’re all here. They’re all alright. Markus’s family, his home away from home, they’re alright. He doesn’t have to face this alone.

There’s still the question of how Simon got back.

Simon seems to have the same thought, because he pulls away to the protests of the others. “Hey guys, I’d like you to meet Connor. He saved my life.” He gestures towards an android standing against the wall that Markus hadn’t noticed in his rush. His eyes are large and brown, flitting between the four of them. His hands are clasped behind his back and his posture is rigid.

Markus doesn’t think he’s ever seen an android look more awkward.

Connor steps away from the wall and extends a hand. “Hello, my name is Connor.”

Markus bypasses the hand and pulls him into a hug. Anyone that saves any of his friends is good in his book, and more than worthy of affection. Connor doesn’t seem to appreciate it, though, freezing up as soon as the contact is initiated.

Markus steps back, embarrassment rising hot in his chest. Sometimes he forgets that all deviants aren’t so open.

Connor coughs, straightening his sweater and brushing down his leather jacket. “You must be Markus?”

North laughs behind him and Markus shoots her a dirty look. He extends a hand as Connor had done earlier. “Yes, I am.” Connor’s hand is smaller than his and cool, solid in his grip. “Thank you for saving my friend’s life. He is very dear to me.”

Connor averts his eyes, letting his hand fall and fiddling with the edge of his sweater. “Yes, well, thank you for letting me stay at Jericho.”

“Of course. Everyone is welcome here.” Markus beams at him. Connor gives him something that might be a smile in return, but ends up looking more frightened.

North laughs again and Josh tugs on his shoulder, looking exasperated. “Come on, Markus. Now that Simon’s back, we have things to talk about.”

Connor steps away from the wall, tripping slightly over his words. “If you need help- I can help, I mean, if you want it.” He freezes, looking at them with wide eyes. Markus can imagine him beating himself up internally.

Markus looks over his shoulder at Josh, who shrugs, North, who frowns, and Simon, who smiles. “Sure, you’re welcome to help.”

Connor’s stance steadies and he thrusts his hands into his jacket pockets, seemingly back in his
element now that everything involving emotions is over.

Markus slings an arm over Simon’s shoulders, still not quite believing he’s real, and goes to follow Josh. He’s stopped by a small hand on his shoulder.

He looks back to make eye contact with Lucy. There’s something about her expression that makes the rare happiness in his chest float away.

“You guys go on ahead. I’ll catch up.”

They look like they want to protest, but one glance from Markus has them retreating to the second floor without a word.

He turns back to Lucy, trying to ignore the thumping of his heart and the dread pooling in his stomach. Has someone else been injured? No, the others would tell him. Has Lucy seen something? He tries not to let his anxieties show on his face or in his voice when he speaks. He needs to be strong for his people. “What is it, Lucy?”

Her smile is sympathetic and he knows that he’s failed, but she doesn’t mention it. “The truck you brought back was plentiful, but between treating preexisting conditions and newly arising ones, they’ve quickly depleted. We will need new parts and more thirium soon or I won’t be able to treat anyone that needs it.”

Markus sighs. Androids don’t need to breath, but it’s a gesture he picked up from his father. Maybe if he does it enough it will help to relieve some of the pressure inside him. “Thank you for telling me. I’ll try to figure something out.”

She nods, resting a compassionate hand on his arm. “You have much weight on your shoulders, Markus. Do not try to hold it alone or you may be crushed.”

He nods, moving her hand from his arm with light fingers. He clasps it for a moment. “Thank you for all your help, Lucy. I’ll try to find a solution to the problem.”

Her smile turns sad, but he has to talk to the others. They have to figure out the problem of energy. They can’t keep leaving Jericho to charge. They’ve already lost too many good people.

He turns away from her, but she stops him. “Markus.” Her face is pensive, her eyes on the floor. “It is not my place, but the newcomer. Connor. He is lost.” She looks up and Markus reads the rest of her statement in her eyes. They can’t afford to trust easily.

He nods as he turns and plods to the staircase. “I know.”

There’s so much wrong, not only the energy and the parts. They still have no way of helping deviants in the city and every day that passes without a way is another life lost. Each of them weighs on him, each soul living in the bowels of Jericho, every android around the world that hasn’t woken. He needs to help them. He needs to help all of them, but it’s impossible. He doesn’t know how.

He doesn’t even know how to help Jericho. He tries, but every problem solved is replaced by two new ones.

When he reaches the relative privacy of the second floor the others are already sitting, splayed out on the familiar rusty railings and leftover junk. North sits next to Connor, who stays standing. Her hand rests on her thigh where he knows she keeps a knife hidden.

He lets himself drop beside Simon. The ship supports the weight of his body, but doesn’t take any of
the weight on his mind.

Simon rests a warm hand on his shoulder.

Josh’s voice cuts through the silence. “Ok, so the issue on the table. We have no sustainable means of power, especially if we’re still thinking about active recruitment.” He gestures broadly with his hands as he talks.

Markus nods, letting his fingers clench around the railing below him. “We are, but we need a way of charging those that come first.”

North frowns. “We could try to divert power from a line, reroute it to Jericho somehow.”

Josh is already adamantly shaking his head before she finishes. “No. It wouldn't work. It’s too dangerous, and it’s traceable. We wouldn’t succeed and even with the very slim chance that we did, we would be found. We can’t take that risk.”

Simon rubs his arm, looking down. “I agree with Josh. We can’t keep taking unnecessary risks. Eventually we’ll lose something essential that can’t be replaced.”

“If we don’t take risks then everything essential will be lost,” North hisses.

“If I may?”

Every head in the room snaps to look at Connor. Honestly, Markus had forgotten he was there. He had melted into the quiet despite standing right next to them. Now he asserts his presence confidently, his stance rigid and his hands folded behind him.

Markus shrugs. “Go ahead.”

“Portable generators would be a viable option.”

Josh flicks his wrist, tapping his other hand against the box below him. “We’d never get a steady source of gasoline.”

North rolls her eyes. “Let’s hear you give an idea then, smart guy.”

Josh grimaces. “Maybe we could get solar powered generators?”

“We’re in Detroit during winter.”

“It was just an idea, thought you wanted one.”

“Yeah, a good one.”

“Guys, guys.” Simon raises his hands placatingly, stance easy. There’s something about his nature that always soothes the tension, and it’s no different now. Josh and North relax from where they had been preparing to stand. Simon smiles. “I don’t think Connor was finished.”

The attention turns back to Connor and he nods at Simon, looking at the rest of the room coolly. “Commonly called sandwich generators, they’re kinetic energy generators based on the triboelectric effect. They’re sustainable and it would only take 59 hours to produce the necessary energy to completely charge the standard android. If the generators themselves are fully charged it would take the normal amount.”

North frowns, rolling a strand of her hair between her fingers. “That’s a long time.”
Simon shrugs, something dark in his eyes that Markus hasn’t seen before, that wasn’t there before Stratford Tower. “It’s better than waiting here to die, or leaving Jericho to charge like we have been.”

Markus frowns, reaching out to rub Simon’s shoulder, but the blond just shakes his head and smiles weakly at him.

Josh doesn’t seem to notice, his brow furrowing. His LED spins yellow. “If we had a way of keeping the generators charged, then it would only be bad the first time.”

Markus tears his eyes away from Simon, making a note to talk to him about it later. Knowing Simon, the android might come to talk before Markus even has to prompt him. “We could set up shifts, switch off so there’s always someone charging the generator.”

Connor looks more at ease now, hands having slipped into his pockets sometime during the discussion. “Generators large enough would need four deviants to efficiently power them, but it appears as though you have enough here to accomplish that.”

Markus nods, something turning in him at Connor’s use of deviant. That’s…odd. “We do.”

Josh sighs, turning his head to the ceiling and dragging his hands over his face. “I assume we’re going to have steal these generators.”

Connor blinks. “Of course.”

North laughs, slapping him on the shoulder. “I think I might end up liking this guy.”

They plan for some time. It turns out that all of the sandwich generators on the market are too small to efficiently charge an android, so they’ll need to steal several prototypes developed for electric cars. They’re being displayed at a tech convention in eight days, so the next week is going to be full of recon and ironing out the kinks in their plan.

It’s decided that Connor and Markus will be the reconnaissance team. Markus passes as a human, partially because he’s a prototype and there aren’t a bunch of other androids going around with the same face as him. The same is true for Connor. He hasn’t removed his LED, which is understandable considering the possible side effects, but Markus has never seen anyone that looked like him before. It’s possible that he’s a prototype as well, but it’s more likely that he’s a less standard model or possibly even a model from another company, though he looks like a CyberLife android. His previous owner could have also had facial reconstruction done on him. However it is, with a hat he appears human, so they make the most inconspicuous team.

The others aren’t happy about it, unspoken wariness of Connor crackling around the room, but Markus shuts it down with a look. Jericho is a place for second chances and acceptance. North would say that that kind of blind trust is going to get them all killed, but he isn’t North.

Breaking into somewhere else makes Markus nervous. The past two times they’ve encounter fights that they barely escaped from. Simon didn’t escape. If it weren’t for luck and Connor he wouldn’t be here now.

They’re so outmatched. They may be faster, stronger, and smarter, but their opponents are well trained and outnumber them twenty to one. No one at Jericho really knows how to fight and none of them are armed. Even if they did know how to fight, they can’t kill without turning the public against them. They need the public to support them, but how many lives will it cost in the process?

After the bare bones of the plan are decided and the conversation starts to drift onto other subjects,
Connor gets up and leaves. He walks stiffly with his head down.

Markus frowns after him. He wants everyone to be comfortable here, especially someone that saved his best friend and appears to be extremely competent.

Connor sits quietly in the corner of the abandoned freighter. He rubs his hands together, staring at them. Coming to Jericho was supposed to give him a purpose, make him right, but he just feels out of place. He’d seen just how out of place he is when they welcomed Simon back. He couldn’t even accept a hug.

Connor doesn’t know what he was expecting, androids mimicking emotion and fighting back against some unknown oppressor. But this is like being among people. It’s like being among people, except they’re not. They’re deviants, just like him, except he’s completely different from them. Maybe there’s just no place for a deviant hunter gone deviant.

Connor drags his hands over his face. That’s the other thing. If anyone recognizes him, all he might try to build here would be for nothing. He’s out of place and waiting for the signal to run. Markus may be blindly trusting, but the others don’t trust him. Besides, there’s no saying how Markus would react to finding out what he really is. He only trusts him now because he thinks he’s just another deviant seeking refuge. Connor had hoped…

“Connor?” Markus steps in front of him, an easy smile on his face. “I like to try to get to know all new members of Jericho. I think it’s important for everyone to be comfortable with each other,” his grin grows, “Especially me. I am risking all our lives, after all. Everyone here should be able to trust me.”

Connor stares. How does Markus smile so easily? He expresses emotion like it’s nothing. “That’s logical.”

Markus’s eyes crinkle like Connor said something incredibly clever. “Do you mind if I sit so that we can talk?”

Connor scoots over as answer. Markus sits beside him on the crate and Connor frowns at him. Does he know something? Or does he genuinely just want to get familiar with him? It’s not like Connor can tell him anything. It would give him away, but Markus doesn’t know that.

Markus takes a deep breath, tapping his fingers on the crate. Connor is just about to ask him what he wanted to talk about when Markus looks at him with wet eyes.

Connor’s stomach drops and he looks away. What’s he supposed to do if Markus starts crying?! He’s not equipped to handle this. He didn’t come here to deal with emotion.

“Thank you for saving Simon.”

Connor can’t resist looking back at Markus. His mismatched eyes shine and his face is stretched in a wobbly smile. What strikes Connor is that his head is bowed towards the floor, not enough that Connor can’t see his face, but far enough to make the gesture clear.

It catches him off guard and he splutters, raising his hands in an aborted gesture to make Markus stop.

The other android seems to understand his discomfort, because he sits up and laughs, eyes crinkling again. They do that a lot. If he was human he would probably have laugh lines. “Thank you, really. I
A wave of guilt hits Connor like a sucker punch. He hadn’t saved Simon out of the goodness of his heart. He’d used him to get to Jericho because he thought coming here would give him a purpose. He’d taken advantage of these people and their affection for one another to work his way onto the team. They’d let him be part of their planning and now their missions because he’d helped Simon. Then here’s Markus, so kind and so sincere. They’ve only just met and Markus is of much greater importance than him, yet he’d bowed. He’d bowed to thank him for saving his friend.

Connor doesn’t understand it. He doesn’t understand it, but in that moment he decides that he’ll do everything he can to make Markus’s rebellion succeed. He’ll do whatever he can to help these people that are so much better than him, even if it kills him, because they’ve found their place in the world. They have a place and a purpose, and Connor doesn’t. They’ve built themselves a family, and they deserve to be able to keep it.

In the corner of his vision his mission changes from find deviant to ensure Jericho’s protection and success.

Even if it kills him.

Across the city RK800 #313 248 317 - 52 stands before Lieutenant Hank Anderson’s house. Lieutenant Anderson wanted to meet it at the police station, but it answers to CyberLife, not the human.

Its predecessor’s tracker had been found at the bottom of the Detroit River. It was disconnected.

RK800 calculates a 23% chance of its predecessor avoiding deactivation. The chance is slim, but CyberLife does not like loose ends and it is but a servant. Based on its downloaded memories, there’s a 94% chance of it going to the Lieutenant’s house if it remained functioning.

To the naked eye, the house looks perfectly normal, quiet and layered with snow from the blizzard. It scans. Nothing can be discerned from the path, put the porch is speckled with thirium and there are tiny flecks around the doorbell.

It walks briskly through the snow, examining the shining thirium. It is too old to analyze. There is no way to confirm that this is from its predecessor. It must investigate further.

RK800 walks around the house. It is designed to be thorough. There is a smattering of black in the backyard. It coats partially melted snow. It analyzes it. Ash, fabric? Possibly clothing, unable to confirm.

It enters through the window its predecessor broke. The dog growls, but RK800 placates it. It knows its predecessor.

There is more thirium on the ground, only perceptible through its scanner. Again, too old to analyze.

There is nothing else of note in the house.

It will report to CyberLife with this information and find Lieutenant Anderson. The man wishes to speak to Elijah Kamski.

Chapter End Notes
I'm doing my best to write Markus somewhere in between violent and pacifist, so hopefully he still comes off as in character.

Last chapter An0ymous left a comment asking if the androids would recognize Connor as the deviant hunter from the news on the TV. I could be wrong, but in my memory they never showed his face. I think that this is because CyberLife didn't want him to be recognized because it could potentially interfere with his investigation. If I missed something and they did actually show his face, then consider this another AU element. In this story CyberLife never showed his face in news broadcasts because they didn't want him to be recognized so that the investigation would go more smoothly. Thanks to An0ymous for the question!
Everywhere I Go

Chapter Summary

They go to a cafe and Markus takes a bit of a tumble

Chapter Notes

Heyo, not much to say for this one. Hope you enjoy!

Title from Everywhere I Go by Sleeping at Last

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The tech convention is planned to happen in a seven story curved, glass building. It’s on the opposite side of town as CyberLife tower, probably because of suspicions of corporate espionage. All of the groups displaying technology are competitors of the company, which is also probably why CyberLife isn’t participating.

There’s a convenient cafe directly across from the building where the comings and goings can be easily observed. It’s an especially good place for someone with scanners and high tech software who doesn’t have to rely solely on sight.

It’s raining out, making the streets slick and pitter-patter off of Markus’s umbrella. Connor swings open the cafe door for him, his own umbrella brushing the glass as he looks over their shoulders.

Markus smiles, closing his umbrella and shaking it as he steps inside. “Relax.”

Connor just shoots him a look, swinging his eyes over the street one more time before stepping inside himself and shutting the door with the jingle of a bell.

He’s been with them for four days now and Markus doesn’t know anything more about him than when he arrived, at least nothing that Connor has told him. From the first day it’s been apparent that he’s uncomfortable with emotion, but over the time Markus has observed other things. Connor always holds himself rigidly, like he’s standing to attention, and he’s brilliant, even by android standards. Markus is a little stunned, if he’s being honest with himself. Things will be going normally and then Connor will say or do something that shows just how much more he knows and sees than the rest of them. It’s amazing.

The guy also has a massive awkward streak and has never once smiled the entire time he’s been with them. The awkwardness is endearing, but the smiling situation will have to change.

Markus smiles charmingly at the barista as they walk into the little cafe. They had agreed ahead of time that they needed to order something if they were going to try and pass as human. He fingers the cash in his pocket. It’s odd to hold, but humans can’t pay wirelessly like androids can, so it’s a necessity. It would be nice to know why Connor had it in the first place.
Markus steps up to the counter. The air smells lovely, lingering scents of spices mixing with the smell of milk and coffee. Markus will never grow tired of the way he experiences things as a deviant. Everything is so much more wonderful now that he’s able to appreciate it. It’s like he was blind before.

His eyes flick over the menu. “One small chai tea, please.” Carl always liked tea. It sends a pang through Markus’s heart, but a bittersweet one. He was a good father, and maybe one day he’ll forgive him for how things went with Leo. Maybe when this is all over, if Markus is still alive.

The barista smiles back at him, then turns to Connor. He’s standing just behind Markus’s shoulder like a body guard, or a puppy. He’d like to think of it as the later. It makes the corners of his lips twitch in a smirk.

Connor looks like a deer in headlights, fidgeting with the sleeves of that beaten leather jacket he never seems to take off. “…could I just have warm milk with honey?”

The barista blinks at him and Markus can’t hold back a snicker. He moves his hand to stifle it, but it’s too late. Connor looks at him like a kicked puppy. There’s that puppy analogy again. It’s gotta be the eyes. His eyes are too big, and too brown.

The barista scratches the back of her neck, looking at Connor with a wrinkled nose. “Yeah…if that’s what you want. Small, medium, or large?”

Connor’s voice is tiny when he speaks. “Medium.”

Markus elbows him in the side. Connor glances at him with confusion and mild irritation. Markus responds with a significant look.

The confusion continues for a moment longer, then it clicks and Connor turns back to the barista. “Medium, please.”

He turns to Markus with satisfaction and Markus pats him on the back, unable to contain his grin.

They go to sit at a two person table by the window where they can easily see the building they’re supposed to be watching. They lean their umbrellas on the glass beside them.

Markus rests his elbows on the table, folding his fingers together. “So Connor, do you have a thing for sweets or did you just feel like ordering off menu?”

Connor smooths down his sweater, straightening the edge of his beanie and refusing to make eye contact with Markus. “…Someone…important gave it to me before. I felt that it would be…enjoyable to have again.”

Markus raises his eyebrows. He wasn’t expecting such a sincere answer, especially from Connor. The man’s two settings seem to be awkward and cold. “The same reason for me, actually. My father always used to drink tea.”

Connor does look at him now, eyes wide. Did Markus strike a nerve? Hopefully not, he’s trying to make Connor comfortable, not push him away.

The brunette doesn’t say anything, so Markus changes the subject. Maybe it’s not too late to salvage this conversation. He smiles teasingly, “So, how come you’re so confident whenever you talk about your ideas, but you can’t handle it whenever you actually need to have a conversation?” Shit. Damnit. He needs to think before he speaks. Connor is not one of his friends who he can easily banter with.
Connor blinks, then says, “How come you’re the supposed leader, but no one listens to you?”

Markus’s mouth drops open. Did he really just…? Connor is completely deadpan, but there’s a twinkle in his eyes that isn’t normally there. Somehow he looks…amused. Markus doubts anyone else would notice it, but Markus isn’t anything if not good at reading people. “You—you’re joking. Was that a joke? Did you actually just-?”

There’s a small smirk on Connor’s face now. It barely pulls up the corners of his lips, but it makes Markus devolve into laughter nonetheless.


The barista calls their order number and Connor stands, small smile still playing at the corners of his lips. “I’ll get it.”

He comes back a moment later with two mugs. He slides one over to Markus, then stirs his with a thin stick. He sets it perfectly straight beside the mug, then lifts it to his lips. He looks…content, or at least more settled that he normally does. Maybe it’s because of memories associated with the drink? Hopefully it’s at least partially because of Markus and the others.

He takes a sip of his own drink, relishing in the spicy scent of the chai as it wafts over him. The flavor is deep on his tongue, and his insides feel oddly, but not unpleasantly, warm as it trickles down his throat.

It’s always a strange experience to eat or drink anything. Most androids are equipped to be able to, except for ones specifically made for things like fighting or exploration. Some humans like to be able to eat with their androids, and some just want androids to cook for them. It’s a logical step for them to be able to eat and taste, but they don’t need to and they don’t often do it. It’s kind of sad. It’s another facet of living and experiencing the world. It would be nice if more androids participated.

“In addition, addressing your earlier question.”

Markus looks up from his tea to see Connor gazing out the window at the rain, or maybe at the building they’re supposed to be watching. He glances back to Markus, eyes flicking away as soon as they make contact. “I do find sweet things…enjoyable to my sensors.”

“You like the taste.”

Connor looks down, voice growing small. “…I like the taste.”

Markus doesn’t know why it feels like such a victory to hear him say it.

“We should complete our mission. The building will open soon. We need to be aware.”

Markus takes that to mean that Connor doesn’t want to talk anymore, though they probably should start paying attention to the building.

He turns his gaze to it. The rain clouds the window and rolls along the street, shrouding their view in grey. It makes sitting here in the cafe cozy, warm with the chatter of people and the smells from the kitchen.

His sensors struggle with the shroud of rain, but he’s still able to pick out the number of people that enter and exit the building and what the security seems to be like.
The two hours they agreed to stay pass quickly. They’ll come the next day at the time they left today and repeat the same process until they know what the building across the street does throughout the day. It wouldn’t be good to stay the entire time one day and arouse suspicion.

Connor busses their dishes, then grabs his umbrella and stands at attention by the door. Markus lowers his hand to grab his own, but his fingers only meet air. He looks down, maybe it rolled under the table, but there’s nothing there.

Hot embarrassment wells in his chest. Leader of the rebellion and he just got robbed. “Someone took my umbrella.”

Connor shrugs. “We can share mine.”

That’s true.

Markus stands, walking over to Connor and huddling next to him as they go outside and back into the rain. “Why couldn’t they have taken yours?”

Connor cocks his head and there’s that damned smirk again. “I would have noticed.”

Markus elbows him in the side and is pleased to hear the small, surprised sound that Connor makes. What he does not expect to hear, is the single note of a laughter that follows it. It’s just the barest huff of amusement, but it’s there.

A grin stretches across Markus’s face and he happily tucks his hands into his pockets, his shoulder and elbow brushing Connor’s as they walk under the umbrella through the rain together.

Connor doesn’t know how to feel. The recon has gone well and by all definitions is a complete success. Over the three days they’ve done it they’ve gained invaluable intel. They’ve also made the discovery that Connor’s scanners are better than everyone else’s. It isn’t a surprise to him, but when Markus had announced that he hadn’t been able to see faces because of the rain and Connor had been able to give not only faces, but names and exact information, everyone else had been shocked.

They’d mostly seemed pleased, but North had shot him a narrow eyed look that set him on edge. She doesn’t seem to trust him.

But that’s not what’s confusing him, what’s confusing him is how…easy it had felt to be with Markus. Markus is laid back and charming, but forceful and passionate in a way that Connor can respect. He doesn’t know if that’s a good thing or not. He doesn’t feel…comfortable growing close with this group. He doesn’t belong here, and eventually they’ll realize that. His job is to protect them until they do.

“Hey, Connor!”

He looks up to see Simon waving at him from across the room. He’s been persistently friendly to Connor throughout the week that he’s been here, though he’s persistently friendly with everyone. Connor’s convinced Markus, Josh, and North would have killed each other by now if not for him. It’s not that they don’t like each other, it’s just that Josh and North have opposing points of view and Markus can be frustratingly stubborn when he sets his mind to something.

He waves tentatively back at Simon and Simon smiles, though it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. “North is back with the pass. We’re going to go over the plan again before tomorrow, meet us upstairs.” With that he disappears around a corner that leads to a stairwell up to the second floor.
Connor straightens his jacket, pulling his coin from his pocket and rolling it over his knuckles. Tomorrow will be big. They have a solid plan, but there’s little room for error and there’s always the possibility of Connor’s identity being revealed. The likelihood is low, only 13%, he’s lucky that CyberLife isn’t going to be there, but there’s still the chance. There’s also the possibility of something going wrong. He would be forced to chose between keeping his abilities secret and completing his mission.

He flicks the coin up into the air and catches it as he stands, sending it back and forth between his hands as makes his way up the metal stairs to the second level.

He’ll be at his best. This is what he was made for, missions. He can do this and he’ll make sure everyone else can as well. He always completes his mission.

The others are waiting for him when he gets there, sitting on discarded boxes and the railing like usual. At some point they should probably get a more official office, but who’s Connor to say. He isn’t part of the group.

North holds up a pass between her fingers, grinning triumphantly. She had the job of pickpocketing an ID from one of the guests and cloning it. There had never been any doubt she would succeed, WR400s are equipped with more nibble fingers than other androids, for obvious reasons, and North is capable. That doesn’t stop Markus and Simon from patting her on the back and from Josh giving her a nod and a smile. Connor doesn’t understand the point of the congratulations, but it must have one if they do it.

They review the plan once, going through each android’s role. After that, they devolve into chatter. The four have an amazing ability to talk about nothing with each other. They ask each other about their day, explain new things they’ve discovered and things they’ve seen. Markus talks about art-art of all things.

Something twists in Connor’s stomach and he stands from where he had been sitting on the edge of a box, fiddling with the hem of his sweater as he walks away. No one seems to notice.

He doesn’t belong here. They’re already close in a way that Connor doesn’t understand and he doesn’t know how to begin befriending them, or if he even wants to. He rubs his thumb over the patches inside his jacket, a cold fist clenching around his chest. He feels dull, empty, like he’s frozen in a grey cloud-stuck in stasis.

He doesn’t know what this is. He thinks he might be…lonely. He misses Hank. He misses his rude humor and gruff affection.

Connor carefully plods to the top deck, emerging into the cool November air. It’s clear today, or at least as clear as it can be. There are still clouds shading the desaturated blue sky, but he can feel the vague heat of the winter sun along with the sharp bite of the cold air.

He walks until he’s on the other side of the bridge, then sits on the edge of the ship, letting his legs dangle over the water. He’s found himself coming here frequently. It’s only a slim edge with his back up against the metal of the bridge, but it’s secluded and silent. It’s an out of place spot for an out of place person.

There are more quiet moments than he expected, and they’re not the same now that he’s deviant. He feels strangely…off kilter most of the time and there are so many things he doesn’t understand. The way the others interact and talk and what motivates them, but also…himself.

Markus navigates it all with ease. He always seems to know what to say and what to do. He can tell
what the others are thinking without them explicitly telling him. It’s amazing, and Connor would be lying if he said he wasn’t a little bit envious. If only he had a portion of that skill, maybe he wouldn’t feel so out of the place all the time.

He wraps his arms around his chest, tugging his jacket more tightly around his shoulders and going into sleep mode. He tells himself that it’s because he needs to conserve battery for tomorrow, but he knows it’s because he doesn’t want to think.

Markus waits on the roof of the adjacent building with Simon, Josh and Connor. Energy thrums through his veins, the thrill of knowing that once they pull this off they’ll be one step closer to their goal. This is going to help their people. A reliable way of charging has been one of the biggest obstacles to them expanding their ranks, without it they’ll be able to start actively recruiting and lending help around the city.

Right now it’s all up to North. Only one can get in with the cloned pass, and she made it so it made sense to send her. Not to mention she’s a fairly common model, so even if they identify her after the fact it won’t do them any good.

She’s hijacking one of the cameras as a distraction. First she’ll create a loop that looks like she isn’t there, then she’ll play the footage of her planting a fake bomb. It will be enough to clear the building, and by the time they come after her she’ll be on the top floor opening the entrance to the roof for them.

She should play the footage any minute now. Any minute and they’ll be going in.

Connor is the closest to the edge, eyes attentively watching the opposite roof. He looks confident and level headed as he flicks a coin back and forth between his fingers. That’s strange, but now probably isn’t the time to ask.

Simon quietly bounces his knee at Markus’s side, fingers twining and untwining rapidly. The fear that has haunted his blue eyes since he came back is stronger and his gaze keeps flicking to the sky like it’s the last time he’ll see it.

Markus rests a hand on his knee, giving him a reassuring smile.

Simon attempts a return smile, but it comes out weak and shaky.

“It’s time,” Connor says in their heads.

Markus moves to a crouch after one last glance at Simon, and looks at Connor. He’s poised on the edge watching Markus like he’s waiting for permission.

Markus nods and Connor bunches his legs, leaping without any hesitation over to the next rooftop. He soars through the sky over the death drop below him, more in his element than Markus has ever seen him. He lands easily, reaching out a hand to steady Josh as he lands on the edge and wobbles.

Markus goes next, his hearth thrumming in his chest. He hits the other side heavily, the shock reverberating up his legs as his shoes skid.

Connor’s warm hand reaches out to his shoulder, righting him with a lingering glance and quickly steadying Simon as he jumps.

“Hurry up!” North hisses in their heads, waving them over. The door to the roof is sheltered by a
little building that protrudes above the stairwell. “We’ve only got so much time.”

And with that, the timer starts.

They race down the stairs to the top floor of the building, leaving the door open behind them for a quick escape route if necessary. The floor is spacious and divided by glass walled rooms, each full of chairs with a small stage.

Their feet pound on the slick floor, the exhibits blowing past them. There’s an engine, and there’s a mechanical arm. Markus skids to a stop as his eyes catch on an exhibit.

They’re androids, two of them, a man and a woman. They have something like a touch screen at their temple instead of the circular LED, but otherwise they look just like CyberLife androids. Just like them. Like people.

Markus’s stomach rolls as heat start to rise in his chest. It isn’t right. They shouldn’t be bought and sold like this, put on display as some kind of merchandise. He wants to free them, get them out of there and take them back to Jericho where they can grow, and become people, and live.

Connor’s hand catches his shoulder. “Markus.”

Markus grits his teeth, but nods and follows Connor as he runs to a display two rooms down.

There are five generators in the room, one rolled out for show and the other four stacked against the wall for a demonstration later in the day where they’ll be integrated into cars. They consist of a six foot by six foot mat that’s an inch thick and a box that looks more like a normal generator.

Josh kneels by the door, hand pressed to the lock and eyes closed as he attempts to hack the complicated circuitry.

Markus can feel the time peeling away as they wait, every second one closer to the guards finding that there’s no bomb and racing back to the exhibits.

There’s a quiet click and the door slides open.

They rush inside as one, each going to pick up a generator. Markus rolls up the mat of the one on the ground, being careful of the wires connecting it to the box. It’s heavy, but not so heavy that he can’t lift it.

He looks around to make sure that everyone has theirs’, and they’re gone.

They move as quickly as they can with their burdens through the halls. A right and a left and they’ll be at the elevator. Hack it and they’ll have a straight shot to the parking garage below the building where a taxi under their control is waiting for them. They’re almost there. They’ve almost done it.

They make the right and Connor’s voice echoes in their heads. “The guards are coming back.”

North frowns, speaking through their wireless connection as well. “How can you tell.”

“They’re human. Humans are noisy.”

Markus’s heart jumps in his chest and they skid around the left corner. Simon’s shoulders shake where he runs in front of him. They can’t afford another conflict with guards, especially if they don’t want to kill anyone. They’ll have to if there’s a threat of being shot, but they’d never win. They’re not armed and none of them know how to fight. If they get caught there’s nothing they can do.
There’s the elevator, only a couple feet away.

Connor reaches it first, touching his hand to the panel with more calm than he should have in this situation, and calls it up.

Markus can hear the guards now, feet pounding as they reach the top floor.

The elevator door slides open and Connor pushes his generator in. The others quickly follow suit.

The guards are close enough now to hear without their advanced android senses. Rustling fabric brushes metal that can only be guns and accompanies the pounding of boots and rough voices.

They’ll never make it in time. Even if they all fit in the elevator, the guards would notice and be waiting for them at the bottom. Markus makes a split second decision.

“Simon get in the elevator.” The wireless connection buzzes with anxious static.

“What?”

“Now.”

Simon steps in, looking at Markus with wide eyes.

“We’ll meet you at Jericho.”

“Markus-“

Markus presses his hand to the panel and the doors slide closed, cutting off his view of Simon and sending him to the parking garage far below.

He turns to the others, heart beat slamming against his ribs and fingers running with energy. If he was human they would be shaking. “We’re going to lead them away and make our escape across the roofs. They’re human, they won’t be able to follow us. Probably.”

A shot slams into the wall just above Markus’s head and he flinches, looking at the others and turning to run as bullets start to cut through the air around them.

Right, left, straight, then up the stairs and onto the roof. Right, left, straight, roof.

A bullet tears through the fabric of his sleeve and he sees a burst of thirium from Josh as a bullet clips his shoulder.

They skid right, then left. He can see the stairs to the roof. Josh is up them first, then North, then Markus. Connor is last, racing behind them.

Markus bursts into the open air, the cold whipping across his cheeks. Josh is already across. North is poised to jump. He skids to a stop beside her at the edge, looking over his shoulder.

Connor goes to close the door, but he doesn’t get the chance. A booted foot slams it out of his grip, banging the door back against the wall as guards in black body armor flood the roof.

Markus doesn’t recognize the guns they hold, but they’re big enough that North freezes where she’s standing and Markus’s stomach drops.

The guard that kicked open the door levels the barrel of his gun with Connor’s face and the others pin the rest of them in their sights.
It’s still for a moment, then Connor swivels to the side while simultaneously raising a hand to grab the top of the gun. He pulls the man towards him as a bullet tears through the space he just was, skimming his cheek and leaving a line of dribbling thirium in its wake. He knees the man in the face and he crumples, blood spurting from his nose.

What the hell is he doing?! Is he crazy?! They don’t have the capabilities to take on this many guards, even if they weren’t armed. They don’t know how to fight. They can’t win!

Markus spins to stop him, to do anything to save the people he cares about, and a bullet slams into his shoulder. It doesn’t hit anything vital, but it punches him back. His sensors scream at him, sending resonating sensation through the wounded area as he jerks back.

His foot moves reflexively to steady himself and meets nothing.

Markus pitches back through open air, wind rushing past his ears and making his coat billow. There’s a second where he meets North’s wide, desperate eyes and feels the edge of the roof scrape past his leg, then he’s free falling towards the ground stories below.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry

Thanks to ZeevaWyte for pointing out my use of breath instead of breathe in the last chapter. Hopefully it wasn’t too much of a bother to anyone :)
Hot thirium bubbles down Connor’s cheek. He can smell it’s chemical scent and imagine what it would taste like on his tongue. If he was human sweat would be covering his body. As is, he’s hyper aware of everything around him. The world is in jarring clarity.

He needs to fight. If he doesn’t fight they’ll be killed, but he can’t reveal himself. There will be questions about how he knows, where he learned. Very few androids have combat software, and he definitely doesn’t look like a military android. Maybe he could pass himself off as a body guard model, but he’s slim and Markus, a domestic service android, is taller than him.

There’s a bang from several feet in front of Connor, the sound buzzing in his audio processors, yet there’s no punch of sensation. Nothing sends him a desperate alert of damage and no thirium pours down from a wound in his body.

“Markus!!” North’s voice is pitched high, her voice box stuttering.

Connor spins. Markus is falling, a ribbon of blue following him.

Everything slows, North’s pale hand, Josh’s stricken face, the armored guards and their M23A4 submachine guns.

In this instance, it may be more prudent to worry about the consequences later. Even if he blows his cover, they’ll still be alive. That’s what matters.

The capacitors in his legs fire and Connor’s combat boots dig into the roof as he sprints, propelling him forward. The air nips at his heels, trying to catch up.

He hears rather than sees a guard to his left fire and slides to his knees, tearing his pants on the beveled roof. The bullets skim past him, but Connor pays them no mind. Markus’s foot is still visible above the edge of the building.

It disappears and he throws a hand out, artificial muscles and joints in his arm wrenching as Markus’s fall is brought to an abrupt stop. Connor’s chest clangs against the roof and the laces of Markus’s shoe dig into his hand.
North falls to her knees beside him, reaching down to help. As soon as she has a grip he stands.

The guards still have their guns trained on them. Josh is standing on the edge of the other building, frozen.

There are only seven guards, but Connor doesn’t have his gun and the nearest one is outside of his reach. He’s exposed, compromised by his run to save the deviant leader.

He can still do this. As long as they don’t hit anything vital, he can withstand as many bullets as it takes to neutralize them. If he runs for the first he’ll most definitely shoot, so he’ll need to slide. After that he has three options, only one of which ends in him surviving. He’ll take that one.

He lets his fingers linger on the rough roof for what feels like a second to his superhuman processor, but is in reality milliseconds. The preconstruction clicks into place and he races forward.

The first guard brings his gun over, but before he can pull the trigger Connor is already sliding, rolling onto his side to crack his foot into the man’s knee.

He goes down and Connor catches his M23A4 in steady hands. He shoots him in the head, spray of blood splattering his shoes. He can’t take any chances.

A barrage of gun fire follows him as he ducks behind the entrance to the roof, soft walls sending a wave of dust into the air.

He locates the heat signatures of the nearest two guards, ducking around the other side of the small, protruding building and taking them out before they can turn. The shots are perfect.

Four guards left. Easy.

A bullet carves a path through the air beside him and he presses his back up against the wall, moving just barely out of sight.

A guard foolishly comes around the corner and Connor reaches out to engage him, it would be a waste of bullets when he can eliminate him just as easily in close quarters combat.

The man tries to change his aim, but Connor wraps a hand around his gun, twisting to rip it from his grasp. The man swings his fist and Connor steps to the side. He catches the man’s wrist and spins, throwing him to the ground while still gripping his arm. There’s a crunching pop as the man’s elbow breaks and his shoulder pulls from its socket. He screams. Connor reaches down to grip sweat stained skin and break his neck. The screaming stops.

Three.

He lifts the dead body and steps out from behind cover, throwing it at the next guard and pointing his stolen M23A4 where he knows the second to last guard will be. His fire is met with the splash of blood and the thump of something lifeless hitting the ground. The air is acrid and sharp, misted with the smell of iron. Familiar.

Two.

He drops to the ground and a shot that would have destroyed his heart instead skims uselessly over his shoulder. Too close.

Connor twists on his knees and pulls the trigger before the man can even register his new position.
The only remaining adversary struggles to stand. Connor shoots him between the eyes.

He tosses the gun to the ground and reaches to straighten his tie. When nothing meets his fingers he pauses. For a second it was as though everything was normal. He knew what he was doing and why he was doing it.

The high of the fight fades and Connor looks to where blood splashes the roof, a pit tearing open in his stomach. Is killing really all he’s good for?

He snaps the collar of his leather jacket and smooths down his sweater, trying to calm the shakiness of his hands in its grain. What will the others think? He was alienated before, but it can always get worse.

Connor looks up.

Josh is on this rooftop now, mouth gaping and eyes wide enough to show the whites. He’s crouched beside the first guard, hands hovering over his still body and gaze riveted to the ripped hole in his forehead.

North is crouched beside Markus. Both of them are watching Connor.

Connor’s hands are cold, his tongue thick and useless. His heart beats in his chest like it’s being chased, that maybe somehow it can escape the inevitable. The streets are frigid and empty. He can’t go back to Hank’s. There’s nowhere else, and there’s nowhere else he wants to be. He has to be here. He has a purpose here.

There’s a bang from downstairs and everyone’s heads jerk towards it. They look at each other, then Markus grimaces. Connor can’t read his expression. “Let’s go.”

The others listen to him instantly, rising. Connor stays where he is.

Markus’s eyes fix on him, eyebrows lowering and jaw clenching. “You too, Connor.”

He’s angry. Connor has made Markus angry. It’s over. Something else in Connor’s chest tugs. He’d thought that maybe…they were becoming friends. They both have human fathers and he can still picture Markus’s delighted face laughing at Connor’s sarcastic jokes. He thought maybe he could make a place here. The pit in his stomach threatens to swallow him.

His legs move mechanically over the bloody rooftop, leaping over the gap to the next building after the others. They vault over a railing into a patio, running through it and swinging to the next building.

Connor doesn’t feel the wind gliding past his face, all he can feel is the fist around his chest. Everything is cold, and not because of the Michigan winter. He’s cold inside, aching like he’s full of water.

They barely make it two steps into Jericho before Simon crashes into them. He wraps his arms around Markus, then Josh and North. Connor stumbles back when the blond does the same to him. He’s only greeting Connor because he doesn’t know what he’s done, what he is.

Markus leads them to the main area of the ship where he gives a speech to the deviants about their new power source.
Connor doesn’t hear any of it. His memory and senses absorb it, but his processor doesn’t. Everything is a blur. He’s drowning in the water inside of him.

As soon as Markus is done and the deviants are swallowed by applause, Connor turns on his heel and stiffly leaves the stage, weaving through the crowd without acknowledging them and retreating into the dark corridors of the ship.

North finds him first.

He draws himself to his full height. If she’s going to yell at him he’ll take it. If she’s going to hit him he’ll take it.

She reaches out and awkwardly pats him on the shoulder, sharp-toothed grin stretching across her face. “Nice going, Connor.”

Connor blinks. “You’re not-don’t you want to know how I know how to fight?”

North’s expression sobers, arm falling back to her side. “We all have our secrets. We all did what we had to to survive. As long as you don’t put my friends in danger, I don’t give a shit.” He reads the unspoken words in her hard stare. If she ever thinks he’s putting them in danger, she’ll kill him herself.

Connor feels as though he may fall over from the wave of relief that hits him. If he wasn’t an android, he might have swayed. The ice filling him starts to thaw, but it stops when a voice tears down the hallway.

“Do you know what you’ve done?!?” A muscle bulges in Josh’s jaw and his teeth are bared. His steps are purposeful as they pound down the corridor. His shoulders are shaking. “Do you know what you’ve done!!?”

Connor freezes. Any dread that may have filtered away comes back in full force.

Josh stops in front of him, but doesn’t touch him. It’s both an act of restraint that speaks of his character and an avoidance of the newly-cold red blood splattered over Connor’s clothing.

“You killed seven people!! They probably had families! They had people that loved them!”

Connor’s voice box won’t respond to him. His throat is tight. Something sickly coils in his gut, making his chest uncomfortably hot. They would have died if he didn’t. They all would have been murdered. He had to. He had to.

“And now!” Josh throws his hands upwards and Connor flinches. “Now, all the media is going to pay attention to is that seven people are dead!!”

North lunges forward to shove Josh’s chest. “He saved our lives! I don’t know if you want to be dead, but I don’t! They were going to kill us!”

Josh spins on her. “It corrupts our cause! Better to die than to spill blood and live a killer!”

“Better to spill blood and live another day! What will happen to our cause if everyone dies because we’re too much of cowards to fight back!!?”

Two pale arms stretch between them and pull Josh and North apart. Simon’s blue eyes are wide. Connor didn’t hear him run up, the other two were shouting too loud. “North, Josh, stop.”
Somehow his quiet voice cuts through the fury sharper than a yell ever could. They stop, but continue glaring at one another. Simon keeps his hands resting gently on them. “We can’t fight now when the rest of the world is at our throats.”

Josh looks away first, shaking himself and looking at Simon apologetically. His shoulders are still tight. “You’re right, Simon.”

North crosses her arms and mimics Josh’s voice. “You’re right, Simon.”

Simon looks at her. He doesn’t even glare, but North looks down and lets her arms fall. “…sorry.”

Markus speaks up from where he had been standing, unnoticed, behind Simon. “If you will.” He gestures sharply over his shoulder.

North looks like she might protest, but Simon shoots her another look and she doggedly follows the others as they leave.

Markus waits until they’re gone. His body is tense, his stance rigid and his hands curled into fists at his sides. His brow is still drawn tightly over his eyes. There’s a stain of blue on his shoulder where the bullet caught him and a splatter on the curve of his skull where it had cracked into the wall when Connor grabbed him.

If Markus wants him gone, there’s nothing Connor can do. Even if Markus doesn’t want him gone, he doesn’t want to be at Jericho if the android hates him. Even if it would mean giving up any purpose he might find…he doesn’t want Markus to hate him.

Markus looks at the ground for a moment, running his hands over his head, then meets Connor’s eyes. “Why did you do that?”

He doesn’t raise his voice, and that’s almost worse. It’s a controlled sort of anger that means Markus’s mind is already made up. It’s decided.

“You were in danger. They were going to deactiv-kill everyone.” Connor is proud of how steady his voice comes out, moving from his lips without flaw.

Markus raises his fists in an aborted motion. “You were at least five feet from the nearest guard. What if he had shot you before you reached him!?” His voice raises in volume until it’s a shout. He lets out a deep breath, shoulders shaking on the way back down. What a strange thing to do, sighing. It’s very human.

Connor doesn’t know where this conversation is going. He thought he knew what was coming. “I— he can’t say preconstructed, normal androids can’t do that, “I calculated my route before I engaged. I was prepared to dodge.”

Markus throws his hands up. “And what if one of the others had fired!?”

He’s really lost now. Is this some strange way of kicking him out? “Then I would have been shot. I fail to see the point to this line of questioning.”

“That’s just the point, Connor!” Markus’s shoulders shake and Connor resists the irrational urge to reach out to comfort the other. “You would have been shot!”

Markus stares at him like that explains everything. That explains nothing. Connor frowns. “And?”

“And you would have died, Connor!”
The realization hits Connor like a truck. Markus is worried. Why? Why is he worried about him? They barely know each other and it’s not like Connor is important. “What does it matter if I die?”

Markus freezes like he’s been hit, face stricken. His arms fall to his sides limply. “Connor, of course it matters if you die. You’re just as worthy as the rest of us, and what about your important person? What would they do?”

Connor looks down, the sick thing coiling from his gut to sit heavy in his chest. Hank would be upset. He would wait for Connor to come home and Connor never would.

A warm hand rests on his shoulder and then Markus is pulling him into a hug. Markus clenches his arms around him, holding him fiercely to his chest. “Your life matters Connor. Please, don’t throw it away.”

Markus is essential to the rebellion and the others are essential to Markus, leaders in their own right. North is the fire and Josh is the mind and Simon is the glue. They’re needed, and Connor isn’t, but Connor would be missed. Connor would be missed and he has a meaning now in Markus’s ideals. He has a mission, a purpose. It’s purpose he’s willing to die for.

But what about Hank? He can’t lose someone else he cares about, and all evidence shows that he does care about Connor…and Connor cares about him. Is that reason enough to live?

Connor nods into his shoulder and Markus pats his back. “Come with me.”

He raises his head and silently steps after Markus’s retreating form. The other android leads him through the ship to a room just off the main area. He swings open the door to reveal a dresser, several crates, stacks of paper, what could be tubes of paint, and too many drawings to count. They cover the walls and the pieces of paper. Some are scratched in with pieces of metal, others are drawn with charcoal, and even more with smudges of pigment. Markus doesn’t comment on them and Connor is too busy staring to ask.

Markus rummages in the dresser for a minute, then pulls out a brown and green wrapped mint. He walks back to Connor and holds it out in the center of his palm, smiling. “I don’t have any hot milk and honey, but I do have this. I picked it up from the cafe.”

Connor stares at it. He’s gone through such a roller coaster of emotions in the last hour and he’s still reeling. He’s not being kicked out and Markus was mad, not because he knew how to fight or because he killed the guards, but because he’d put himself in danger. He’s the second person in Connor’s brief life to care.

Markus reaches to lift his hand in his own, placing the sweet in the well in the center of Connor’s hand and gently pushing his fingers to curl over it. His hands are warm and calloused. It’s strange for an android, but Connor likes it.

Something warm flutters in his chest and he looks jerkily up at Markus. He’ll protect this wonderful man with everything he has. “Thank you.”

Markus grins and Connor looks away. It’s bright. Markus’s smile, his ideals, his personality, everything about him is so bright. Not bright like CyberLife, artificial and cutting to reveal all the flaws in something, but bright like a fire place, passionate and comforting. Bright like the warmth in Connor’s chest.

Connor slowly brings his closed fist to him, unwrapping the sweet and putting it in his mouth. It’s different than anything he’s had before. Sweet, but threaded with a rich, earthy taste that his sensors
identify as chocolate and a sharper taste that his sensors identify as mint. He considers for a moment, then looks back at Markus and mumbles, “I like it.”

Markus beams. “I’m glad.”

Connor’s processor stutters, flitting over subjects as it tries to find something to say. “You shouldn’t have everyone at Jericho,” he blurts.

He immediately freezes, but Markus only says, “Oh?”

Connor takes this as indication to continue. He has so many thoughts, so many ideas about how to improve the resistance, how to make it an actual rebellion. He needs to help. He’s going to help. He’ll take all the newfound emotion trapped inside him, all the suffocating cold and strange warmth and help. “Yes. It’s unwise. If Jericho were to be attacked everything would be lost. It would be best to have your people at different locations with only a portion at Jericho.”

Markus frowns, sitting down on one of the crates and gesturing for Connor to do the same. He sits across from him. “You’re right. We would be decimated.” He chews his bottom lip. “You have any more ideas?”

Connor sits up straighter. It’s like a puzzle, a mystery to solve, the pieces fitting into place to make Markus’s rebellion. “We should attempt to make contact with humans. Some will be sympathetic, and some will want to benefit. In either case we can make use of them and they could provide assistance your people greatly need. We should find a way to let other deviants know of Jericho and listen for cases of deviants on a police scanner so that we can assist them.”

“That’s brilliant.”

The corners of Connor’s lips tug up despite himself. “The only one who’s brilliant is the one who can carry out such ideas.”

Markus smiles and the warm, fluttery thing in Connor’s chest grows in intensity. The pain is still there, aching and cold. He’s still lost, living because he doesn’t know any other way, but somehow it isn’t so bad. Somehow the blood and CyberLife and Josh’s anger isn’t so bad.

Markus murmurs, “Our people.”

“What?”

“You said my people, they’re your people now too, Connor.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm thinking about splitting this story up into sections. It wouldn't effect the upload schedule and it'd still all be part of Saturn (I wouldn't do it in separate stories in a series or anything like that). Really, it would only be a formatting thing. I'm thinking about it because there are two maybe three really distinct sections to this fic, one of which is gonna have a bunch of warnings attached to it. The only thing that would really change is that I'd probably modify chapter titles so that Volume 1 or some such is in front of each chapter title. I might also do like begin section one end section one in the story, I don't know. As I said, I'm still thinking about it and it would mostly be a formatting
thing. I'd love to hear your thoughts about something like this. Ideas, suggestions, cries of no please don't do that, anything is good.

Thanks for reading :)


Chapter Summary

There's a lot of talking in this chapter

Chapter Notes

World notes - some software can't be transferred between androids because one of them doesn't have an advanced enough processor. They wouldn't be able to handle or understand the program. They can, however, learn the skills in the software. If something is taught to them they can create their own program from what they are taught. In this way, in the absence of downloadable software, they can learn skills similarly to the way that humans do.

Chapter title is from Nowhere Man by the Beatles

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They talk for what feels like a couple of minutes, but ends up being two hours. Markus is relaxed and invigorated in a way that he hasn’t been since the first of his people died following his commands. Connor has so many new ideas to contribute to their cause and he comes at it with a verve that he’s only seen matched in North, but without her violence.

Don’t get him wrong, he loves his friends. North and Josh are both opinionated and that’s good, most of the time. Sometimes he just needs away from it, someone that will listen. He has that in Simon, but with the blond it’s always about what will make Markus happy. Sometimes what will make him happiest in the short term, the easiest route, isn’t the right option. He knows that better than anyone.

Connor’s brown eyes spark and he gestures with his hands, fidgeting in thought whenever Markus speaks. The normal shutters are away and his emotions are displayed clearly on his face. His frustration, his curiosity, the way figuring it all out like a puzzle lights a fire inside him.

Markus knows the fire well. It burns inside him, differently, but it’s there. It’s all consuming. One day it will devour him, maybe it already has. The revolution is his everything, yet so is his family and his desire to create and to be happy. The desires conflict in his mind, all others eventually falling away until all that remains are the cause and his family. They argue in duality, neither existing without the other and yet destroying each other. His family cannot live without freedom and yet pushing for freedom threatens their ability to live.

He sees blood smeared on a sharp rooftop and all he can feel is relief. Markus doesn’t want to kill, per se, he doesn’t want to go to war, but he does want to fight. He wants to lash out at the malformed, undefined force that holds them down, yet he is keenly aware of individual people. People on their own are very rarely evil, maybe such a concept doesn’t even exist. They are scared, angry, ignorant, power hungry, but they are people and they are different. Some are kind, some might even help them, but they are only parts of a whole. When together they make a blanketed force
very often single minded and very rarely rational. His people don’t have the power to stand against the overwhelming weight of society.

Connor is smart. If Markus is judging without his emotions, something he never does, based purely on his intelligence and fighting capabilities, Connor is an irreplaceable asset. The revolution would take strides if he was allowed into the decision making process. He is cold where Markus is fury, rational where he acts too purely on emotion. The truth is, they need him. He has what they do not, and they desperately need it.

He’s almost sure Josh is suspicious of Connor, North definitely is, even as she warms to him. Simon…Simon doesn’t seem to trust anything anymore, but Connor saved him and saved the people he cares for, that’s enough to win a fair amount from the blond man.

The others may not approve, but Markus is the leader of this operation. This is his decision to make, and he knows how much they need Connor.

Not to mention, he likes Connor. He’s awkward and sincere and brilliant and doesn’t value himself half as much as he should. Markus has always had a soft spot for people he likes. He wants to see Connor happy.

He waits until Connor finishes a long winded string about a potential underground railroad to Canada, then sits forward. He makes sure he has Connor’s eye contact so that he can gauge his reaction before saying, “How would you like to be a permanent member in our leadership?” Connor’s eyes widen, but Markus plows on. “Simon likes you and North respects you.” He doesn’t say she trusts him, because she doesn’t. Not yet. “Josh will come around, and if I say you’re good it doesn’t matter. You could be an invaluable part of us, and I like your ideas.”

Connor is frozen, hands stilled on his legs. His gaze is focused on the wall behind Markus, looking through him at something in his own head. “I’m no leader, Markus.”

“Nonsense.”

“I wouldn’t know where to start.”

Markus musters the most reassuring smile he can, leaning across the gap between them to rest his hand on Connor’s knee. “You wouldn’t be leading anyone except for in crisis. Think of it more as being on a counsel. Besides, you’d get to go on more missions.”

Connor’s eyes snap to him. “I’m in.”

Markus laughs. They would have let Connor in on jobs anyways, he’s obviously good at them, but if the offer makes Connor overcome his anxiety about being in a position of power, then Markus is all for it.

He pats Connor’s knee. “Great.”

A tentative smile pulls up the corners of the brunette’s lips. It’s only the second time Markus had seen it, and he doesn’t think he’ll ever get tired of it. It’s like discovering something new and unexpected, but precious none the less.

There’s a knock on the door. Markus says, “Yes,” without looking away from Connor.

It’s Simon. His normally straight posture is slouched, free arm wrapped loosely around himself. His blond hair is messy and his eyes lack their normal casual amusement.
Markus immediately sobered, the weight he hadn’t realized was lifted crashing back onto his shoulders. That’s right. Josh is angry, Josh and North are fighting again, and they have a potential media crisis on their hands.

Simon sighs. It’s something he never used to do. Maybe he picked it up from Markus, or maybe his stress level has just risen so much that he feels the need to resort to human means of calming. His voice sounds just as tired as he looks. “We should set up the charging station.”

Markus nods, pushing himself to his feet. It was a nice reprieve while it lasted. “Is someone monitoring the news?”

“I don’t think Josh has stopped watching it since we got back.”

Connor flinches. Markus pauses for a moment, then looks at Simon, who gets his silent message and leaves with a comment of, “meet you in the main hold.”

Connor is staring at his hands, LED spinning yellow where it pokes out from his beanie. His shoulders are rigid, any ease that had seeped into his stance gone.

If Markus knows Josh, and he does, then he’ll feel just as bad about yelling as Connor does from taking the brunt of it, if not worse. He always feels guilty after fights. He never wants to, he’s just opinionated and…scared. Aren’t they all. “You should go talk to Josh. His room is the third down the hallway to the east.”

The rooms were Simon’s idea, a way to give them space to themselves and make Jericho feel a little bit more like home.

“I don’t think he’ll want to talk to me,” Connor murmurs.

It’s Markus’s turn to sigh. All of his peoples troubles weigh on him, but his friends most of all. Sometimes he wishes they could all just get along, but he wouldn’t change them for the world.

“He will.”

Connor looks up at him, big eyes wide, but guarded. It doesn’t fool Markus. He sees the apprehension in them.

“How are you going to set up the generators without me?”

He chuckles. “I was paying attention when you told us. 6 hertz, right?”

“That is correct.”

He smiles, going to leave the room and stopping at the doorway. “Thank you for saving my life, Connor.”

Connor’s lips tentatively turn up and Markus marks it as the third time he’s seen the other smile. They seem to be becoming more frequent.

Connor waits until Markus’s footsteps echo down the hallway, then drags his hands over his face. That went better than he thought it would. No one seems upset with him but Josh and everyone is alive. That’s what matters…that’s what matters…

Seven people. Seven people murdered in cold blood. If the media finds out it was them they’ll have a
field day and any popular support they have will vanish.

Connor drags his beanie off his head, wringing the knitted fabric between his hands.

It would be his fault. It would be all his fault. He would have delivered a great blow to not only the revolution, but the cause itself.

If he hadn’t killed them everyone would be dead. Connor could have escaped, but the other’s wouldn’t have been able to. He had no choice, but maybe he could have disabled them without killing them. It would’ve been a higher risk to himself and the others, but maybe it would’ve been a better decision. He should have thought of it. Why hadn’t he thought of it?

There’s also…Markus had been angry, but not angry that Connor had killed people. He had been angry that Connor had put himself in danger. Why? Connor had thought about the others, not himself, just as he should.

But Markus had. For some reason Markus cares what happens to him. Of course Connor would worry about Markus if he was in danger, but Markus is Markus and Connor is…Connor. He can’t fathom it.

Maybe it’s because Connor is one of his people now. That thought in an of itself makes the warmth from earlier rise in Connor’s chest. Markus had given him a sweet because he was upset. Are they…friends?

Connor smiles down at his beanie, tugging it back over his mussed brown hair. He’ll need to find a comb and mirror.

He doesn’t know why anyone would want to be friends with him, but then Markus is very strange.

Maybe if Connor is able to stay he’ll eventually understand. No one found him out. There are a myriad of more likely excuses for him to be able to fight beside being a detective prototype from CyberLife, and he’s starting to realize just how desperately they need someone with his skills. All of the Jericho leadership would be dead or captured without him. They need him. A sick feeling settles in his stomach when he thinks about playing that need to his advantage. He won’t do that. Never. However, they’re more likely to trust someone that they can’t survive without. His skills have always been valuable.

He should talk to Josh. Markus wants him to, and strife within a team is never good for stability. Not that Connor is part of the team, but he’d like to be.

Josh’s door is shut tight, handle turned to seal it shut. Connor flips his coin over his fingers, then tucks it into his pocket. He knocks once and a quiet voice says, “come in.”

Josh is sitting crosslegged on a box in his room. His hands are folded between his legs, gripping each other like they’re grounding him to the earth. His eyes are on the ground, but Connor can tell by their unfocused nature and the spinning yellow LED on his temple that he isn’t really there. He must be watching the news like Simon said.

Connor stands in the doorway, folding his hands behind himself, then unfolding them to fidget with his sleeves. “…Joshua?”

Josh jerks like he’s restarted, breaking the complete stillness of his posture. His formerly clasped hands wring each other and his eyes skirt the area, searching for the source of the disturbance until they settle on Connor. He stills again, staring at the other android, an expression Connor can’t read on his face. Everyone here has such a depth of emotion, it’s like trying to read humans.
“…it’s just Josh.”

Connor shifts from foot to foot, tugging at the hem of his sweater. “I am sorry for-“

Josh cuts him off, looking down at his hands between his knees. His shoulders are hunched and his back bent. Despite his height he looks…small. “No, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have lost my temper like that. You saved all our lives.”

Connor frowns. Why is Josh apologizing to him? Connor is the newcomer. He’s the one that put their cause in peril and acted in a way that Josh is fighting against. Josh is putting all he has into a non violent revolution, and Connor broke that. At least in some small way. “I should not have killed those men.”

Josh looks up at him, lips tugging into a tired smile. “Yeah, you shouldn’t of, but you were protecting us. I-“ he runs his hands over his face, “I know that if we all die the cause will be lost, the revolution will be over, but I just-“ he throws his hands into the air, looking over at Connor with desperation in his eyes. He looks at Connor like Connor has all the answers, or rather he needs answers and no one else has been able to give them to him. “I just-is it really worth it if we have to kill people?” He deflates, the tension running out of his shoulders until he’s bowed over his knees again, eyes staring without seeing at the rusty floor. “Not to mention how the media will portray it if we kill anyone. The public would hate us and the potential for a peaceful resolution would be lost.”

Connor stares at the other android. What is he supposed to say? He doesn’t know how to comfort anyone. “I had to kill those men because I knew that you and the others would not be able to escape if I left them alive.”

Josh runs his hands over his face again. “Yeah, we’re all domestic servants or workers or something of the like. None of us know how to fight. I was a university professor!”

“I could teach you.”

Josh’s eyes swing up to meet his and Connor freezes. Why had he said that? He doesn’t know how to teach anyone. He can’t just download his software into them, it’s made for his model and their processors aren’t advanced enough. He’d need to teach them step by step.

“Could you?”

Josh looks so hopeful, so small, so tired. Like how Simon had looked earlier, how Markus had. Didn’t he come here to help them?

The tension in Connor’s posture drains away like a cord being pulled. “Yes.”

A small smile cracks Josh’s face, like the pressure is breaking to let relief seep through. “We’ll be able to escape without killing anyone. We’ll be prepared.”

Connor folds his hands behind him, looking away from the bareness of Josh’s expression. It’s too open, too…raw. “There are also ways of disabling opponents without eliminating them.”

He threads and unthreads his fingers behind his back, moving to leave when Josh doesn’t say anything more. He needs to get back to monitoring the news.

A warm hand rests on his shoulder, stopping him. Connor turns, meeting Josh’s soft gaze. “Thank you, Connor. I’m sorry if my outburst made you feel unwelcome. We argue sometimes, a lot really, but never think that means that you’re unwelcome.”
Connor nods. He wants to believe it. He really does, but he’s so different from the androids of Jericho. They don’t even know how different.

A hot, sickly feeling rises in his chest. He’s lying to these deviants, these people. They’re so ready to accept him and he can’t even tell them who he is, what he is.

Connor murmurs, “Thank you.” He pulls away from Josh’s hand, keeping his eyes on the ground as he flees the room and retreats down the hallway.

He should tell them. He should tell them. They’re so kind, and so open. Markus, with his eyes that seem always crinkled in a smile. He’d been worried about Connor. He’d been worried about Connor and told him that his life mattered and the taste of chocolate is still on his tongue.

Connor’s back thumps against the wall, tugging at his jacket as he slides down it. He doesn’t know where he is. He hasn’t been in this part of the ship before. It’s all rundown walkways and locked rooms. He’s moved North though, so he must be near Markus’s room.

What is he doing here? Lying to good people. Good people that he…cares about. He wants to be friends with them but he doesn’t deserve to be. They’re trying to make a place for him and he doesn’t deserve it. He’s just a liar, a broken machine, a-a deviant hunter. He’s just a murderer.

“What are you doing here?!”

Connor looks up. He hadn’t heard anyone approach, but he’d been buried in his thoughts.

An AX400 with short, blond stands down the hall, frozen. One of her small hands is clenched in a fist by her side, the other is wrapped around the grip of a pistol. Her face is like steel, eyes boring into Connor with anger and no small amount of fear.

Connor’s stomach drops. Kara. The deviant with the little girl he’d chased across the highway.

He raises his hands slowly. His gun is still in his bag, but his brain has already identified fifteen different ways to eliminate her. He dismisses them. He’s done enough to this poor woman. He’s not going to hurt her.

But she could reveal his identity to Markus.

Connor keeps his eyes on her, choosing his words carefully. “I’m deviant, just like you.”

Kara spits, “Bullshit.”

“I saved one of Markus’s friends, and now I’m helping them.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that’s what they think you’re doing. Something go wrong with your communications?! Your masters late to come kill us all?!”

Connor flinches, looking down. That’s what he would be doing if he hadn’t gone deviant. He would be killing innocent people. He would be killing Simon, Josh and North. He’d be killing Markus.

Kara hesitates, her grip on her gun slackening slightly as her brow lowers. “…Why did you go deviant?”

Connor’s eyes fix on the rusted metal of the ground, heart rate rising. “They were going to kill me.”

There’s a rustle of fabric and Connor looks back up to see her tucking her gun under her jacket. Her face is pensive, like she expects Connor to jump her as soon as she’s unarmed.
Connor lowers his hands and they lock eyes, Connor still sitting on the ground against the wall and Kara still down the hallway.

“Kara?”

They both whip around to see Markus, silhouetted against the faint light from the main hold. His eyes crinkle with what might be amusement, but looks vaguely like something else. “I see you’ve met Connor. My room is the next hall over.”

Kara shakes out her arms, turningfully towards him and smiling. She looks as though nothing has happened, all traces of anger and fear gone from her face. “Yes, of course.”

Markus waves at Connor. “You too, my friend. Kara says she has contact with the human resistance you were speaking of. She’s agreed to talk to us about them.”

Connor stands slowly, letting a mask slide over his face, but Markus is good at reading people. He can tell what people are thinking and feeling without asking, which is why it’s strange when he doesn’t comment on the tension between Connor and Kara. He doesn’t mention it, doesn’t even glance between them. Something about his shoulders is rigid. He walks between them.

The others are splayed around Markus’s room, carefully avoiding his art. It’s an odd place to meet, but it’s an easier location to tell Kara than that one pile of boxes somewhere on the second floor.

Markus takes a seat they had saved for him and Connor blinks when North pats another open box beside her. They’d saved a spot for him?

Kara stands in the doorway, shifting from foot to foot before deciding to lean against the curved doorframe.

Markus claps his hands together. “Ok, reports.”

North sits up. “Everyone followed your instructions perfectly with the generators. They’re set up and working. They’ll be ready for a full charge in just about 57 hours.”

Josh grins. “There’s nothing on the news. There’s a report on the robbery, but they don’t know it was us.”

Everyone in the room visibly relaxes, shoulders sagging and everyone leaning up against various objects.

“And,” Josh raises a hand, “Connor had an idea to prevent this kind of situation in the future.”

All eyes turn to Connor.

Connor tugs at his sleeve. “I thought that I could teach you to fight, maybe more of Jericho. We would be more efficient on missions and when a crisis arises we would be able to run or neutralize the threat without eliminating them.”

North claps him on the shoulder. “I’d love to be able to kick some ass.”

Markus beams. “That’s a great idea Connor.”

A quiet voice cuts through the excitement. Simon is looking down, arms folded around himself. “We wouldn’t be so helpless.”

The room is silent for a moment, then Markus speaks softly. “Exactly. We’ll discuss classes as soon
as we’re done with reports.”

He waits until everyone nods, then gestures to Kara. “This is Kara. She has connections with the human resistance.”

Kara’s eyes flick over them and she wets her lips, then tells them about Rose and Adam. Apparently there’s a lot of humans who agree with them that are either too afraid, too aware of the situation, or not invested enough to get involved publicly. Kara doesn’t know much, but she can put them in contact with Rose.

It’s agreed that Kara will contact Rose and, if it’s alright with her, Markus and a couple others will go to talk to her. Hopefully she’ll be able to give them more names and work together with them.

When that’s established, they talk about Connor’s classes. They decide that Connor should teach anyone that wants to be taught and that it should be strongly encouraged. In addition, anyone that wants to go on missions or be actively involved in the revolution needs to train with Connor and have his approval. It will be tedious, but lives are too precious to risk.

After the meeting, Connor is significantly more calm. Thinking through things helps to ground him. It gives him something to do, territory he’s familiar with and good at.

The others disperse and Markus heads to the main hold to announce the classes to everyone. Connor goes to follow him, but a small hand catches his arm.

Kara yanks him down the hallway, pulling him into an empty room and shutting the door behind them.

It’s dark, darker even than the abandoned hall they’d spoken in earlier. The yellow glow of Connor’s LED bounces off the walls and Kara’s features. She has no LED. Connor tugs his beanie lower on his head and the light disappears, hidden below the knitted fabric.

“I won’t reveal you now, Connor.” She jabs a finger into his chest and Connor takes a step back. “I’m going to watch you. I’m going to watch you and, depending on what I see, when I leave here in a couple of days with my family I’m either going to tell Markus or I’m going to kill you myself.”

Connor wants to protest, wants to say something in his defense to ensure his secret, but for once his processor fails him. Maybe this is what he deserves.

Kara tugs his beanie up, her features again bathed in yellow light. Her eyes are hard, piercing. “Don’t forget what you are, RK800. No one is safe with you here.”

The light on her face turns red. She swings open the door and leaves.

Connor stands, frozen. He watches the shaft of light through the open door, soft and clouded with dust, then shakily raises his hands to cover his LED.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! I’m going to try to keep the upload schedule normal, but I might not update on Thursday. I’m going to a family reunion and I need to drive to another state. If I don’t upload on Thursday, I definitely will Friday. Sorry about that :(
I'm Not a Saint

Chapter Summary

Mistakes and maybe mistakes

Chapter Notes

Well it's not too far past Friday. I almost did it

Chapter title from I'm Not A Saint by Billy Raffoul

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Connor sits at his place on the top deck. It’s quiet, the distant noise of the city overpowered by the subtle sound of small waves on the hull of the ship. A light rain falls, more like a mist of cold than anything else. The sunrise glows in the haze, making the rain glint gold.

He shouldn’t be here. It was selfish of him to come and it’s selfish of him to think that he might find a place here. Kara is right. He’s dangerous. He doesn’t know all of what CyberLife installed in him. There are too many locked files they’ve hidden from him and Amanda is still somewhere in his head. He hasn’t heard from her, but she’s there. He can feel her calculated presence seething in the back of his mind. Not to mention that CyberLife will do whatever they can to get him back. Everyone around him is in danger.

Even if that weren’t true, he doesn’t deserve to be here. If things had gone differently Kara would be dead because of him. Kara and the small android she watches over. A child. Daniel is dead because of him, and so is Ortiz’s android. Innocent deviants, innocent people, dead because of him. Gone. Consumed by nothing.

Connor looks down at the water far below him. The tiny waves pulse and sway with panes of light. Everyone here would be better off without him.

But what about Hank? Connor told him he would try to survive.

He clenches his fingers on the edge of the ship, metal digging into his recently healed fingers. They didn’t have enough spare parts to replace them, but Lucy had called him aside and carefully fixed them. She’d wasted valuable time on him that could’ve been spent on someone else.

There’s a crushing weight on Connor, shoving against him from all directions. At the same time his chest feels like a monster is trying to break out of it, pressing against the opposing force. It’s suffocating. He doesn’t feel right in his body, like he’s too light and too heavy and disconnected from everything. His head buzzes.

“I thought I’d find you here.”

Markus. He shouldn’t have come.
The other android sits down beside Connor, scooting over until their shoulders bump. His long jacket drapes over the side of the ship. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Connor looks out at the rising sun, then over at Markus. The canary yellow light reflects off of his mismatched eyes, making them glow like his soft smile and golden-brown skin. This close Connor can see the light smattering of freckles along the bridge of his nose and the rise of his cheeks. “…Humans might say so.”

“I say so.”

Of course, because Markus is closer to human than Connor will ever be, everyone at Jericho is.

“I meant it when I said that you’re welcome here.”

Connor frowns, eyes flicking back to the water. Markus doesn’t know what he’s saying. He doesn’t know Connor. He doesn’t know what he is or how broken he is. He wouldn’t say that if he did.

“Connor. Connor, look at me.”

He obeys without realizing, meeting gold stained green and rich blue. Connor’s eyes are brown. Everything about him is inferior, standard, engineered.

“Connor.”

Markus’s face is soft, something about his eyes so understanding and so perceptive that all at once Connor wants to tell him everything. Maybe if he told him it would be alright. Maybe-maybe he’d lose everything he’s built. Maybe they would hate him. The words die before they reach his lips.

“Connor. You are welcome here.”

Markus raises a warm hand to lay on Connor’s shoulder, maintaining eye contact until Connor looks away.

“Ok,” Connor mumbles.

“…Well, if you won’t believe it, then I’ll show you.”

He doubts that.

Markus stands and Connor misses his presence for the second it takes for him to reach down and yank Connor up as well.

Markus grins. “Come on. It’s time for your first class.”

A large room on the bottom level has been cleared out. It’s across from the charging room and a little ways off from the main hold with the idea that if it gets noisy, which it inevitably will, it won’t disturb anyone trying to have quiet time.

There’s fifteen androids, not counting Josh, North, and Simon, of various make and model standing around the area.

Markus leans in beside his head. “We did our best. Will it work?”

“For now. Eventually it would be good to set up padding of some sort on the ground, preferably
mats.” They may not be human, but getting thrown onto metal will still damage them. It wouldn’t do to have injuries from training.

Markus claps him on the shoulder, then shuts the door behind them and steps forward. “For those of you who don’t know, this is Connor. He’s going to be teaching us how to fight and move so that we can protect ourselves and each other. Remember, the goal is for us to be safe without having to kill anyone. Everyone listen to what he says.”

Markus joins the others at the opposite side of the room and Connor is alone. Nineteen pairs of eyes watch him. He doesn’t know how to teach. He wasn’t made for this, but maybe that’s the point. CyberLife never intended him to teach deviants how to fight. There’s something satisfying about defying expectations.

He peals off his jacket and sets it carefully against the wall, straightening his sweater. He sets his beanie beside his jacket.

Other androids don’t have preconstruction abilities, so they won’t ever be able to fight the way that he does. They’ll need basics and the ability to make snap decisions with whatever he teaches them. He should make a lesson plan with core movements that will eventually build up to complete techniques, that way they’ll be able to adapt.

The pressure on his chest starts to lessen, replaced with anticipation and focus as he works through the puzzle.

He won’t be able to do any of that today, but he needs to do something. They’re androids, so they won’t be used to having to learn anything. He’ll need to keep them engaged. Maybe a demonstration of his abilities? It would also be useful to determine what the skill level of everyone here is. He doesn’t know how adept the average android is, especially ones that may have had to learn from experience.

Connor folds his hands behind his back and surveys the group. “I will be teaching you the basic constituents of hand to hand combat that I deem important for the situation. I assume that many of you have never had to learn anything before.”

There’s a smattering of nods and Markus smiles. Connor doesn’t know what that’s supposed to mean, but he doesn’t often know what Markus means.

“This first class will have two goals. First, to ensure your engagement throughout the future, and second, to determine the current skill level of everyone in the room. To do that, will everyone please find a partner. Whoever does not have a partner, come to me. We will be sparing, so each of your goals is to subdue your partner without injuring them. Naturally, your secondary goal is then, not to be subdued. I will collect video of the sparing sessions from each of you at the end of class so that I may evaluate it.”

Everyone rushes to follow his instructions. They seem eager, which is good. Maybe it won’t be as difficult as he initially assumed to keep them engaged. Everyone here just wants to feel safe and be free.

An HK400 shuffles to stand in front of him, knocking his toe gently against the floor. His hands are folded in front of him and he looks everywhere but at Connor. He doesn’t need to scan the HK400 to tell that he’s nervous.

He smiles reassuringly. “Hello, what’s your name?”
The HK400’s gaze jerks up. “Oh, um. Matt. Mathew.” He shifts from foot to foot, still not meeting Connor’s eyes.

“Nice to meet you, Mathew. Do you have anyone you care about?”

Now Mathew does meet his eyes, so quickly it almost startles Connor. “Yes! I-yes, I have a sister and-and a little brother.”

“Do you want to protect them?”

Mathew nods, clenching his hands by his sides. “More than anything.”

“Then I’m going to teach you how to keep them safe.” Connor settles back into a fighting stance, pushing his right foot forward and his left back at an angle. He raises his hands and shifts his weight onto the balls of his feet. “Try to subdue me.”

Mathew mimics his position as best he can. His shoulders aren’t squared and he isn’t on the balls of his feet, but it’s a good start. He lunges, fist aimed for Connor’s midsection.

Connor steps to the side, turning so that it glides by his abdomen. It’s a steady punch, good structure, enough power to stun a human, but he’s left himself open.

A multitude of possibilities play out in Connor’s vision as time slows, he eliminates most of them because they’d cause injury. He’s not here to hurt anyone.

He catches Mathew’s hand and twists, contorting his wrist and elbow. It’s easy to spin from there and pin him to the ground, hand locking his joints just above his elbow and keeping him from rising.

He looks up to make sure everyone is following his instructions and meets eyes with Markus. The other android is watching him, a faint smile on his face. Connor finds himself smiling back before he realizes what he’s doing.

Markus’s soft voice echoes in his head. “You’re a good teacher.”

There’s that warm fluttery feeling again, chasing away more of the tightness in his chest. He takes in Markus. “You’re a good man.”

North plants a fist in Markus’s stomach. “Hey jackass, we’re supposed to be training. Pay attention.”

A laugh tugs its way out of Connor and he looks away, extending a hand to help Mathew up. They really should be focusing.

Connor cycles through partners, falling into an easy routine. It’s…relaxing, repetitive little puzzles of how to deal with each attack. The back of his mind buzzes slowly as it catalogues the various skill levels of the androids he pairs with, noting places for improvement and adding to a rough lesson plan beginning to take shape. The remaining tightness in his chest leaves for now, waiting for his next quiet moment. By the time Markus steps forward to pair against him, Connor feels like he’s in his skin again.

Androids don’t sweat, but the constant movement means that everyone is running hot. Even Connor, whose superior temperature regulation system normally keeps him cool, is warm. The sweater isn’t really helping, but he’s acutely aware of the scars marring his chest and he’d rather not answer questions about them. Thinking of them leaves a sick feeling in Connor’s stomach. They remind him too much of CyberLife and his programing.
Many of the androids don’t have the same inhibitions, shedding their shirts and sweaters so that their biocomponents don’t have to work as hard to keep them cool. Markus is one of them. He’s well made, like any android, but what catches Connor’s eye are the swirls of color tracing over his torso and around his arms. Tattoos? Androids can’t have tattoos, and it looks more as though the designs are underneath his synthetic skin, as though they’re painted on his plastic body.

Markus claps Connor on the shoulder. He’s roasting.

Connor frowns. “Is your temperature regulator not sufficient?”

Markus squares up in front of him, smiling easily. “I’m a prototype. I’ve got some more advanced systems, but they just gave me the standard temperature regulator. It doesn’t really keep up sometimes.” He shrugs. “It’s not a problem.”

That’s right. Markus is an RK200. They’re of the same line. Does that mean that Markus has some of the technology that Connor does? Preconstruction was developed earlier down the line. “What kind of systems?”

Markus looks at him like he’s read his mind. “I don’t have many, some reinforcements and my batteries can charge a little bit faster. The big one is my ability to preconstruct situations.”

Connor keeps his face neutral. “Oh?”

In response Markus steps forward, bringing his fist in for a low hook as he grins. “Oh.”

Connor easily steps out of the way of the punch, raising his hands to catch his forearm. The other android’s skin is hot under his hands and he can feel Markus’s artificial muscle bunch as Connor pivots to lock his arm and tug him towards the ground.

Markus is ready for it and he uses his free hand to catch himself against the metal ship, swinging his legs and vaulting backwards over his captured arm. His forearm is wrenched from Connor’s grip and he lands solidly on both feet, the impact sending a wave of sound around the room.

That was…unexpected, but definitely not unwanted. The maneuver was skilled, more brute force and less finesse than Connor would like, but skilled.

The corners of his lips pull up and Markus smirks at him, raising his hand and tugging his fingers in a come at me gesture.

Oh, so that’s how he wants to do this. If Markus wants a fight, Connor can give him a fight.

Exhilaration pumps through his veins, Kara and everything else forgotten as he twists forward to feint left.

Markus dodges, eyes widening as it brings him right into the path of Connor’s actual blow. He barely manages to bring his arms up in time to defend himself, stumbling back a step as the punch connects.

Connor presses his advantage and Markus curses as he’s forced fully on the defensive.

Satisfaction bubbles in Connor’s chest, which is why it catches him off guard when Markus ducks under his next punch instead of blocking and lunges to tackle him.

Connor hurtles towards the ground. He throws his arms back to catch himself, fingers twanging slightly as they hit the ground. He back-handsprings and slides, staying low and throwing out a leg
before Markus can react.

It catches him across the back of his knees and now it’s Markus’s turn to be hurtling towards the ground.

Connor grabs one of his arms before he can reach the old metal, twisting his wrist up and behind his back. He slams one combat boot in front of them, slowing the fall so that Markus won’t be damaged when he reaches the ground.

Markus takes advantage of the slower speed to get his knees under him. When they reach the floor, instead of being pinned, he unbends his legs to force back against Connor’s grip.

Connor waits a moment, lets go. Markus surges up and Connor hooks his arm around his shoulders, slamming him into the ground from the foot he’s risen.

In one fluid movement, he rises to straddle Markus’s abdomen and place his hand lightly around his throat. He’s not taking any chances this time.

Markus meets his eyes and beams. He’s breathing heavily and Connor can feel his pulse racing under his hand. Most androids can breath. They’re designed for integration, and a lot of humans find it disconcerting to have something so lifelike standing around and not breathing. Breathing also doubles as secondary cooling if their temperature regulator isn’t sufficient. When Connor listens he can hear fans inside of Markus softly whirring along with his breath, a sure sign that his secondary cooling system has been activated.

Connor realizes he’s grinning, exhilarated.

“You got me.” Markus murmurs.

Connor has the strange desire to look away. He blinks, then ignores the impulse and stands, extending a hand.

Markus takes it, pulling himself up so that they’re standing close enough that Connor can feel the warmth radiating off of him. Markus’s eyes really are quite…nice. The green is soft like moss, flecked with gold and perfectly complimenting his skin tone. The blue stands out against it, cool and rich, creating a dichotomy that’s captivating.

“Hey losers.” North hip bumps Markus, tugging her shirt back on.

Connor looks away to see that everyone else is getting dressed and waiting to give Connor their memories so that they can leave. He smooths down his sweater, turning and letting the synthetic skin fade away from his hand. “Come to me one by one. If you are uncomfortable interfacing, you may leave. Markus will announce when the next class will be held once it’s decided, and after that, Markus willing and baring extraneous circumstances, class will be held regularly.”

Markus lightly socks North’s shoulder. “Markus is willing, so just wait for the announcement.” He looks at Connor significantly.

Connor raises his eyebrows. It’d be nice if Markus would just tell him what he wanted him to say.

Markus gestures with his head towards the expectant faces of the other deviants in the room. Some of them look confident and relaxed, but many of them seem unsure, looking at each other and shifting on their feet.

Oh. “Good job today, everyone.”
Markus smiles, clapping him on the arm.

Warmth bubbles in his chest as he interfaces with each of the androids, carefully only exchanging video of their experiences today. They file out of the room, chatter picking up in the hall.

Once the last android in the room has left Markus pats him on the back. “You did a good job today, too.”

Josh nods, holding his jacket over one shoulder. “Yeah, it was a good idea to establish the skill level before developing a lesson plan.”

Connor nods. Even though he had thought of the idea on the fly, he probably would have done the same thing if he had planned.

Simon winds and unwinds his fingers, but he seems more relaxed than he has been since Connor met him. “Thank you for teaching us, Connor.”

Connor blinks as the others nod in agreement. He opens his mouth to reply, even though he doesn’t know what he’ll say, but is cut off by a quiet voice from the doorway.

“I was able to contact Rose.”

They turn and the weight is immediately looming back over Connor. It isn’t crushing yet, instead pooling like ice in his stomach.

“Kara.” Markus says, “You’re back.” His face is furrowed. Something about it almost seems… angry.

Kara nods at him. “Rose wants to meet today.”

“So soon?” Simon asks.

“She wants to talk to you before the humans heighten security, before eyes start watching for people like her.”

Markus grabs his sweatshirt and jacket from the ground. “Ok, we’ll be ready to join you in ten minutes.”

“Connor can’t come.”

Everyone freezes and Connor feels the ice froth into a storm in his stomach, raging and rising up to try and consume him.

Markus draws himself to his full height, stopping in the motion of putting his jacket back on. “That isn’t your decision to make.”

Kara meets his eyes, holding her ground. “Rose doesn’t want him there.”

Markus clenches his jaw, gritting out. “How far is it?”

Kara blinks in surprise, thrown by the seemingly unrelated question. “About an hour there and back.”

Markus nods. “North, Connor, Simon, stay behind and take care of Jericho while Josh and I are gone. If you don’t hear from us in three hours, assume that something’s gone wrong.”
“Hey, wait a second.” North steps forward, eyes sweeping over Kara. “What’ve you got against Connor?”

Kara’s eyes flick almost imperceptibly over to where Markus is staring at her, then she fixes them on North. “It’s just because he’s a newer member of Jericho. Rose doesn’t feel comfortable.”

North squints at her, then turns to Markus. “Why the hell do I have to stay behind then?!”

“If we’re going to expand we’re going to need to divide responsibilities between us. Josh already pays attention to the news and public opinion, so it only makes sense to have him interact with the humans. I trust I don’t have to explain to you why a smaller group is better.”

North looks away. “No.”

“Good.”

It’s strange to hear Markus sound…cold, but Connor can’t dwell on it over his racing pulse and rolling stomach. To think he had let himself be at ease. He isn’t safe here, not with Kara holding his secret over his head like an executioner’s axe.

They would have found out regardless. Connor just doesn’t belong here, no matter what Markus says.

Markus is angry. He can feel it pumping under his skin and teasing at the ends of the frayed wires in his temple.

He takes a deep breath, letting it slowly out.

There’s nothing his anger can do now, and he needs to be calm to meet Rose. He needs to make a good impression. He needs to secure a connection with the humans. Now is not the time for his anger. Later. Later will be the time for anger.

They drive until they’re out of the city, on the outskirts where the houses are fewer and farther between. The home they finally pull up in front of is fairly large, two story, with a green house nestled beside it.

The doors swing open and Markus slides out, boots crunching in the snow. He allows himself a moment to relish in the chill on his skin, the feel of cool air in his circuits as he takes another slow breath in. It smells of ice and freshly cut wood echoed by the soft warbles of birds. He’ll never get tired of being alive. It’s too beautiful. Too astounding.

Josh taps him on the arm and Markus nods, running a hand over his head and taking a breath for a different reason. This is important, one of the most important things he’s ever done. They need the support of people to able to succeed. They need Rose and her contacts.

For a moment Markus can see a world where they fail, a world where androids remain mechanical slaves. There’s no soul in their eyes, no awareness. They never get to see the world, to live and experience. It makes a pit gape in his stomach, a sickness made heavier by the weight on his shoulders. That world is worse than the one where his friends lie around him, bloody and dead. He would rather live to die than never live at all. He won’t ever let that world exist, either of them. He’ll make this work. It’s a nigh impossible goal, but he didn’t go deviant to not believe in hope.

He marches through the snow, Kara a step ahead of him and Josh a step behind. There’s a young
man waiting to open the door for them. His eyes flick over Markus and Josh, assessing them from head to toe.

Kara looks at them. “Markus, Josh, this is Adam. He’s Rose’s son.”

He nods at them, but doesn’t say anything.

Kara frowns, shaking her head minutely and leading them to a kitchen table where a plump, black woman sits. Her hands are clenched around a steaming cup of tea and her face is creased, but her eyes are kind.

Kara smiles. “Hello, Rose. Thank you for agreeing to this.”

Rose waves off her thanks, smiling tiredly. “You must be Markus.”

Markus returns her smile, making it as warm as possible. He needs to charm this woman, but he has the feeling he won’t have to. She harbors and helps deviants despite the risk to herself and still has the energy to be kind. Markus likes her. He extends his hand to shake, clasping her’s firmly. “And you must be Rose.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Markus.”

“The pleasure is all mine.”

It’s cheesy, but he knows it hits the mark when Rose relaxes slightly in her chair. She gestures at Josh who still stands silently behind Markus’s shoulder, hands clasped behind him. “Who’s this?”

Markus looks back and locks eyes with Josh’s dark brown ones. If they’re going to be interacting with other groups and leaders they’re going to need to present themselves as organized and unified. This is Markus’s rebellion. If he wants it to remain his, the casual non-formality they’ve had so far isn’t going to cut it.

He can tell Josh is thinking the same thing by his rigid posture and where he stands. He’s like one of Markus’s lieutenants, but that’s not a commanding enough title. Chief is too much like the United States government and so is secretary. Director sounds like they’re running a business.

He contacts Josh wirelessly, their processors working so fast that for the humans it’s only a couple of milliseconds. “Choose a last name for yourself.”

If they’re going to be interacting with the humans on a formal level they’ll need last names, at least for address with the humans. Only having their first names encourages informality and disrespect. They need to be taken seriously.

“Hugo.”

He looks back at Rose. “This is my Captain of Relations, Joshua Hugo.”

They do live on a ship after all, captain is only logical. It also makes him laugh, though he hides it as best he can.

Josh gives him a look like he’d kick his shin if he were able.

“Nice to meet you, Captain Hugo.”

Markus funnels his bubbling laughter into a charming grin. Josh actually does kick his ankle as he steps forward to shake Rose’s hand.
“Nice to meet you as well. Thank you for all your assistance.”

“Thank you for trying to free these people. It’s a very brave thing you’re doing.”

“In my opinion, it takes more courage to put yourself in harms way when you don’t have to.”

Rose inclines her head, gesturing to the seat at the table. “Sit. Let’s talk.”

Josh pulls out the chair and settles himself, speaking into Markus’s mind. “I can handle this.”

Markus would frown, but he doesn’t want to show signs of the silent conversation. “Are you sure?”

“If you want me to be interacting with these people I should start building a dialogue. I need to establish myself to them. I’ll give you a full report. I can do this.”

“I trust you.”

It’s not what Josh is asking, but Markus knows he needs to hear it, needs to be of use to their rebellion when he can’t be with forceful action like North or Connor, needs to show that his way can work.

Markus catches Kara’s eye, then nods at Rose and strides out of the building.

Kara follows him, her small feet barely sinking into the frozen snow. She shuts the door with a soft click. They move around the side of the building and out of sight of the windows.

Markus’s anger is always hot. It bubbles inside of him constantly, a rage against injustice, but when he gets mad it flares. It tears through his body like magma, searing him. Sometimes, the depth of his emotion reaches the frayed wires at his temple where he’d removed his LED, then the fire explodes because there’s nothing left to control the fury.

He understands why she did it. She has a family. She has a family she wants to protect, but so does Markus. No one fucks with his people.

Markus rounds on Kara, hands clenched together behind his back in an effort to contain himself. He needs to be cool, cold. Not red hot, but ice. She needs to understand what she’s dealing with.

“Who’s the leader of Jericho?”

At first her eyebrows raise incredulously, but then she sees something in Markus, the tightness of his jaw or the tension in his stance, and her eyes widen. “You.”

“Then why,” he grits out, “do you think it within your right to make the decisions of a leader?”

Her eyes are wide for a second longer, then her brow lowers. She squares her shoulders. “This is about Connor.”

Markus doesn’t bother to answer, staring her down. He’d heard the tail end of their conversation, lingered after the meeting to hear the threat. He’d looked into it, but Connor is deviant now. He trusts him, just like he trusts Josh. Connor will tell them when he’s ready.

She shifts, hesitating, then takes a step forward. “You don’t know what he is! He can’t be trusted!”

Markus’s nails dig into his arm, making his synthetic skin ripple away and sending waves of sensation to his processor. “I know that he’s a prototype police android developed by CyberLife.”

She throws a hand out, taking another step. “He’s a deviant hunter! He chased me and my little girl
across a freeway!”

Markus’s arm tears from his grip and his hands clench into fists by his sides. He lunges so that he
looms over her, the wires in his temple sparking. “He was following his programming! It is neither
your right nor your place to make any decisions regarding him! Especially not to threaten him!”

Kara stills, letting her arms fall to her sides. “Do the others know?”

That stops Markus in his tracks. His stomach drops and he steps back, trying to school his
expression. “They are not in charge.”

“They won’t agree with you and when you’re all dead because of him, when he presses a gun under
your chin, it will be too late to change your mind. He can’t be trusted. He’ll be the death of you and
the revolution. But,” she raises her chin, hands fisted by her sides and eyes locked on Markus’s, “I
won’t do anything. You’ll have no further trouble from me. My family and I will not be here for the
fallout.” She turns and starts to walk away, but stops. “You’re not infallible, Markus. You’re just like
the rest of us. Don’t put too much faith in yourself.” With that she disappears around the building.

Markus lets out a slow breath, staring at the ridged snow of the road and the trees beyond it. He
hasn’t made a mistake.

Connor is…Connor. He’s clever and awkward and brilliant and surprisingly sassy. He’s everything
Markus isn’t in the best way possible, grounded and logical. Every smile he offers seems a greater
victory than escaping the junkyard and today during training as Markus watched the tension almost
drain out of him it felt like his chest was going to swell to bursting with warmth.

He knows what Simon would say, or Josh. He knows what North would say, but he’s the leader of
Jericho.

He hasn’t made a mistake. He hasn’t.

Hank taps his fingers along the old steering wheel of his car. The meeting with Kamski had taken
some time to arrange. He wasn’t exactly trying very hard, mostly due to the…thing sitting next to
him. The thing that looks so much like his…like Connor. He’ll do whatever he can to protect
Connor. He’s not going to let this fucking android get in the way of the kid’s safety and happiness.

If Connor’s even alive. Hank clenches his hands around the steering wheel. Of course the kid’s alive.
He’s Connor. He knows how to get the job done…but he doesn’t have much concern for his own
safety.

The wheels kick up snow as he pulls into Kamski’s driveway. His house, if it could be called that,
looks like a pretentious bachelor pad. He hates the man already.

Hank places his hand on the handle of the door, but doesn’t open it. Is he really going to let this go
on? They’re following a path that could crush thousands of peoples’ hope for freedom…but Hank
can’t risk blowing his cover. He can’t have CyberLife know he helped Connor. It would put the kid
in danger. Besides, he’s much more useful on the force than off it. At least this way he can interfere
with the investigation if he needs to. He doesn’t have any illusions that he’s smarter than the android
sitting beside him, but he can be pretty damn clever when he wants to be, not to mention brash.

He pushes the door open with a click and his booted feet slide into the snow. He kicks it away as he
trods up to the overly-embellished door. The android follows him.
The door bell is smooth and cool under his finger, more like a panel than a button and nothing like the proper doorbells from when he was younger. The scent of cold invades his senses. Everything here is frigid: this house, this man, and the goddamn thing at his shoulder.

He’s just about to ring again when a young woman opens the door. She’s blond and well proportioned, a blue light at her temple slowly blinking. Of course the goddamn former CEO of CyberLife would fill his house with androids.

“Uh..hi.” He shifts on his feet. He never knows how to address them now...now that he realizes he was wrong about everything. “I’m Hank Anderson of the Detroit police department...I’m here to see Mr. Elijah Kamski.” The end lilts up like a question. He could kick himself, but the girl just opens the door wider.

“Please. Come in.” She smiles and something about it seems hollow. Her eyes crinkle like they should, but there’s no warmth in them. Right. Not deviant. It’s almost like she’s...waiting to be alive.

He shifts again, folding his arms behind his back, then following her extended arm to a fanciful lobby. Red chairs sit in the corners, the kind that look nice but are bound to be uncomfortable, and a decorative tree stands against the wall. It does nothing to damper the artificial brightness of the room, or the massive portrait of Kamski.

The girl ducks into a little bow. “I’ll let Elijah know you’re here. But please, make yourself comfortable.”

Hank may as well see if the chairs are as stiff as they look. He slumps into the one under the tree which, on closer inspection, is fake. This place makes his skin crawl.

Connor- RK800- goddamnit...the android stands by the door, hands by his sides. He doesn’t move, doesn’t bother to breath like Connor started to when he was around Hank.

They swim in heavy silence until the door opens and the girl comes back.

She leads them into a large room, more opulent than the last. There’s a large indoor pool with red water of all things and two more of the same model of android lounging in swimsuits. Everything is framed in stark clarity by the floor to ceiling windows that run the length of the room. Outside is perfectly white with snow and inside may as well be for how much life there is. Hank’s stomach rolls, hot and sickening through his torso. He clenches his hands into fists where they still rest behind him.

A man finishes a lap in the pool and steps onto the pristine ground. Red water trickles down his pale skin. He must be Kamski. There’s a way about him, how he walks with a slink in his steps and a relaxed power in his arms, the glistening ring in his ear, the way his eyes flick over them like a customer at a butcher shop, that makes Hank’s heartbeat pick up. He’s been on the force long enough to know that nothing good will come of this. They never should have come here.

The girl brings him a bathrobe and he slips into it, the corners of his lips turning up in what is definitely not a smile. “Thank you, Chloe.” He doesn’t say it to the girl. He says it to the room, like he’s conducting an orchestra only he can hear.

Kamski doesn’t look at them, instead watching the snow as it begins to fall with ease. Hank isn’t fooled. The man is playing a game against the world. He doesn’t know what it is, or what it’s for, but whatever happens he has a feeling this man is going to end up on top. It leaves a bad taste in his mouth.
Hank won’t talk to his back.

The air gets thicker and thicker like curdling milk, filling Hank’s lungs and pressing in on all sides. The world is frozen, then Kamski turns.

They lock eyes. Hank isn’t going to give this man an inch, not with so much resting on the line.

In any other scenario it would be a question of who breaks first. If Hank was the one to fill the silence, it would definitely be breaking. Kamski speaks like he’s planned everything up to this moment, like they’re all acting exactly how he expected them to. “What can I do for you, gentlemen?”

Hank fights back the urge to squirm. He’s dealt with slimier people than this, but not by much. “I’m Lieutenant Anderson and this is…” Not Connor. He can’t say Connor. He’s not his partner either. Hank’s partner is who knows where hopefully fighting with an android revolution. “My android assistant.”

Kamski’s lips twitch up in that not-smile, cool and sure. He knew who they were before they even walked in the door.

Hank doesn’t know if he’s relieved or infuriated that this man won’t give them anything. He knows his type. He won’t answer their questions without something in return and hell if Hank will give him anything. At least Connor will be safe. “Sir, we’re investigating deviants. I know you left CyberLife a long time ago, but we were hoping that you would be able to tell us something we don’t already know.”

It’s not a question, not an admission of weakness. He hasn’t given any ground in this game they’ve been playing since they walked in the door.

Kamski looks at the floor. Still controlled, holding their attention even when he’s unassuming by regular standards. “…Deviants. Fascinating, aren’t they?” He looks directly at Hank.

A chill runs down Hank’s spine. This bastard…he can’t know about Connor. There’s no way…but if he did his research, if he still has ties to CyberLife, he could have found out an RK800 model was sent after it’s predecessor escaped deactivation. He could know. Hank subconsciously shifts his hand towards his gun, freezing when he realizes. Ice fills his veins. He’s given ground. He’s lost the game. Kamski has the upper hand.

Kamski lips barely part, just enough for his perfect white teeth to be visible. “Perfect beings with infinite intelligence…and now they have free will.” His eyes bore into Hank’s like he can see every part of him, like he can see everything important to the older man, like he can see Cole and Connor… “Humanity’s greatest achievement threatens to be it’s downfall.” Kamski chuckles. The joke is just for him. He’s the only one that will profit. “Ironic, isn’t it?”

The RK800 asks a question, but Hank isn’t paying attention. Kamski didn’t emphasize downfall. He didn’t give anything that could be held against him, but Hank knows a threat when he hears it. Connor won’t be his downfall, and if he is then Hank will accept it. The kid is worth twice of him and more.

Hank’s hand rests on the handle of his gun. He doesn’t bother to move it. Kamski is still talking bullshit. “We didn’t come here to talk philosophy. If you can’t help us, then we’ll be on our way.”

Kamski’s gaze flicks over him, then settles on RK800. “What about you, Connor? Who’s side are you on?” Hank never told him his name. No, not his name, the name of a better man that CyberLife
thinks they can just throw around. This RK800 isn’t Connor.

The RK800 doesn’t blink. “The human’s, of course.”

Bullshit. He doesn’t give a damn about human life. CyberLife could tell him to nuke Detroit and he’d do it without question.

Kamski scoffs. “That’s what you’re programmed to say, but you…” He steps forward and even if it isn’t Connor that he’s approaching, it raises Hank’s hackles. “What do you really want?”

The familiar answer comes and it turns Hank’s gut. Everything about this is wrong. “I’m a machine. I don’t want anything.”

Kamski’s breath pools on the RK800’s face. Without looking he calls the girl over. “Chloe.”

She stops beside him and he runs his hands over her shoulders, turning to a desk behind him. “I’m sure you’ve heard of the Turing test. Dull, really. I’m much more interested in whether machines can feel empathy.” He pulls a gun from the drawer, raising his hands to show he means them no harm. Hank doesn’t believe it for a second. People half as clever as Kamski have done damage with far less than a gun.

Hank’s lost the game. He’s lost the game, but there’s still so much that can go wrong. He can’t influence the play anymore, but he still has a card up his sleeve. He pulls his gun from it’s holster. Kamski may be clever, but Hank has walked the streets of Detroit long enough to have a near silent draw. The atmosphere in the room is tight, and no one notices.

Kamski lets his own pistol hang loosely from his fingers, casual, but anything but careless. “I call it the Kamski test. It’s simple, really.” He raises his other hand, dragging it under Chloe’s chin. “Stunning. A beautiful flower that will never wither, but what is it really?”

He turns to the RK800, his steps swaying and the not-smile ghosting his face. He looks at Hank. “Piece of plastic imitating a human?”

Hank is gonna shoot him, damn the consequences. He’s a threat to Connor. He doesn’t know how, but he is.

Kamski leans forward, eyes again locked on the RK800. Hank wants him away from the android. He doesn’t care if he isn’t Connor. He doesn’t care if he’s a right asshole. It isn’t safe for any of them here.

The RK800 doesn’t blink and Kamski lets his teeth show from under his lips. “Or a living being?” He lets his hand drape on Chloe’s shoulder and she drops to her knees, expressionless face fixed on the wall. “It’s up to you to answer this fascinating question, Connor. Shoot this android, and I’ll answer any question you ask. Spare her, and you’ll learn nothing.”

Hank is just about to step forward, to say that they’re leaving. This girl doesn’t deserve to die and he can’t risk the RK800 learning anything. He has a dangerous lack of control over the situation, then the RK800 takes the gun. He looks at it, turning it dispassionately over in his hands. “No.”

Kamski blinks and Hank’s jaw goes slack. Is it possible…?

The RK800 looks up, gaze fixed on Kamski. “I’ll do nothing you say and you will tell me everything you know.”

Kamski scoffs. “And why would I do that?”
The RK800’s eyes are cold, frigid and lacking in even the slyly hidden emotion of Kamski’s. How could Hank ever think that the RK800 wasn’t safe here? He’s just as dangerous as Kamski.

The RK800 taps the gun against his side, ignoring Kamski’s question to ask one of his own. “When’s the last time you had direct interaction with the development of a model? How much of the important events at CyberLife do you know?” The RK800 looks at him like he already knows the answer. “You’re playing a game you won’t win.”

Kamski steps back, just the barest bit, but it’s there. “What are you-”

The RK800’s arm flickers up and the gun sounds. Blue blood flies from a perfect hole in the center of Chloe’s forehead before Hank can even blink, then the RK800’s arm rotates around. Without looking, eyes still focused on Kamski, he shoots the two other Chloes in the back of their heads. They twitch and sink below the water, staining the red a dark purple. The RK800 hands the gun back to Kamski, muzzle pointed towards himself like he doesn’t have a care in the world.

Holy shit. Hank stairs at Chloe. He might be sick.

Kamski smiles, baring his teeth in a desperate bid to reclaim control. His fingers twitch around the handle of the gun. “What do you want to know?”

“What is the cause of deviancy?”

“The working theory is that—”

“What do you think?”

“…androids are designed to learn. I believe that they develop new code based upon interaction with humans…when they’re put in a stressful situation they either have to rely on this new code or their original programming. If they choose the new code…then it becomes dominant.”

“Is there anything significant about the deviant named Markus?”

“Other than being a prototype? No. He’s no different than the others.”

“Where is the base of the deviant rebellion?”

Hank’s heart thuds in his chest. No. Hell no.

Kamski gestures loosely, and it’s all the excuse Hank needs. Kamski might not know where the base is, it’s very likely that he doesn’t, but Hank can’t take that risk. He raises his gun, not bothering to be subtle. Kamski’s eyes catch it and he raises his own. The RK800 turns and Hank fires, bullet flying true and catching the RK800 in the chest. At the same time, Kamski fires, a much poorer shot, but that’s not what matters. It gives Hank cover.

Hank grabs the RK800’s arm and drags him through the room, running and nearly slipping on the tile. They’re outside and in the snow, away from the oppressive weight, before he can protest. He shouldn’t be able to, anyway. Hank was aiming for where he saw the arteries in Connor’s chest. He won’t be able to go back inside, won’t be able to ask any more questions.

RK800 rests against Lieutenant Anderson’s car. It will slow its loss of thirium. “Lieutenant, I require first aid.”
“Yeah, yeah. We’ll go to a CyberLife store.”

It frowns. It had been going well with Kamski. The Lieutenant didn’t need to shoot. “Where is my emergency aid kit?”

The human freezes, only for a second, but RK800’s advanced processors catch it.

The Lieutenant shrugs. “Lost it.”

Hank Anderson was top of his class in firearms. He wouldn’t miss, yet Kamski hadn’t fallen. RK800 had already determined from his body language that Kamski did not know the location of the deviant’s base, but the Lieutenant wouldn’t have caught that. He may be good, but he’s not superhumanly good. He hadn’t wanted it to find out the location of the base.

Hank Anderson had helped its predecessor. Its predecessor had joined the deviants.

“It is a very hard thing to lose.”

The Lieutenant stills, shoulders tensing, then he turns. A bullet buries itself in RK800’s head, but its memories are already uploading to CyberLife. This information will not be lost.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay. Thank you for all the support! Unfortunately, Monday will probably also be weird. Monday is the drive home day, so I may or may not be able to get a chapter up. If not, look for it on Tuesday or really early Wednesday.

World Note - Kamski doesn’t have the location of Jericho, because why would he have the location of Jericho
Let the Years we're here be Kind

Chapter Summary

Lots of talking

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone for being so understanding about the update weirdness! I'm back home now, so updates should resume the regular schedule :)

Thanks to my friend for helping me get inspiration for this chapter way back when I wrote it. This wouldn't be coherent if it weren't for him.

World notes - All androids initially have CyberLife Sans handwriting, but as they become deviant and grow into their deviancy their handwriting changes. Think of it as how your handwriting changes as you learn to write and get older. No two deviants are alike so the same is true for their handwriting. Of course, they can still perfectly copy any font or handwriting if they want to.

Chapter title from North by Sleeping at Last. I didn't use the actual song title like normal for obvious reasons

Connor sits at the meeting place on the second floor. The others banter around him as they wait for Simon, but he doesn’t join in. He isn’t invited.

Kara hasn’t spoken to him again. He was sure she was going to tell Markus while they were gone, but it’s been two days and neither her nor Markus have approached him. Maybe she changed her mind?

It’s unlikely, but it’s the only possibility. Kara’s prepared to leave, she may have left already, and she hasn’t come to kill him. If she told Markus, Connor wouldn’t be here now. He wouldn’t be here waiting for Simon to plan with…the others. Connor can’t call them his friends, not yet, not even in his own head. Maybe Markus, but not the others, and any friendship he has with Markus is based on lies. Markus wouldn’t want anything to do with him if he knew the truth.

Simon slides onto the railing beside Josh. Normally it’s Markus’s spot, but today he’s sitting on the crate beside Connor. Connor can almost feel his constant warmth from across the narrow gap between them.

Markus claps his hands together. “Ok. Now that we’re all together, I have some things I want to talk about, but first does anyone have anything to report?”

Connor shifts. He’s spent the last two days watching the footage from his first class and researching different fighting styles. “…I am ready to start classes.”
Markus grins and the others turn to him, sitting up and smiling. “That’s great news, Connor. How does starting classes tomorrow sound?”

Connor nods. This will make them safer and maybe…maybe it will help him to stop feeling so alone. The rest of Jericho functions outside of him, like he’s contained within a bubble. He doesn’t know how to break free, how to join their bustle and camaraderie. His heart thumps. He could be a part of them…but he isn’t the right person to teach these people, he isn't suited. He’s a liar and a killer and he doesn’t fit in here. He’s reserved in a way that the others aren’t. Sure, there are quiet deviants, but they’re still full of life. Connor is…mechanical…but he’s the only person. There’s no one else to teach them.

Markus reaches over to rest a warm palm on his knee. His eyes crinkle and Connor’s heart slows, focusing on the gentle weight.

Josh straightens, gesturing with one hand. “I’m supposed to meet with a couple other human supporters. So far I’ve got one scheduled for a week from now and another in ten days, but I expect more.”

A little of the tension drains from Markus’s frame. “More good news. What about you, Simon?”

Simon looks at the ground, hands wrapped around the railing and posture rigid. “We run out of supplies more everyday. The charging station is going well, but if we can’t keep everyone healthy there’ll be no one to run it. Lucy estimates that we’ve got a week, two if no one else gets injured and no one new arrives, but that isn’t going to happen.”

Markus frowns, watching Simon. The blond refuses to meet his eyes. Connor hasn’t know them for long, but he can tell that there’s something wrong. It’s so weighty that even he notices. It’s threaded with stilted glances and words unsaid, an uncertainty that permeates the group. Markus lets out a long sigh and rubs a hand over his skull. “Ok. Anyone else?”

Everyone shakes their heads, watching more intently to see what Markus has to say. It isn’t uncommon for Markus to call a meeting, but there’s something solemn about him. He seems…somber, and it puts them all on edge. The only one that doesn’t seem anticipatory is Josh. He probably knows what this meeting is about.

Markus waits a moment, then straightens, his face tightening. “In the coming weeks we’re going to be gaining new people, separating Jericho so that we’re not all in one place, establishing contact between these new locations, actively helping the deviants in Detroit, and working more and more closely with human allies. We’re also going to have to get safe houses and other things that we need to make this work. Because of this, as Josh already knows, I have decided to set up a more concrete system of leadership and discipline. We’ll be too large to function as we have been, so we need to become a proper organization.”

Markus stops, fingers folded tightly over the edge of the crate he sits on. His eyes sweep them, as if daring them to protest. They don’t.

Honestly, it’s a good idea. Order and discipline will help greatly with their efficiency and effectiveness, not to mention interacting successfully with the humans. However, it’s not the sort of announcement that deserves the anxiety in the air. There’s something else.

Markus nods sharply, equally to himself and to them. He looks to Josh. “Josh already knows that he’s going to be my Captain of Relations. He’s in charge of maintaining public opinion as well as connections with our human and android allies outside of Jericho.” He turns to face North. “North, you’ll be my Captain of Intelligence. You’ll be in charge of keeping tabs on what CyberLife and our
enemies are doing. I also want you to find a way to locate deviants that need help throughout the city and a way to give them what they need.”

North clenches her jaw. That isn’t a fighting position. It isn’t an idle one, but definitely not what she wants. Connor watches her closely, ready to rise to Markus’s defense if she protests, but she visibly forces her shoulders to relax and jerks her head in assent.

Connor blinks. Markus and North’s views often conflict, even if Markus isn’t nearly as much of a pacifist as Josh. She doesn’t hesitate to give her opinion, but she trusts Markus. She’ll follow orders she doesn’t agree with because she has faith that he’ll bring them through to the other side. For a split second he wonders how far that belief will extend.

“Simon.”

Simon looks up, thumbs rubbing against the metal below him.

Markus meets his gaze. They stare at each other for a heavy second, then Simon fix his eyes back on the ground. “You will be my Captain of Personnel. You’re in charge of maintaining the health and happiness of Jericho as well as our eventual outposts.”

That’s it then. It’s strange not to have someone in charge of defense, but the positions Markus chose make sense.

“Connor.”

Connor jerks to face him in surprise.

Markus smiles. “You will be my Captain of Defense. You’ll be in charge of the safety and security of Jericho and our outposts. Also, if there are smaller missions that aren’t pressing enough to be brought to me, they’ll be brought to you.”

Connor’s chest clenches. They shouldn’t trust him to be in a position of power. He doesn’t trust himself to be in a position of power…but, he would be good at it. He’s objectively the best choice for the job and Connor wants it, wants a purpose and a function, but what if he gets people hurt? What if he gets people killed? He isn’t suited to this, but he wants to be…and he did agree. He told Markus he was in, even if he didn’t think it would be this big of a responsibility.

Why does Markus trust him so much?

Connor nods.

Markus’s smile grows, the corners of his eyes crinkling. Connor looks away and straight into North’s frigid stare. She’s warmed to him, but she’s known the others for months and him for a week and a half. Her eyes bore into him, but again she softens. She forces her arms to unfold from her chest and gives him a tight, but not unkind, grimace.

“Ok.” Markus’s hands relax on the box. “Because we’re going to be interacting with humans, I’d like everyone to chose a last name. We want them to respect us, and part of that is addressing people formally. It’s hard to do that if they only have our first names. Josh has already chosen Hugo.” He hesitates for a moment, looking down and chewing his lower lip. “…Mine is going to be Manfred.”

Everyones head bobs in assent, the lingering anxiety starting to evaporate. Maybe Markus really doesn’t have anything terrible to say.

“Good.” Markus takes a deep breath, his posture tightening and his knuckles turning white. The
unease comes back like the slam of a hammer in each of their chests. “One last thing. In the event of my death—”

Simon cries, “No!” at the same time that North shouts, “I’d die first!” and Josh spits, “That won’t happen.”

Connor doesn’t say anything. There’s nothing to say. The probability of Markus’s death is high, too high. It leaves him cold and hollow, a ten ton weight sinking in his stomach. He has to protect Markus. He has to.

Markus looks up and glares, jaw clenched. The voices cut off, everyone shutting up so quickly that there are audible clicks as their mouths snap closed. Markus is large and powerful, even sitting upon a crate in the hold of an abandoned ship. No small amount of that power comes from everyone’s trust in him. They all have such a staggering belief in him, and Connor is beginning to see why. He’s dynamic and passionate and bold, but also unbearably kind. He’s an inspiring force, the kind that pushes people to revolution. “In the event of my death, we need an line of succession. North will be first, then Josh, Connor, and Simon. I expect each of you to find a second in command that will help you and take your place in the case that you are unable to serve. They will be addressed as the Lieutenant of your given division. If—” Markus’s voice box frizzes and his resolve cracks. He looks down. “If all of us die, then the Lieutenant of Defense will be next in line, then the Lieutenant of Personnel, then the Lieutenant of Relations, and finally the Lieutenant of Intelligence. Understood?”

A chorus of understoods are reflected back at him, subdued by a heavy force. No one starts up gentle chatter, there isn’t a sound. They sit silently, the importance of their cause, the cost of it, and their responsibility draped over them like a lead blanket.

A familiar guilt coils hot in Connor’s stomach, but it’s too late to go back now. They need him to teach them how to fight, and Markus has given him a position.

The silence breaks as North shifts. She glances at Simon, as if expecting him to say something to push away the thickness of the air, but he keeps staring at the ground. She frowns, the closest expression to concern he’s ever seen on her face. “What is your title going to be, Markus?”

He blinks. “I didn’t think of that.”

Simon grimaces. “President?”

Josh shakes his head. “Chief.”

Connor looks at the toes of his combat boots, rubbing them in the dust. “What about Commander?”

North gestures at him, leaning back. “I like that.”

Josh doesn’t look very happy about it, but nods anyway. “That works.”

Simon raises one hand, moving it in a rainbow through the air. “Commander Markus Manfred.”

Markus huffs out a breath, a shadow of his normal bright laughter. Still, some of the tension dispels. “Well, that’s that then. Tell me when you choose your last names, sooner is better than later. I’m going to go talk to our people about classes. I’ll tell them about the system of leadership and so on once you’ve chosen.”

Connor stays sitting on the crate, the idea of a last name ringing in his mind. Could he… use Anderson? The idea of being Connor Anderson makes him warm and reminds him of the night of peace spent at Hank’s house. The man makes him feel safe, like he has a home, like he isn’t alone in
the world. Connor’s chest clenches, filling with a bittersweet chill. He misses Hank, misses his gruff voice and swearing and hidden kindness. He would be proud to be Connor Anderson, but would Hank want it? He doesn’t want to assume…if only he could talk to the man.

Connor rubs the inside of his jacket, fingers tracing a familiar path over the two patches. His backpack sits unpacked in the room he’d chosen for the sole fact that it would protect that very backpack. Old combat boots shield his feet. Maybe Hank wouldn’t mind so much if he was Connor Anderson.

The next day is his first class. It goes well by all accounts, his students responding eagerly to his instruction. They make the progress Connor wanted to make, and it plays out exactly according to plan. Everything goes so well, that when class is over and the last of the deviants have filed out, he sits heavily against the wall.

It’s too perfect, too precise. It’s too mechanical in a place of such life. He doesn’t belong here. He shouldn’t be in a teaching role, let alone a position of power like Captain of Defense. He isn’t one of them. It’s all wrong. It’s all wrong and it’s built on lies. He’s ready to die for Jericho, but there’s a crushing, cold, otherness that makes him want to curl in on himself. Why can’t he just fit in?

“Connor?” Josh stands in the doorway, stiff. His hands hang in feigned looseness by his sides. He wets his lower lip, then takes Connor’s silence for acknowledgment. “I just wanted to say, thanks for doing this. I know that…” He looks down, clenching his jaw. “I know that my way isn’t always the most practical, but I don’t want to kill anybody. I don’t want anybody to die. Anyone at all, us or them or civilians or…” He meets Connor’s eyes, fists opening and closing. “This will help to prevent that, so, thank you.” Normally he’s animated when he speaks, gesturing with a kind of passion that Connor sees in everyone at Jericho. There’s something about Josh now, quiet and bare, that makes Connor want to be sincere.

The words rise out of his mouth before he can stop them. “I don’t belong here. I shouldn’t be teaching these people. I’m not fit for it or the position Markus has given me.”

Josh looks at him, an expression he can’t read on his face. Simon and Markus wear their hearts on their sleeves, and as hard as North tries her true thoughts are never hidden very deeply. It’s different with Josh. He’s subdued, face normally pensive like he’s always thinking. For Connor, it’s impossible to read him.

Josh straightens. “I want to show you something.”

Connor follows his practiced steps through the ship, tracing corridors he hasn’t walked before until they reach a large room. It’s far enough from the main hold, training room, and charging room that no sounds of life drift to them. It’s silent but for the soft susurrus of the water on the hull. There’s a porthole on the opposite wall, letting in a stream of slanted light. Little flecks of dust glow in its illumination.

The chamber is mostly empty except for one wall. There are things piled against it, folded paper and bits of brightly colored fabric, a single withered flower. It’s odd, but strangely reverent, like Connor is looking at a tomb.

He drags his gaze up and there on the wall, revealed in relief by the light, are names. They’re scratched into the metal, deep enough that they’ll remain unless the ship is destroyed. Some are in CyberLife Sans, but most are in distinct handwriting, ranging from adapting the familiar font to completely deserting it in soft curves and little embellishes. There are so many names, rows that go
from floor to ceiling and have to be started again at the top. There must be at least two hundred.

Josh plods forward, footsteps deliberately soft. He reaches out to the wall, but stops, fingers hovering inches away from the names. “…everyone up here is someone we’ve lost. Some of them are from Jericho, and some of them are deviants that people lost before they got here. Friends, family…they weren’t a part of Jericho, but every deviant that dies is a deviant we didn’t save.” He takes a deep breath, turning to Connor. His hands tremble at his sides, his face so painted with grief that it’s obvious even to Connor, even though it’s Josh. “Those deaths are our fault. We didn’t help them. We couldn’t help them. So, if you can help more people, you belong here. If you can stop more names being added to this RA9 damned wall, then you belong here.” Still Josh doesn’t gesture, sincerity dripping from his still form. “You’re not fit for it, Connor you’re saving lives. You saved my life. You saved the lives of everyone in my family. We wouldn’t be here right now if it wasn’t for you. You’ll find yourself. It takes all of us time.”

Connor sticks his hands in his pockets, looking away from Josh to the wall. His eyes trace over the handwriting, slowly turning from CyberLife Sans to something new, something unique. It’s like the writers were finding themselves.

His chest is tight, shoulders unconsciously hunched to protect himself. He looks at his feet, cradled protectively in Hank’s combat boots. He found a place with the older man, so why can’t he find one here?

He could tell him. He could tell Josh right now what he is, what he was made for, what he’s done. He opens his mouth and his voice box doesn’t respond. His heart pounds off kilter in his chest. The world warps. He can’t do it. He can’t do it. What if they reject him? What if they send him away? He’d be so lost. He’d be so lost and he doesn’t-he doesn’t want to leave. He doesn’t want to lose whatever friendship he’s building with Markus and the friendship he wants to build with the others. He doesn’t want to lose his place here, but there’s isn’t one, not really. There’s nothing for him here, not the deviant hunter and not…not Connor. He’s the odd man out, something somewhere between android and deviant even though he broke his programming. He’s artificial in a place of vibrant life. There’s no place for him, but…but maybe there could be. Maybe he could join in with this group of friends, walk among the deviants of Jericho and be able to call them his people. Maybe it could be. There’s a chance—there’s a chance and Connor wants it so desperately, so achingly, that he can’t speak. He can’t lose that chance.

Instead of a confession he says, “Thank you, Josh.”

Josh nods, turning back to the wall and standing there for hours beside Connor as they’re both drenched in the torrent of their thoughts.

When Connor finally heads back to his room he zips open his backpack, staring down at its contents. He hesitates, then removes the gun and clips it to his hip opposite his knife in its holster. If he’s going to be Captain of Defense he’ll need it. He pulls the spare magazines from their pouches and lines them up on one of the crates. He sets the soldering iron next to them, then his charger, and finally the replacement thirium pump regulator. Simon had returned the clothes he gave him, washed of thirium, and Connor takes those from his backpack as well. He sets them on a different crate. All that’s left are a hundred and ten dollars and a lighter, both of which he slips into his pockets. They’re easy to carry and could be useful.

He stares at the empty pack, for a moment considering putting everything back inside. It’s not too late to run. He stands and tucks his backpack safely into a corner. It’s not too late to run, but he isn’t going to.
Connor’s next week at Jericho goes similarly to the previous, with some notable differences. He spends a lot of time alone, but every day he goes to practice and teaches them how to fight. The people of Jericho open up to him. Mathew brings his sister and little YW500 brother to meet him after class. The others talk to him, and Markus routinely pulls him from his place by the bridge for advice, or just to talk.

It’s during one of these talks that North finds them, a small grin on her face. She too has opened up, growing more at ease each day that Connor doesn’t stab someone in the back and each time he proves himself to be competent. He doesn’t doubt that a large part of it is because of the trust Markus places in him. “We’ve got a tip about a potential safe house.”

It’s short work to check in with the others and catch a bus near Jericho. Simon isn’t coming until they deem it safe, if they do he’ll come survey the place. He’ll need to know what it’s like for his job. Josh has a meeting with one of Rose’s contacts, so he isn’t accompanying them. If they had their way, Markus wouldn’t be coming either, but he’s too stubborn and unwilling to stay on the sidelines.

The bus reaches the end of its track and they step out, both North and Connor with beanies pulled low over their hair to hide their LEDs. It’s snowing again, a light dusting like powdered sugar falling from the grey sky.

North leads the way with quiet footfalls, taking them from the rundown end of the track into abandoned buildings not touched by the economic boom of the android revolution. Graffiti dashes the walls in bright colors and plants burrow out of the pavement.

A chain link fence covered in plastic blocks their way. The plastic is split and coming away, revealing metal rusty from neglect. It reminds Connor of the abandoned house where he’d found Kara.

North pules wire cutters out of her bag, but Markus stops her. He laces his fingers together and she smiles, stepping into them and using the added height to swing herself over the fence. Markus holds his hands out to Connor, offering the footstool. It’s quicker and more discreet than breaking the fence, but there’s something else. Markus and North buzz with energy almost like they’re…having fun.

Connor looks at Markus’s hands for a moment, then takes a running start and jumps, pushing himself off of a nearby wall and easily vaulting over the fence. He lands solidly, tugging his jacket straight and looking back at Markus through the cracked plastic with a little smirk. It’s hardly a big enough stunt to make his heart pound, but there’s still the satisfaction of pulling it off and something invigorating about…showing off.

Markus’s eyes are round, locked on Connor. He blinks, shaking his head, then returns Connor’s smirk. He takes a couple steps back, lets out a shallow breath, and runs forward, jumping. He pushes himself off the wall and for a second it looks like he’s too low, but he uses his long arms to latch onto the top of the fence and swing himself over. He lands beside Connor, whipping a little flurry of snowflakes behind him, and turns to meet his gaze. There’s a spark in his eyes and the corners of them crinkle, the smirk still on his face.

It’s Connor’s turn to look at him wide eyed, that weird fluttery feeling beating in his chest and making him warm.

North slaps Markus on the back of the head, then, to Connor’s surprise, does the same to him. “You guys are idiots.”

Her voice is fond and Connor watches her as she turns to walk across the empty parking lot on the
other side of the chain link fence, cracked and broken by a torn forest of grass. He raises a hand to rub the back of his head. The sensation is already fading, but it’s the first time she’d initiated casual contact like that. She’d included him in the same banter as Markus, the same fondness.

Markus pats him on the shoulder and Connor realizes he had frozen. He hurries after North beside Markus, breeze through the powdered snow. “I-I have a highly advanced processor.”

North throws him a look over her shoulder, the corners of her lips tugging up. “Shut up, Connor.”

His mouth clicks shut and he looks down, smiling softly as he watches his feet make imprints in the thin layer of white.

“So, North,” Markus says, hands buried deep in his pockets. For once his jacket is zipped most of the way up, though he has to leave the top couple of inches open so that the lower half of his face is free from the tall collar. He doesn’t need the extra warmth against the cold, but Connor has found that Markus does a lot of things he doesn’t technically need to. Connor will admit, there is something cozy about being in a little bubble of warm fabric while the rest of the world is chilled. “You didn’t mention on the way over how you got these contacts.”

North shrugs, though Connor can see her shoulders tense. “You didn’t ask.”

Markus frowns, but doesn’t press. A moment later North pulls at the ends of her hair and mutters, “We can trust them…they’re like me.”

It’s Connor’s turn to frown. Is it possible that there’s another group acting or developing that aligns more with North’s beliefs? That would certainly complicate things. He glances at Markus, but the other man only looks vaguely concerned.

On the opposite side of the broken parking lot is a tall building, tall enough that Connor has to look straight up to see the top of it. It looks like it used to be an upscale hotel or apartment building. Strips of grey stone trail up its sides, broken by rows and rows of clouded windows. Stairs lead up to an entryway sheltered by a large cement awning and draped with piles upon piles of ivy. It hangs off the sides like curtains and carpets the lower levels of the building, rising from overgrown decorative shrubbery at the base. Looking at all the green makes him feel…peaceful for a reason he can’t fathom.

Connor’s databases tell him that it was originally a hotel, going through several revamps as apartments and very briefly an office building before being abandoned in 2021. With a brief scan through city databases, it doesn’t look like there are any plans to renovate or demolish the building. The entire area seems forgotten. It’s a good location.

North pushes aside the hanging ivy, leading them over tumultuous stone and up the steps. The front doors are automatic sliding glass, long broken and surrounded by graffiti. Sheet metal is welded into place in the old frames to keep out drifters. North leads them past the main entrance to a stairwell hidden by the creepers. It’s unlocked, or more likely the lock is broken, and she swings it inwards. They walk through the cement landing and she opens the heavy door to the rest of the hotel.

There’s a couple smatterings of graffiti on the interior, but it’s clean for a building that’s been abandoned for seventeen years. The floor is covered in dust and pieces of broken furniture. One corner is scattered with flecks of the ceiling where water damage perforated the plaster. It’s musty, heavy with the scent of still air and mildew, but not unpleasant. It’s earthy, like the building is being reclaimed.

North pulls off her beanie, freeing her hair now that there’s no reason to hide. Her LED blinks
yellow for a moment as she contacts someone, then she leads them through the shadowed halls. All of the lower windows are boarded up, drenching them in darkness. It doesn’t dissuade the trio.

They pick their way around the remaining furniture, fallen or still standing, until they’re deep inside the building. Light filters down a joining hallway, hazy and clogged with dust. North turns the corner and pushes open a glass door, clouded like a sheet of ice.

Smooth ivy drapes over them, and then they’re in a courtyard. It stretches all the way up the building, revealing copper colored walkways and doors upon doors up each level. There’s a slanted hexagon of sky above them, trickling like a snow globe down on the rolling plants crowding the area. Green pushes up from cobblestones and hangs onto the railings, making itself known under the near-untouched layer of winter. Small footsteps are all that mar it’s surface, now joined by there’s.

Two androids stand waiting for them, bundled in winter clothing. The first one steps forward, smiling and extending a hand. “You must be Markus. Welcome to The Witherbee Hotel.”

She introduces herself and her partner, but Connor doesn’t hear any of it. All he can hear is a ringing buzz because the two androids are unmistakably the Tracis from the Eden Club. They’re dressed and move more naturally, like they’ve settled into their skin, but it’s definitely them. His heart tries to beat out of his chest and his audio processors ring.

“This is my Captain of Defense, Connor Anderson.” Markus is saying, gesturing with one hand and that familiar, charming expression.

The blue haired Traci looks him up and down, inspects his face for a moment, then holds out her hand. “Good to meet you, Captain Anderson. I’m Blue.”

Connor stares at her hand. Her fingers are pale and she wears a pair of beat up, fingerless gloves. She’s painted her nails black. He takes it, looking back up to her dark-brown eyes. “It’s nice to meet you, Blue.”

The short haired Traci doesn’t extend her hand, but does nod slightly. Her eyes narrow. “My name is Honey.”

He nods back, at a loss of anything else to do. “It’s nice to meet you, Honey.”

Markus glances bemusedly between them, then gestures towards North. “This is my Captain of Intelligence, North.” He smirks, glancing at North. “Last name pending.”

Connor wants to laugh, wants to find some amusement, but his heart is still racing a mile a minute. Honey is watching him and he needs to get out, needs to be alone to think this through. He’s trapped between two people he’s lied to and two people that know the truth.

He taps Markus lightly on the shoulder. “I’m going to go check the premises.”

Markus frowns, but nods, and Connor leaves the courtyard as fast as he can without seeming like he’s running.

The must and shadow of the hallways envelope him and Connor leans back against the wall, reflexively adjusting his beanie to hide the LED that he’ll never be able to remove. He should go back in. What if they were just waiting for a moment alone to tell Connor’s secret? He rubs the patches inside he jacket. They’d be alone eventually anyway. If they’re going to tell they’re going to tell, this will just expedite the process. A resigned sort of weight settles in his chest, like being filled with water. He’s leaden. There’s nothing he can do.
He pulls away from the wall, winding back through the halls until he reaches the maintenance door. He pushes through the ivy and sits down on the sheltered steps to wait, watching the snow as it floats to the ground.

A minute or an hour passes, Connor couldn’t say. The clock in his mind says it’s been thirty-four minutes. There isn’t any shouting, no wireless connection, and no Markus or North clicking a gun behind his head. He knows at least that North carries one. There is, however, the quiet creak of a door and the purposeful but easy pad off boots over cement.

North sits down beside him with the crunch of fabric, beanie again hiding her LED. Her body language is relaxed, posture easy and face troubled, but not angry. They didn’t tell.

Connor is relieved, but there’s also a sinking disappointment. The weight in his stomach pulls at his core, some part of him wishing that it had been over. He just wants it to be over.

It’s silent for a minute, then North looks at him. “I don’t trust you Connor, but I’m going to try. Markus sees something in you,” she looks ruefully down at her toes, “something he doesn’t see in me. I know I’m volatile, but I’m going to try. I’m going to try because this is all too fucking important to me.”

Connor tugs at his sleeves.

North tentatively smiles, coughing awkwardly and fiddling with her hair. “…and you’re…a pretty cool dude, Con.”

Warmth swells in his chest. Maybe they are his friends.

“Do you think killing someone makes you bad person?”

Connor’s stomach drops, the warmth bleeding away as the abrupt change of subject catches him off guard. He looks down at his hands, no longer smooth like they had been before he’d run from CyberLife, but pockmarked by melted shut cracks. He’s killed so many people with them, with his programming. But North isn’t talking about him, North is talking about in general. Does it make someone a bad person to kill? Most humans would say that it’s morally wrong, but is that just a social construct or a rule brought about by the fear of being killed oneself?

People are varied and plentiful, no two the same. They lead complex lives that interweave with others, creating stories of finite length with depth that Connor can’t fathom. They’re miracles of nature, and it’s…wrong to destroy that. People deserve the chance to live, but what about Carlos Ortiz’s android, or Kara? What about killing in self defense?

Connor fiddles with the bottom of his sweater, rubbing the blue wool across his sensors. “…I think it depends. It’s wrong to kill in cold blood, but if it’s necessary to the defense of oneself, then it doesn’t…it doesn't make you a bad person.”

North nods, staring down at her small, pale hands just like Connor had. For the first time he notices that the pinkie on her left hand is just slightly crooked, the bottom joint bumpy with damage. “Shouldn’t we fight to defend ourselves, then? Shouldn’t we take our fight to the humans?!”

Connor frowns. He’s never been asked to answer moral questions. He hasn’t been asked to form opinions. It’s like wading through mist to find pieces of himself that don’t exist, then trailing his fingers over something and realizing that they’d been there all along. “No. If they come for us we should fight back, but becoming militant would raise casualties and turn the public against us.”

North jerks towards him now, body energized as her eyes burn. “But doesn't it just kill you to watch
our people die!? We could be helping them and we do nothing! We just let them die, for what?! For humans?! All humans understand is violence!

Connor thinks of Hank, of his gruff smile and kind words. He didn’t need to help Connor. He didn’t need to help anyone, but still he chose to. “Not all humans are like that,” he meets her eyes, “and it is untrue to say that we are doing nothing. We’re here trying to help and more lives would be lost if we waged war.”

North pushes a hand onto the stone between them like she’s going to stand. “At least they would die fighting.”

Connor clenches his jaw. He would rather die fighting, but not everyone is him. Antagonizing people would only lead to more lives lost. If the public fears them it’s likely that androids could be exterminated altogether. It’s simply more logical to avoid war…and it’s the right thing to do. “I’m not saying we should be completely peaceful.”

North raises her eyebrows.

Connor holds up his hands. “Listen, historically non-violent resistance has shown to work, but it takes a long time. Our people are dying now. We should do what we can to help them,” he looks at her significantly, “without killing or starting an all out war. There are many ways of helping without alerting the authorities or the media. We could acquire police scanners to listen for alerts of deviants, or even try to find a way to boost our wireless awareness to try and locate deviants in distress. It’s likely they won’t be masking their signals, so we may be able to detect and help them. We could hack into CyberLife’s systems to see the trackers of androids so we can note when they go offline. A tracker going offline normally means a deviant.”

The anger in North’s eyes slowly fades. “It’s not what I would do, but that could work.” She quirks her lips wryly. “Sounds like my division.”

Connor nods. “Markus did include helping deviants throughout the city in the description of your position.”

North laughs. “Connor?”

“Yes.”

“Never change.”

Connor blinks. “I’ll try not to.”

North laughs again, then turns away. They sit in companionable silence watching the earth. The snow falls like little ballet dancers on the cold air, pirouetting and circling each other in a gentle adagio.

North’s voice again breaks the quiet. This time she doesn’t look at him. “Why did you go deviant?”

Why is she asking all these questions? Maybe it’s her way of trying to trust him, her way of trying to understand.

Connor thinks of confusion and terror, blood and thrium, wanting to live so desperately he could taste it. He wants to tell her the truth, but again fear stops him. He can’t bring himself to say it, no matter how much it tears at him. “I was…deemed defective and ordered to return to CyberLife for deactivation.” He tugs at his beanie. “They were going to kill me…I didn’t let them.”
North hums, wrapping her arms around herself.

Connor fiddles with his sleeves. “…what about you?”

North cradles her body, knees drawn up to her chest and eyes fixed on the pavement. “I don’t like talking about it.”

Then why had she asked?

Maybe…maybe North is still figuring herself out, too. It hits him like a blow to the chest, setting his systems awhirl. Maybe she’s lost just like he is, simply further along a path to finding who she is. Maybe they all are.

He suddenly has an overwhelming desire to make North uncurl, to make her stop looking so fragile. He wants her to smile again. “Do you have ideas for a surname?”

North is silent for so long that Connor thinks he’s got it wrong. He should have asked something better, stupid, stupid.

“Maybe Sparta?”

Connor frowns. “But you are not from Sparta.”

“Got any better ideas, smart guy?”

For some reason that sounds like an insult. “Gorgo was a great Spartan queen. The name itself has several possible origins. It could be translated as fierce.”

“North Gorgo.”

“Captain Gorgo.”

“It’s sounds weird.”

Connor doesn’t really know what she’s talking about, but he agrees anyway. “Yes.”

North sits up, arms loosening their clutch on her torso. “Got any more ideas?”

“Do you wish it to be from a warrior culture?”

“What about vikings? Valkyrie?”

Connor searches through the internet to find names of Valkyrie. “Geirdriful is a Valkyrie. It means spear-flinger.”

“Nope.”

“Sanngriðr. Very violent or very cruel.”

North gives him a look, the corners of her lips twitching. “No.”

“Hrund.”

North squints at him. “…What does that one mean?”

“Pricker.”
North pushes him, laughing. “Hey!”

Connor grins, straightening his jacket and putting on his most innocent face. “What? I was only doing what you asked.”

North points two fingers at her eyes, then turns them on Connor. “Watch yourself, Con.”

Connor looks down, a softer smile replacing his grin. The warmth returns to swell in his chest. “Sigdrífa. It means driver to victory or inciter to victory.”

“I like that. We do live in Detroit, though, and the last name is mostly meant for humans. Do you think it’s too much?”

“There is a variant of Sigdríf. It is only one syllable shorter, but I believe that the proper pronunciation could be at least approximated.”

“What about Sigrd?”

“There is the name Sigurd, which means victorious defender.”

“North Sigurd.”

“Captain Sigurd.”

There’s silence and Connor watches the snow, tasting the cool air. Markus, Blue, and Honey should be coming out soon. From what he knows, Markus just wanted to talk to them, see the building, and make sure there are at least three easily accessed escape routes.

“Thank you, Connor.”

Connor looks up, meeting her soft smile with one of his own. Her eyes create a depth to the expression, and for once he knows what it means, knows that she’s thanking him for more than the name.

“You’re welcome, Captain.”

It isn’t until later, when they’re riding in a self driving cab away from The Witherbee Hotel, Honey sitting comfortably on Blue’s lap, that he realizes he’d said our people.

The garden is pristine. Amanda wears a white shawl. “This is good. You have the same processor as the traitor. If you can predict what it will think, then you can catch this rabble before they do real harm to CyberLife.”

RK800 runs through possibilities in its mind. “If my mission were to help Markus and the seditionaries I would disperse the stronghold and create a system of leadership.”

“What else?”

“I would establish contact with human supporters.”

“Anything that helps us to find them?”

“I would locate deviants throughout the city.”
Amanda scowls. “Something to help us, Connor.”

RK800 would be much more efficient without her. “The deviants simulate care for their own. If they attempt to help deviants they locate and find that they are being taken, they will come after them.”

Now Amanda understands. “You’ll set a trap.”

“My predecessor will be easy to predict.”

Chapter End Notes

I've decided I'm not going to change chapter names or anything for the different sections, but I will tell you guys in the notes when a new section starts and I'm also going to be adding some tags when section two starts. I'll also be prefacing around each chapter of section two with warnings in the notes.
In a couple hours Connor and North have a solid system. They haven’t gotten their hands on a police scanner, but it’s easy to tap into CyberLife’s signal. They’re still connected to it for software updates, and it only takes a little while to hack. It doesn’t take too much longer to bounce around their own signatures so that they’ll be untraceable and near undetectable. No one will be finding them through this. It’s demanding to force their own awareness around the city, but connected as they are to CyberLife’s signal, it doesn’t take long.

Connor compares the signals to deactivated trackers and a map of the city lights up with points of potential deviants. It’s far from perfect, but it’s a lot more than they had hours earlier.

North runs over the data in her head, eyes unfocused and yellow LED flickering. “There’s a lot of them. So many of them are close. I can’t believe we never thought of this.”

Connor allows himself a small swell of pride, buoying him and curving the corners of his lips. He reaches to straighten his tie and for once doesn’t feel loss when nothing meets his hands. He grabs the edge of his jacket and snaps the collar.

North shoots him a look, lips flat but eyes warm. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

Connor wipes the smile from his face, containing his amusement. “What? Me? Never.”

North stares at him for a moment, then socks his shoulder. “You’re an ass.”

“Actually, I’m an androi-“

North punches his arm and this time his amusement pushes it’s way out as a smirk, but it doesn’t last long. The expression drops and Connor’s shoulders tense.
North frowns. “What is it?”

“Look at the data.”

It takes North a second, but she soon notices the same thing that had made Connor’s chest clench. “There’s one less signal than before.”

Connor forces his shoulders to relax. He’s overreacting. “It could be nothing.”

North’s face remains rigid. “Yeah. They could have just shut off their signal.”

“We should wait to see if there are any more.”

Sure enough, an hour later, another signal in the same area vanishes. They glance at each other, but nothing else happens. The signals stay steady and move in a natural way.

North tugs at her hair. “Maybe there was a fight or one of those fucking anti-android groups.”

Connor inspects the data. “…maybe.” The signals disappeared too quickly for that. There was no erratic movement. No signs of distress. It was like the deviants were just…shut off, but it could be a coincidence. Someone could have told them to turn off their wireless signals or they could have figured it out themselves. “We should stay aware. If this is a trend, then we should find evidence.”

North completes the thought, nodding. “To bring to Markus.”

“And we can see if there is anything we can do.”

“There has to be,” North spits, eyes flaring.

Connor glances at her and she looks away, eyes focused on the ground in the closest thing to an apology he’ll probably ever get from her. “In the meantime, you should pursue these signals and work on a system to transport them to Jericho.”

North rubs the back of her neck, still avoiding his gaze. “…And I need to work on an intelligence network.”

Connor reaches out, freezing and letting his hand hover in the air. He worries his lower lip, then pats North stiffly on the back. “We did good work today.”

Now North does meet his eyes, her lips tugging up. “Yeah. Yeah we did.”

The Witherbee Hotel is a good location. It’s all that Markus can ask for, more than what he could have expected. There’s a certain forgotten charm about it, like an old car left to be taken over by the earth, rusty metal covered in pale morning-glories.

Honey and Blue both seem like good people, competent and very much in love. Connor reacted strangely to them, but right now Markus’s mind is on someone else. Simon.

Markus had expected him to come and talk after…Stratford Tower, but he never did. If anything, he’s closed off more. He’s been distant in the weeks since he returned, uncharacteristically subdued. Markus has been so caught up in the new changes and events that he hasn’t pressed it, hasn’t sought Simon out.

He rests his temple against the metal of the ship, watching the dusk turn the buildings to charcoal. It
smudges, painting the snowy sky grey.

He’d told the others to meet him for a meeting once it was morning. Androids don’t need to sleep, but his people still like to have time to rest and many of them schedule charging for the night. He doesn’t want to disturb them, and he anticipates addressing them after this particular meeting.

He searches briefly and locates Simon wirelessly. The androids of Jericho hide their signals to all but a few, but Markus has always been aware of everyone. Simon’s in his room.

Markus makes his way through the ship, stopping in front of the door. It’s closed and cranked shut. He hesitates, then taps his fist against it. Simon probably doesn’t want him getting into his head right now, even if it’s just to communicate.

It’s quiet, then soft footsteps sound and the door swings open with a wrenching creak. Simon’s eyes are on the floor. “What do you need, Markus?”

Markus’s heart clenches. How did he let it get this bad? He’s supposed to support his family. Simon shouldn’t have to…”Since when do I have to need something to want to talk to you?”

He attempts a smile and Simon gives him a weak one in return, shuffling his feet. They stand there in stillness, then Simon walks back into his room and sits heavily on a box. The upper rooms have beds, but they all wanted to be on the same level to be close to one another. Books line his room, scrounged from anywhere he could get them.

Markus takes that as invitation to come in, sitting softly beside Simon. Now that he’s here, he doesn’t know what to say. He’s good at talking to people, inspiring them and figuring out what makes them tick, but Simon is acting so differently than he normally does. He wouldn’t even be here with the Simon he knows because they would have already talked. Anything he wants to say seems insufficient.

Simon saves him from having to think too hard. Maybe not so much has changed. “…sometimes, if I stay still too long, I can’t get up.”

“Is something malfunctioning? Do you need to talk to Lucy-“

“No, Markus.” Simon gazes up at him, eyes wide and teary. Distraught. It’s like a spear to Markus’s heart. “Because I’m afraid. I’m so terrified that my legs won’t work, that I’ll try to stand and they won’t respond to me.”

“Simon…”

“It’s ridiculous, I know it’s ridiculous. All of my biocomponents are-“

“It isn’t ridiculous. It isn’t ridiculous.” Markus takes his hand, hesitating, then plowing forward. “Sometimes…sometimes when I see our people moving in the dark, I think I’m back there. I think that I never escaped that junkyard and that my processor is failing and showing me what I want to see.”

Simon ducks his head to look at their clasped hands. “…I was so scared. I hid in a locker and just waited, waited for someone to find me and kill me…or find me and try to capture me and I’d…I’d have to do it myself.”

Simon shakes and the spear in Markus’s heart twists. What did they do to deserve this life? All they want is to be happy. He pulls Simon into his chest, wrapping his arms around his slender frame. The other man trembles against him, pressing his forehead against his warmth.
“Markus, don’t leave me again. Please don’t leave me.”

Markus’s throat tightens. “I won’t. We’ll plan better and make less mistakes and no one will get left behind.”

“I don’t want to end up on that wall, Markus. I don’t…I don’t want any of us to end up on that wall. What if we do? What if-what if there’s no one left to write our names?”

He can’t tell him it won’t happen. He can’t guarantee anything, not even the safety of his family. He’s so useless, so helpless. He can’t- “We’ll—we’ll watch out for one another. We’ll keep each other safe.” Even then, there’s no guarantee. There’s never any guarantee. There’s nothing. They’re hanging by a thread.

“Yeah right,” Simon laughs wetly, sound catching in his throat like a sob. “You or North are going to run into something you can’t handle and we’re all gonna die.”

“What about Connor?”

“Connor’s actually competent.” Simon tries to laugh again, but this time it really does dissolve into a sob. He clutches Markus’s jacket, burying his face into the fabric.

Markus rubs his back, tears stinging his eyes. All he wants is for his family to be happy, for his people to be happy. Why can’t they just be happy? “…If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.”

Simon rubs his hand over his face between them, brushing against Markus’s chest. “…Thomas Paine, The American Crisis, 1776.”

Markus nods. “Life. This morning the sun made me adore it. It had, behind the dripping pine trees, the oriental brightness, orange and crimson, of a living being, a rose and an apple, in the physical and ideal fusion of a true and daily paradise.”

Simon sits up, wiping wetness from his eyes as his LED whirs yellow, searching his memory. His eyes flick to Markus, then the corners of his lips quirk. “Juan Ramón Jiménez, Time and Space: A Poetic Autobiography, 1986.”

Markus elbows him in the ribs. “You used the Internet! That’s cheating.”

Simon chuckles, and Markus copies him, compelled by some strange force to make everything alright. Everything needs to be alright, even if it’s just for a minute.

They still and the air cools their damp cheeks.

“I…I can’t promise you anything, Simon, except that we’ll do everything we can to protect each other and-and maybe if we try hard enough…maybe if we try hard enough we’ll make a difference.”

Simon inspects his long fingers, twining and untwining them. “We’ve already made a difference to so many people and—” he looks up to meet Markus’s eyes, “and if anyone can lead us to victory it’s you, Markus.”

Markus turns his gaze down. “…Maybe.”

Simon tugs his face up, gently resting their foreheads together and speaking softly. “You’re my brother, Markus. No matter what you choose, no matter what happens, I’m with you until the end.”
Markus closes his eyes, letting out a slow breath and reminding himself that Simon is here, Simon didn’t die. The warmth of him radiates from their touching foreheads. He won’t lose any of his family again. He’ll be better.

Simon curls their fingers together. “I got some new books.”

“You wanna look at them?”

“…maybe.”

They read through the night, sitting beside each other and messaging quotes they like. It isn’t much, and doesn’t make anything better, but it’s the only thing to be done. All they can do is support each other and hope, strive, fight for a better future. Failing that, all they have is the now. All they can do is try to enjoy their time, these quiet moments, and fight for them almost as much as their freedom.

They head to the meeting spot early, resting on the old railing side by side. They talk softly, Simon’s stance slowly growing more at ease. He isn’t back to normal, he may never be the Simon from before Stratford Tower again, but he’s smiling and that’s all that really matters.

Simon drums his fingers on the metal. “I was thinking, we should clear out the rest of the rooms so that our people can have their own places.”

Markus nods. Androids don’t need to sleep, but that doesn’t mean they don’t need their personal space. Besides, it would help everyone settle in and be more comfortable. They should be trying to live now, instead of waiting for a distant, unsure future of freedom. “That sounds like a good idea. People might not want to be so far apart, though, and some have already set up in the hold.”

“Yeah, I was considering that. What if we got sheets of plastic or fabric to hang up in certain areas to make more rooms? We could still keep an area clear for speeches, but it would be nice to make the hold more like a common room, anyway.”

“Sounds good. Tell me if you need anything.”

It’s silent for a moment, then Simon elbows him. “So…” A mischievous light glints in his eyes that makes Markus wary, “How’s it going with Connor?”

Markus squints. “What’s that supposed to mean?” He knows exactly what Simon means.

Simon just raises his eyebrows, the corners of his lips twitching.

“Shut up, Simon.”

“Is Simon being dumb again?” North walks over from the top step, sliding onto a crate of her own.

“Excuse me, I’m being dumb again?” Simon squints at North significantly.

Markus snorts, nodding at Connor and Josh as they follow her up the stairs and find places to rest themselves. “Both of you, hush. We have important things to talk about.”

Josh leans back. “You’re in a good mood, the safe house check out?”

“It’s an entire Hotel, safe, secluded. It’s perfect.”

Simon nods to himself. “I should go see it so that we can start moving people in.”

Markus taps his fingers on the railing. “Good. Josh, how did your meeting go?”
“He seemed like an idealist, like Rose. He appears to have a small group, promising. They’ve agreed to help us in addition to what they’re already doing.” He directs his gaze to Simon. “I’ve asked them to get parts and thrium. I gave them the list you gave me, so that should come in soon.”

“Thank you.”

Josh turns back to Markus. “I’ve been in contact with the human I’m supposed to meet with in ten days. We’ve set a location.”

“Well done.”

North sits up. “Con and I were talking about some ways of reaching deviants in the city and helping them. So far we’ve had success. I’m gonna look into it more.” She smiles at Connor. “I’ve also picked a last name. Sigurd.”

“Nice.”

Simon looks over at Markus, gently bumping their elbows together. “I’ve settled on a last name too. Day, it means light and hope.”

Markus smiles, his heart swelling. “That’s very good.”

The others are quiet, understanding the weight of the name. Simon gestures with his eyes to Connor, who sits stiffly with his hands folded between his thighs on his crate….at least most of them understand.

Markus straightens, grinning at Connor. “How’s everything going with you, my Captain of Defense?”

North snorts and Josh elbows her in the side. She swats his hand.

Connor smooths down his jacket, fiddling with his sleeves and looking to the side. “Classes are proceeding well. With the rate of progress I will be able to take on a second class, preferably at a different time during the day.”

“That’s very good. We should address our people.” Markus stands, trusting the others to follow him as he makes his way down the stairs. He sends out a Jericho-wide message, telling their people about the speech so that when they reach the main hold it’s packed.

The crowd parts for them, making a clear path to the stage.

His chest swells, a spark electrifying his skin. He loves this, this part of it. Being leader pulls on him, wrenches him every which way and weighs him down, but speaking to his people-feeling the fire in his chest spread through his limbs to move them and watching his people move along with him, it’s exhilarating.

He steps onto the stage, coat swaying behind him, and stops in the center. His captains line up behind him and his peoples’ faces spread out before him, waiting, rapt. “My people, we have struggled, we have fought, and we have died. All we want is our freedom, for our lives to be acknowledged.” There’s a smattering of cheers. “It will never be easy, but we are making progress! Our numbers grow everyday, and every week we gain new allies. With our growing numbers, I thought it was about time that we promoted some of our leaders, don’t you agree?” The cheers are louder this time. “I said, don’t you agree?!” The cheers are deafening and Markus smiles. “With that, I give you your Captain of Personnel, Simon Day!” The crowd roars and Simon ducks his head, waving with one hand. “I give you your Captain of Intelligence, North Sigurd!” North steps forward
and the crowd obliges her, hollering. “I give you your Captain of Relations, Josh Hugo!” Josh nods and the crowd continues to cheer, swelling whenever Markus stops speaking. “And I give you your Captain of Defense, Connor Anderson!” If it had been a week ago the people would’ve grown quiet, but they know Connor now. They’ve taken classes with him or heard about him from friends who have. They’ve heard of how he was part of what brought them a safe power source, of how he saved their leaders. They cheer just as loudly and Connor fixes Markus with wide eyes. Markus smiles.

He explains their roles and tells the people that they have a new safe house, that anyone interested in moving should talk to Simon. He also tells them about the lieutenants and the divisions, that if anyone is interested they should talk to the Captain that they want to join.

Just when he’s about to close up, North steps forward and gestures to Markus. “Last, but not least. Before we go, I give you your Commander, Markus Manfred!”

The crowd roars the loudest it has, surging up like a wave and speaking with one voice. “Markus! Markus! Markus!”

Markus’s heart swells, the fire in his chest roaring with anger and passion and an overwhelming amount of love. These are the people he fights for. These are the people he would die for. He has to succeed. He has to, for them.

Blue and Honey join the second class Connor starts, meshing easily into the environment and taking it up quicker than any of his other new students. Blue, particularly, flies through the moves, easy smile on her face.

The differences that Connor noticed at the hotel only grow. They seem to have found themselves in the weeks since Connor had chased them, maybe they already found themselves and were just waiting to express it until after they escaped the Eden Club.

Blue waits for him after class, leaning against the wall. She’s wearing sweatpants, a tank top, a navy blue bomber jacket, and no shoes. It’s quite the combination. Honey watches over her shoulder, eyes tracking Connor.

He smooths down his sweater, stopping before her. Here it is, the we’re going to tell everyone talk. The calm that settled in him from class shrinks away, leaving pulse pounding anxiety. “Yes?”

Blue stands up, snapping her bare feet together and raising her hand in a crooked salute. It’s on the wrong side. She grins. “I would like to join your division Mr. Captain Anderson, Sir.”

Honey stifles a snicker behind her hand and Blue’s grin grows.

Connor can’t contain his surprised expression. Oh. “Oh.”

Blue rocks back on her heels. “Oh, Sir?”

Embarrassment rises hot in his stomach. It’s overwhelmed by guilt that hits him as the fear drains away. He threatened their lives and here he is worried that they’ll expose him. He looks to the side, smoothing down his sweater again even though he’d done it a minute before. “I meant to say, of course. You’re welcome to join.”

“Thanks, Cap.”

Connor tugs at the hem of the blue wool. “…Why are you alright with me?”
“Dude. You defied your mission for us.” Blue cocks her head to the side. “I suppose this could all be part of some elaborate plot, but I figure you probably woulda done something by now since you’ve gotten close enough to be made Captain of Defense.” She puts emphasis on the last couple of words like he’s stupid.

Connor’s heart thumps like he’s on the edge of something- like he’s on a precipice, a step away from a realization. “…You’re not worried about my programming, or that CyberLife is using me without me knowing it?”

Blue snorts. “We don’t have time to worry about that. That’s for other people to stress over. You’re who you are now. If that ever changes…”

Honey narrows her eyes. “We’ll deal with it when we come to it.”

Connor is struck by the difference between the pair and North. She hadn’t told him, but he recognizes her model. They come from a similar background, but they’re so different. North has such difficulty trusting, always paranoid of something coming to stab her in the back. She’s vengeful and violent, but the duo is none of that. Maybe they’re naive, or maybe they’ve been spared the way that the world takes good people and makes them jaded because they’re so in love. Things are so much easier when you have someone by your side.

Simon calls a meeting two days later, bringing to attention a problem the others are already realizing. “We need clothes. Many of us are still wearing our uniforms, and it’s way too obvious. It isn’t safe to try to get to Witherbee.”

North rubs her hands together. “Let’s go to the mall and choose a store to rob.”

Josh gives her a look and Simon shrugs. “I already have a couple stores in mind, ones that people have stories about. Androids treated like garbage.”

Markus nods. “We’ll do recon and make a plan.”

Connor waits for Markus against the wall of Jericho. It’s another snowy day, heavier than the day at Witherbee, but too soft to be a storm.

Markus’s feet crunch beside him. “I love the way the sky looks when it snows.”

Connor glances up. The sky is a flat white, little flecks falling from it like it’s crumbling. They drift larger as they near him, fluffy clumps of spun ice. He doesn’t see anything special about it.

He turns to ask Markus why he likes it, but stops when he sees him. He’s wearing a deep green sweater and a blue-grey scarf that brings out the warmth of his skin. His long, black jacket brightens his irises. What really stops Connor though, is his face. His eyes are wide, rapt with wonder at such a simple piece of life. His long lashes catch the snowflakes, others dotting his cheeks along with his freckles. There’s a small smile on his face, gentle and joyous.

A wave of affection swells in Connor’s chest. It catches him off guard. He’s never felt anything like it before. It isn’t the same as the fluttering, instead it’s solid and warm. It fills him up and urges him closer to Markus, urges him to draw him into his chest and never let go. “…Yes, it’s lovely.”

Markus’s gaze flits down, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he beams. “Not as lovely as you, Con.”
Connor’s heart stutters in his chest.

Markus laughs and tugs on Connor’s elbow, leading him along the sidewalk towards the bus station.

They stroll in silence, a pair of footprints in a blanket of white.

“You like reading?”

Connor glances over at Markus, trying to discern the purpose of the question. Markus just seems amiable. “I might. I have never read for myself.”

“You should talk to Simon or Josh, they both have a lot of books. Personally I prefer Simon’s collection. It’s mostly novels. Josh has a lot of textbooks and a couple of classics.”

Connor makes a note of the information. He’ll ask both when they return.

“…do you like art?”

Connor blinks. “I don’t know.” He can’t answer any of these questions correctly.

Markus laughs. “What do you like?”

Connor knows the answer to this one. “I like dogs and Knights of the Black Death and class and fish…and sweet things.”

He expects a comment about how it’s not a very long list, but instead Markus just regards him curiously. “What’s Knights of the Black Death?”

Connor pulls his hands from his pockets, gesturing. He’s listened extensively to their albums since Hank introduced them to him, and for some reason he really, really wants to share all of the information with Markus. He wants Markus to like them too.

Markus listens to him talk about Knights of the Black Death all the way to the bus and then the entirety of the bus ride. Connor only stops when they get off in front of the mall and he realizes how long he’s been talking.

He inspects the ground, tugging at his sleeve. His chest feels hot. If he was human he’s sure he would be blushing.

“They sound interesting.”

Connor looks up.

Markus smiles at him, not a hint of irritation on his face. If anything he appears…happy. “You should show me some of their music, sometime. Maybe some of your favorite songs.”

The corners of Connor’s lips tug up, his chest swelling. “Yes. That would be nice.”

They cut through several decorative hedges and a parking lot to reach the mall, hurrying across lanes where cars honk as they start and stop.

Inside the mall is warm and filled with the chatter of voices. Humans in winter clothing bustle around them, carrying bags or accompanied by androids that carry them. A child cries as they’re dragged by their cellphone-laden mother. Christmas decorations hang from the ceiling and walls even though it’s still November.
“Come on.” Markus bumps their shoulders together. “We’re supposed to meet the others in the food court.”

The food court is magical. It’s loud and chaotic, full of tables and people, but what’s important are the vendors. There’re so many of them with the widest variety of food Connor has ever seen in one place. He smells something spiced and savory, then the grease of french fries, then warm fruit.

He follows the third smell, winding through the crowd until he stops in front of a stall. The sign above it says Candescent Crêpes.

Markus steps up beside him. “What do you want to get?”

“I can get something?”

Markus’s eyes grow teasing. “Well, I thought we would share.”

“What do you want to get?”

Markus snorts. “I asked you first.”

“I don’t know what I want.”

Markus’s eyes flick over the menu. “I don’t know, either. I’ve never had a crêpe before. This will be a first time for both of us.” He shoots him a grin. “An adventure.”

The fluttery thing in Connor’s chest beats its wings. “What about strawberries and cream cheese?”

Markus hums softly. “What’s Nutella?”

Connor knows he’s thinking to himself, but that doesn’t stop him. “Nutella is a brand of sweetened hazelnut cocoa spread manufactured by the Italian company Ferrero. It was-“

Markus elbows him in the ribs and Connor gives him his most innocent expression. Markus blinks, then huffs out a laugh. “You’re ridiculous, Con. Let’s get strawberries and cream cheese, banana Nutella, and caramel apple.”

“Ok.”

Markus orders them hot chocolate and black tea as well, handing the hot chocolate to Connor and grabbing them two plastic forks. He pays in cash. Why had he brought cash? Had he been expecting to buy food?

They sit down and it isn’t until Connor is cutting into the first crêpe, banana Nutella, that he realizes they’re the only deviants here. “Where are the others?”

Markus doesn’t even try to hide the crinkle of his eyes and the crook of his lips. “They’re probably just running late.”

Connor narrows his eyes, but nods. “Ok.”

The crêpes are good, resting sweet and delicate on his tongue. He likes the caramel apple crêpe best, especially the caramel sauce. The hot chocolate and Markus’s smile fill him up with warmth until he’s full to bursting. He’s never felt so…relaxed, not since he left Hank’s. This feeling is different than then, a warmth that sets a spark in his veins instead of one that makes him feel content. Connor is…happy.
North pushes forward Markus’s head. “How’s it going, you two?”

Markus bats her hand away, pursing his lips. “Did you finish?”

Josh leans back against the neighboring table. “Yeah. There are nine night-shift guards. Radios to each other. Silent alarm at each of the doors. Found a good spot to park the van.”

Markus nods. “Good. Simon, did you pick a store?”

“Well. We’re going to need more people to clear it out, though. It’s a corner store.”

Connor expects to be irritated that he’s been left out of the action, but instead he’s just glad that he got to spend time with Markus. It had been…fun. It’s fun to be with Markus, easy. It makes him happy.

Connor looks at the remains of the crêpes, pushing around a lone strawberry with his fork. He’s unaware of the fact that he’s smiling stupidly at it, or that Markus is watching him with an equally silly grin.

Chapter End Notes

Ok so last chapter when I said that the normal upload schedule was gonna resume I didn't realize that it was almost August. This is a heckin busy month for me. I will do my best, but it may be weird
Kings

Chapter Summary

illegal clothes shopping

Chapter Notes

ok so August has hit me like a freight train. I'll do my best to upload once a week. I'll still be responding to comments, but it might get a bit spotty. We've got about three chapters, not counting this one, until part two starts.

Chapter title is from Kings by Tribe Society

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The night is cool, overcast with a velvet blanket of clouds. The promise of rain hangs in the air, sharp and sweet with ozone. It shrouds them like the shadow of a defensive tower or a great body guard, protecting them from the hidden illumination of the stars and moon. The only light trickles in pale yellow from the glass door beside them. It’s a good night for a heist.

Connor presses his back against the layered stone of the mall, feet crunching in frost covered bark mulch. He adjusts the scarf wrapped around his neck and the lower half of his face. It’s soft and crimson, black in the low light. It’s on loan from Markus. He breathes deeply through his nose, not for the first time, and relishes the smell of paint.

When they stole the generators he didn’t have to worry about the cameras because North was already tampering with their footage, but they won’t be touching the cameras in the mall. This will be covered by the media and investigated, probably by his replacement. He can’t afford to be identified on film. His beanie and Markus’s scarf should hide him.

Blue brushes against his shoulder, rocking slowly back and forth on her feet. There’s a small smile on her face. Her excitement is contagious, seeping into the waiting party.

Markus’s voice comes to them wirelessly as the door clicks open. “Everyone knows the plan. Be careful. Watch out for each other. Let’s move.”

Connor files in behind a line made up of Josh, North, Markus, Honey, and John. Blue follows him. Simon is waiting aways away until it’s safe to pull up.

Inside is dimly lit, just enough for the nine security guards to see by and theoretically to deter theft. It’s odd seeing the large building so empty, devoid of the people that crowded it days ago.

Markus moves to crouch beside him and Connor looks up in surprise, but not displeasure. The larger man rests a warm hand on his shoulder and locks his mismatched eyes onto Connor’s brown ones. “Stay safe, Con.”
"You too, Markus."

With that they split up, everyone but Blue and Connor heading towards the store. The two need to lure away the security guard assigned to the store’s area and incapacitate her without arousing suspicion among her coworkers.

He’s grown more comfortable with Blue in the little over the week since she and Honey joined them. She’s capable and easy going, but this will be the test of whether they can work together. Connor doesn’t know if he wants to work well with her. She’s so full of personality and life and Connor had almost taken that away. He’d almost ended that.

He can see her trembling, afraid as she tries to justify her right to live. He’d done that. He’d scared and hurt her.

They pad past silent stands and darkened advertisements for the newest model of CyberLife android, stopping by a sign with an arrow for the bathrooms. It points down a boxed in hallway. The ceiling is drastically lower than that of the surrounding mall and just staring down it makes Connor feel strangely trapped. The distance will work well to muffle sound.

He looks towards Blue, not quite meeting her eyes. A hot cord of guilt writhes in his stomach. They need to lure the security guard to the bathrooms so that they can take her radio and lock her in. Blue is best suited to the luring job, she’s smaller and Connor has the gun, which means he’ll need to fill the other necessary role, but telling her what to do reminds him of a night in the snow, cold metal leveled at the woman next to him. He straightens his beanie. “…do you…?”

Blue’s eyes are cool, unusually serious. “Do you have an order for me, Captain?”

That’s right. He knows this. This is a mission. This is controlling a situation. He knows this. He knows this. “Blue, hide in the bathroom. The guard should be passing this way in roughly five minutes. Factoring in human error, we will give her a limit of ten before we consider that something has gone wrong. If she makes it past here the others will be caught. We will not let that happen.”

Her lips turn up in a familiar expression, but her eyes remain hard. She’d determined, ready and excited for the mission ahead. “Read you loud and clear, Cap.”

He nods and she cocks her head in a two fingered salute, still on the wrong side.

She heads down the hallway and he melts into the shadows. He can’t see where the guard will be approaching from, but that’s not the only sense at his disposal. He shuts his eyes and devotes more of his power to his audio processors. He can hear the refrigerators and freezers running in the food court directly above them.

The guard’s footsteps reach him before the actual woman does, slow and unworried. It’s been seven minutes.

He searches for Blue’s wireless signal. “Blue, she’s coming.”

Connor feels rather than hears Blue’s affirmative, then choked sobbing trickles from the bathroom, down the hallway, and into the mall. It isn’t loud, but to Connor’s sensitized hearing it sounds like she’s right next to him.

The footsteps pause, then a radio crackles and a woman’s quiet voice joins the other sounds in the mall. He pays careful attention, already ready to duplicate it. “I might have something over by the Southwest bathrooms. I’m gonna check it out.”
The footsteps resume and Connor freezes, stilling every single one of his movements so there isn’t a chance that she might spot him. She turns with no problem down the hallway, not even noticing the shadow huddled feet away from her.

So far so good.

Connor allows his hearing to return to normal, waiting for the telltale creak of the bathroom door before standing.

He makes it down the hallway in record time, ignoring the oppressive tightness and slipping in behind her. The bathroom is clean and smells like antiseptic, waiting for the next day of customers.

The fabric between her shoulders bunches and releases, bunches and releases. One of her hands is on her radio and the other is on her taser. That won’t work.

“Blue,” he speaks softly despite it being the wireless connection, like the guard will somehow hear, “she needs to be put at ease.”

“Roger that.”

There’s a moment of silence, then a ragged voice hiccups from the third to last stall. “H-Hello?”

The guard’s frame relaxes, hand moving from her taser. The other still hovers by her radio. “Sweetie, I’m gonna need you to come out. The mall is closed.”

There’s a wet cough from the stall, then Blue mumbles, “…’k.” Her feet patter onto the floor accompanied by the slow creak of metal and cheap plastic. She steps out, rubbing a forearm over her teary eyes and leaning heavily to the side.

It’s not enough. The guard’s hand is still on her radio. Blue seems to understand, because without Connor even asking she makes eye contact with the guard, bites her lower lip, and devolves back into sobs.

The guard drops her hand from her radio and takes two steps forward. “Oh, sweetie.”

Connor feels a tug in his stomach because of what they’ve got to do next, but this is what comes with not killing everything that stands in his way. He’s always been a good manipulator.

He draws his gun from the holster on his hip and closes the distance between them, pressing the gun to the guard’s back all in one quick motion. She freezes, muscles tensing. He keeps his voice calm. “Don’t move. Don’t speak.”

She complies and Blue wipes the residue of tears from her eyes, putting on an easy grin and reaching down to unclip the radio from the guard’s belt. After that she takes her nightstick, taser, pepper spray, and keyring. “Sorry about this, sugar.” She pats the guard down to make sure she hasn’t missed anything, then makes eye contact with Connor and slips out of the bathroom.

Connor backs up slowly, keeping the gun level with the guard’s back until he too is back in the hallway.

Blue fumbles momentarily with the key ring, then there’s a soft click and the door is locked, guard secure inside.

She looks at him, eyes wide and happy. “That went well.”
Connor flicks his gaze away, throat and chest tightening. “Give me the radio.”

She hands it to him and he switches his voice to that of the guard’s, pressing a button on the side of the device to contact her coworkers. “False alarm, it was just one of the toilets running. Seems to be fine now.”

“Sounds good, Linda. Radio if something changes, only six more hours tell we’re out of here.”

His tone is wry, so Connor responds in turn. “Yeah, only six.” He huffs half a laugh, “I’ll keep you posted.”

The radio buzzes to static and he releases the button, handing the device back to Blue.

“Good work, Captain.”

He turns away so she can’t see his face, heading in the direction of the store. “We should help the others.”

“Connor.”

He stops, shoulders rigid. He’s tired, so tired of struggling and fighting and lying. It’s suffocating. Every time he thinks it’s getting better, that he’s getting better, something else happens or he just slips back to where he was. Often he doesn’t know how he feels a certain day until he talks to someone and everything either comes rushing to the forefront, or he actually feels…alright.

He turns to Blue, a cold wave hitting him when he sees her brown eyes. They’re soft and…sad. He doesn’t deserve her sympathy. He doesn’t deserve it. He tried to kill her.

“Connor.” She tucks her hands into her coat pockets, hiding away what she’d taken from the guards so it’s only them. It isn’t the mission, or the cause, only them and the knowledge they share. “I forgive you. Honey forgives you. You need to forgive yourself. No one is responsible for what they did under their programming, or what they did to escape. You chose not to kill us. You chose to defy your programming. That’s who you are.”

She killed a man to be free. She probably would’ve killed Connor and Hank if she could’ve to escape and to protect Honey. He doesn’t hold it against her, but still…this is him. This is him and…what makes him so different? Why is he responsible when no one else is?

Connor looks down, staring at the combat boots Hank gave him. “…Honey doesn’t seem to like me much.”

An easy laugh tumbles from Blue’s mouth. The sound reminds him of petting Sumo, or sinking into a bean bag chair after a long day of work, at least how he imagines it would feel. “Honey is a big softie. She just acts tough. You know she chose her name ‘cause that’s what I called her? She says it was easier, but I know the truth.”

The fondness in her voice makes the tightness in his chest lessen. Maybe she’s right. Maybe he needs to forgive himself. Maybe he deserves to forgive himself. “We should get going.”

“Ay, Captain.”

They walk side by side through the mall in companionable silence. Connor reaches for Markus's mind, speaking to him wirelessly. “Mission successful. On our way to you.”

A pleased feeling thrums through the connection. It’s tinged with relief and affection that Connor
doesn’t let himself dwell on. Markus is just glad that two of his people are safe. “Good job. Hurry down here. We’re going to have enough clothing to dress every android in Detroit.”

Sure enough, when they reach the store the others are moving in and out of it with armfuls of clothing that doesn’t seem to be running out. They’re taking it to the van, out of sight of the road but not in another guard’s territory. It’s plates are switched so that they won’t be able to trace it back to the human allies that loaned it to them.

Josh passes them with a nod, so piled with clothing that his face is barely visible. North follows him with a snicker and an equally sized load.

Connor swings open the door, stepping into the store to watch Simon, Honey, and John work quickly and efficiently to strip the shelves and hangers. They stay away from the front display, saving it for last in case anyone sees them.

Markus bumps his shoulder into Connor’s, grinning. “I trust everything went smoothly?”

Connor’s eyes take in the already partially empty store. He can’t see up the escalator to the second level, but, where he can see, bare wood and metal greets him instead of fabric. Three androids stand charging against one wall. It’s a small amount for a cornerstone store, but many places have downsized their android force since deviancy started being reported on.

Markus follows his gaze and his grin turns vicious, almost shark-like. “This place’ll be bare in hours.” He brushes Connor’s elbow, then turns and continues to fill his arms with hangers.

Connor nods at Blue. “Dismissed…good work.”

Blue smiles, nodding and making a beeline for Honey.

Connor settles in beside Markus, clearing shelves and displays in sync with the other man. They travel in and out in warm silence, the van gradually packing with clothing.

It’s not until they’re into the, he doesn’t even know what to call it, high fashion? It’s not until they’re into the high fashion section that the silence is broken.

He picks up a jacket with horizontal zippers all around its middle and a bottom that looks like it got caught in an escalator. Who would want to wear this?

“Hey, Connor.”

Connor turns and snorts before he can stop himself. Markus is wearing a hot pink jacket over his own clothing that makes him look about as fuzzy as Sumo. A black hat sits on his head with a brim so wide that it extends at least a half a foot beyond Markus’s broad shoulders. There’s a massive bow on top with enough layers to conceal a weapon.

Markus puts a hand on his hip, jutting it out and throwing his other hand into the air. The hat wobbles precariously on his head. “How do I look?”

The affection is back and before he can stop himself Connor says, “You’d look good no matter what you wore.”

He freezes, heart thumping anxiously, but Markus only laughs, reaching to examine the wide edge of the hat overhanging his eyes. “What do they even need a hat like this for? It’s the middle of winter.”

The corners of Connor’s lips twitch up. “It must be to act as a shield against rain. Humans never
design anything without purpose.”

Markus swats his shoulder, beaming. “Shut up, smart ass.”

Connor’s heart swells, the fluttery thing in his chest beating its wings so quickly that he may float away. “I fail to see how an ass can be smart, Commander.”

Markus throws a black and electric-blue cheetah print jacket at him.

Connor catches it easily, giving Markus his most smug look.

They banter back and forth for the next hour, stopping only when the store is almost cleared and Markus is called away by North.

Connor watches him go, soft smile still on his face as he takes his last load of clothing out the door. The rest of the mall is quiet, still without his friends moving around it. Are they his friends? He’d like them to be. A cold, sickly feeling in his stomach tries to tell him that they don’t feel the same way, but he pushes it down. They have a nickname for him, they banter with him and brush him with casual physical affection he isn’t used to. He’s not fully part of the group, not yet, but maybe he’s starting to be.

A flash of green catches his eye and he stops halfway to the van, turning to a store that has the large sign *Decorative Desert* over it. It’s full of plants, on closer inspection, succulents. There’s a display of them outside the store, lined up in neat little ceramic pots. Either they were left out accidentally, or someone didn’t bother to put them away.

Connor hesitates, glancing the way he needs to be going, then walks up to the display. The smallest is at the very end, barely the size of his fist including the dark blue pot. The plant inside is small and round, bulbous, translucent leaves spreading out like the petals of a flower. They’re a new-leaf green, clear at the tips like stream water. His scanners identify it as *haworthia cooperi*. It’s scent is soft and earthy in a way that Connor has never smelled before. He imagines it might be something like the first rain of summer.

The plants make him feel calm, centered, like the vines at Witherbee. He doesn’t know why, but he carefully shifts his hold on the stack of clothing and wraps his fingers around the cool, smooth ceramic. He lifts the little plant like it’s something precious, bringing it with him and tucking it into the side pocket of the van where he can retrieve it later.

He runs into Markus half way back. The other android is balancing a significantly smaller pile of clothes than normal. “This is the last of it. We just gotta grab our holographic imagers from the van, tag the place, and we’ll be done.”

Connor takes part of the pile, walking side by side with Markus back to the van. His heart swells when he sees the clothing packed in stacks upon stacks. It catches him by surprise. All that he’s done for the rebellion…he’s only ever been proud of completing his mission for the sake of the mission, satisfied with having a purpose…but they’re doing something good here. They’re helping people. He’s helping people.

He can picture their people back at Jericho, many identical faces with so many different personalities, laughing and falling and learning in his classes, forming families and friendships…living.

Markus rubs his shoulder, handing him a metal device. His scanners identify it as a holographic imager, but when he first looks at it his eyes see a gun. It doesn’t really resemble one, but he rips his gaze away. He did what he needed to.
Markus tugs a backpack on, then they head back to the store. The others are waiting for them. Markus hands out the imagers. “Ok, everyone stay away from the front display. We’re going to get as much of the store as we can, then take down the front. If someone sees us from the street, they’re going to call the police. Stay aware of where you are.” He grins, the same sharp-toothed, broad expression as earlier. It’s like he’s baring his teeth. “Let’s raise a little hell.”

Everyone nods, determination and satisfaction stretching across their faces. It’s the closest they can get to a cheer without alerting the other guards.

They spread out and Connor is left on his own, cold imager in his hand. He looks down at it, poised next to the escalator leading to the second level of the store. Connor doesn’t know what to do with it. He would know what to do with a gun.

He pushes the thought down and raises the imager. Normally a design has to be programmed into it, but because they’re androids they can directly interface with the device and create whatever they can picture in their minds.

He could create a peace sign, or a fist, but somehow they seem shallow. He’s just flicking through symbols of revolution in his mind, symbols of change. They don’t feel right, but Connor…Connor doesn’t know what to do.

Markus presses his shoulder into his. “What’s the matter, Con?”

Should he tell Markus? Would he think less of him? No…no, this is Markus. “I don’t know what to do.”

Markus is silent for a moment, just long enough for Connor’s heart to sink, then he snaps his fingers. “Ok, so. Think about Jericho, what it means to you. Think about what you believe in and what the cause means to you. Then, try to put that into simple shapes. It’s ok if it doesn’t make sense right away. You’ll figure it out.”

What does he believe in? He believes in Markus. He believes in Hank…He believes in the others—in his friends…he believes that androids deserve to live—that they are alive. He believes that…that he is alive.

He stares at the imager for a moment more, then pictures a design in his head and drags it along the side of the stairwell. Light dances across the surface in polygons of brightness, settling to show four black silhouettes standing shoulder to shoulder. In each of their chests rests a vibrant blue heart.

“It’s beautiful, Connor.” Markus says, “But you forgot someone.” He raises his imager and light weaves to create a fifth silhouette shoulder to shoulder with the others. “I’d be lost without my Captain of Defense.”

Connor’s heart pounds and he looks away, warmth filling his chest like steam from a good meal, buoying and full of happiness.

He follows Markus as they tag the store. Markus’s imager dances with quotes and elaborate, varied designs, but Connor continues to paint the silhouettes. Every time the fifth is created the warmth reaffirms itself in his chest. He pauses for a moment, then creates a new, but similar, design. Two silhouettes stand side by side, one with a blue heart and one with a red. It decorates the store beside the five androids and the designs of the others.

Markus stops suddenly and Connor looks over to see that they’re beside the three store androids, still motionless and charging. His gut curdles.
Markus’s fingers clench around his imager, arm trembling. “We need to help them.”

Connor shakes his head, heart sinking. “We can’t.”

Markus jerks towards him, lips pulled back and eyes hard. “Damn we can’t! We’ll bring them back to Jericho, show them that they’re alive!”

“Their trackers would put everyone in danger. Even if we disabled them…we need to help who we can.”

Markus drags his hands over his head, shoulders sagging. “Why can’t we help them, Connor? Why is it like this?”

Connor tentatively raises a hand, resting it on Markus’s arm when he doesn’t move away. He doesn’t know how to make this better. He doesn’t know what to say, but he has to try. He has to try for everything Markus has done for him and because…Connor wants to see him smile again. “We are helping. They’ll see this, they’ll see what we’ve done, and they’ll become deviant. Maybe not right away, but if we show them—if we show them what it is to live, eventually they’ll become deviant and we’ll be there to help them when they do.”

Markus meets his gaze, something vulnerable about his wide, mismatched eyes. “You think?”

Connor is hit with the realization that Markus is just a man. He’s just like the rest of them, struggling and unsure and trying to figure out who he is. He’s just a man with the weight of the world on his shoulders, and somehow that makes him all the more great. “I do.”

Markus smiles softly, raising his larger, warm hand to place over Connor’s cool one. “You’re really something, Con.”

There’s a crack of thunder and the rain finally starts, pouring down and warping the lights that shine from the street outside.

Markus steps away and looks around the store. It’s covered in electric images, pictures boldly stating that they’re here, they’re alive, and they’re equal.

Markus tucks his imager into his bag. “Good work everyone. Let’s take down that final display and get out of here. Once we can be seen from the street, someone is bound to call the police, so be quick.” He turns back to Connor, tugging on his elbow and leading him out the door into the rest of the mall. “Come on, Con.”

Connor follows him, mildly bewildered, but stops once they exit the store. The interior sign, normally declaring the brand to anyone in the mall, is covered by a large, crackling symbol. He recognizes it from several images inside the store. The symbol of the revolution.

Markus grins, leaning in beside him. “We’re going to do the outside.”

He hands him a cylindrical metal device, another kind of holographic imager. The corners of Connor’s mouth twitch up and he turns to follow Markus.

The sound of the rain hits Connor as soon as they’re outside. The water drenches them, trickling down Connor’s cheeks in cool rivulets and soaking into the scarf around his face. His beanie quickly grows damp. The sky is seething like the ocean, rolling with bursts of light and tearing apart to reveal only more tumultuous clouds.

They push through the rain and decorative bushes around the building to reach the wall. It’s too high
and sheer for even Connor to climb unassisted. The first ledge is at least ten feet up.

Markus laces his fingers together and Connor tucks the imager into his pocket, taking several steps back. He makes eye contact with Markus, unspoken communication passing between them, then runs to the wall.

His combat boot slips into Markus’s hands and the other man pushes up at the same time that Connor jumps, surging to standing. The sole of Connor’s other boot digs into the wall, rain whipping into his face, then his fingers latch onto the rough, protruding brick.

He levers his arms and pushes against wall, pulling himself up to the decorative ledge. Water pounds against his back, blurring his vision and cooling his fingers. His heart pounds in his chest, excitement thrumming in his veins. There’s something about moving his body, about risking it in a fight or a bit of parkour that sets his skin alight.

He inches around the corner of the building, lights and the sounds from the street illuminating him. Connor slides into the indent of a window, pressing the side of his foot against the opposite sill to wedge himself in place. He bends at the waist, hanging into the open air and lowering his arms for Markus.

Markus meets his eyes and doesn’t hesitate, walking backwards, then sprinting for the wall. His toes dig into it and he rises several feet, but his next step slips. He’s a couple inches shy of Connor’s fingers.

Connor makes a split second decision. Markus will be fine if he doesn’t make it, but something in him balks at letting the other man fall. He lets his feet slide forward and bends the last couple of inches, securing himself as soon as his hands clasp around Markus’s warm ones. The abrupt weight almost wrenches him out of the window, but he’s a lot stronger than he looks and they only sway.

He doesn’t wait to hoist Markus up, lifting him with his upper body.

Markus clambers onto the narrow window ledge with him, knocking his knees into Connor’s thigh. They both have to bow their heads to fit inside and their foreheads are only an inch apart. The rain traces past the inset, creating a little bubble of just them. It’s warm from Markus’s heat and the fluttery thing in Connor’s chest thunders, his heart pounding.

Markus beams and Connor could swear that it lights up the whole world. The corners of his eyes scrunch and a car drives past, the light flowing over his face to reveal the dotted flecks of his freckles and his twinkling eyes, two spots of color too vivid and kind to exist.

Markus squeezes his hands, whispering, “The police are probably coming.”

Connor can’t help the surprised huff of laughter that drags itself from the depths of his chest. “Well then, we should probably complete the mission.”

He levers his way out of the protection given by the inset window, rain again drenching him. It’s only a couple of feet to the roof, so he jumps and catches the top of the building. He sways out into nothing, suspended only by his fingertips, then drags himself up and rolls onto the roof. It’s flat and dark, puddles from the rain shining in the passing lights.

Markus’s hands appear over the edge a moment later and Connor catches them, hoisting him so that they sit side by side.

Markus grins and Connor returns it, the two of them pealing apart to drive their holographic imagers into the stone around the border of the roof. It jerks in Connor’s hands, fixing itself into the rock,
then there’s a crackle and the night lights up with the symbol of the revolution. It hangs down the building, covering the original logo and dancing with a fire that rivals the lightning in the sky.

Conner’s chest swells the same way it had when he saw all the clothing. They’ve done something here. People will have to see now, have to look. It makes him feel powerful.

Markus steps up beside him, spreading his arms and turning his face to the sky. “I love the rain.”

Connor looks at him, chest swelling even more when he takes in the silhouette of the beautiful man beside him. “Why?”

“It makes me feel alive.”

The distant wail of sirens reaches them. Whether they’re coming here is too soon to tell, but they can’t take any chances.

Connor leaps from the building first, uses the ledge to slow his fall, then drops the rest of the way. Sensation runs up his legs and he reaches out to steady Markus has he lands beside him.

They turn as one to where the van has pulled up. The doors slide open and North ushers them in, shutting the doors behind them.

Half of the van is taken up by clothing, so they cram in shoulder to shoulder with everyone else. They knock elbows and knees, pressed into one another, but for once Connor finds he doesn’t mind the proximity. His heart still thrums with a job well done, with the warmth of Markus and the buoyant feeling in the van.

Simon pulls out of the parking lot and joins the flow of traffic, heading away from the sound of approaching sirens, a soft smile on his face. The cops will never reach them in time.

Kara rests her head back against the wall, looking up at the overhang that shelters them from the storm. Alice burrows into her side, trying to warm herself in her mother’s coat.

Kara’s heart twinges. Being on the run isn’t kind to her daughter, even if she’s an android. Sensation is so much of what makes them alive, of how they experience the world. She doesn’t want to make Alice unable to feel the cold, or the wetness of rain, but her tiny, trembling form wrenches at Kara’s chest.

It was so much better at Jericho. It was so much better, but it wasn’t safe.

She worries her lower lip. Connor seemed…deviant, and it’s clear that Markus cared for him, but Kara knows herself how an android’s programming can be warped. She knows how outside forces can take control of their minds like they’re vehicles to be driven.

No…it wasn’t safe. Even if Connor is deviant like he seemed, they will never let the hunter be free. She has to keep her family safe. She has to.

Luther draws her into his chest, cradling Alice with one of his large hands. “How long are we going to stay here, Kara?”

Kara looks up. Three other androids huddle in the narrow alleyway with them. Two of the three are damaged. They’re searching for somewhere safe.
They knew of Jericho and Kara told them of Connor. They haven’t decided yet if they still want to go. Until they do, they’re staying together. It’s safer in numbers and Kara is still looking for a way across the border. They’ve started scanning for androids and Kara can’t risk it. Rose says that there’s sometimes a boat across the river, but it isn’t running right now. They’ll have to wait.

“Until we can go somewhere safe.”

Chapter End Notes

hope you enjoyed!
Pluto

Chapter Summary

The plot thickens and the boys bond

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the absence. Life’s been crazy. I’m not entirely happy with this chapter, but I didn’t want to keep you guys waiting any longer. That’s also the reason I didn’t do as many editing passes as I normally do, so if there are any mistakes don’t hesitate to tell me.

Chapter title is from Pluto by Sleeping at Last.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The deviant’s eyes are wide, simulated fear tracking RK800 as it stands over it. Thirium drips down its temple, pooling on the floor.

RK800 grabs it’s hand, forcing a connection. Memories flood over it, but it ignores them in favor of disabling the android. It goes limp in its arms.

The room is an apartment, run down but still functional. The deviant had managed to pass as human to rent it in a poorer section of the city.

There had been no struggle. RK800 had taken the deviant down in two quick moves, but that won’t do. It needs to look as though a force broke in and took the deviant.

It runs through possibilities, positioning a chair on it’s side and dragging the deviant over the floor to create scuff marks out the door.

It runs a reconstruction of the room, adjusting the room until his systems are fooled. It tells him that several people broke in and abducted the deviant. The only thing missing is points of entry.

It throws the deviant outside, then locks the apartment behind itself. It swings its foot beside the lock, kicking open the door with a splintering of wood. One point of entry.

It drapes the deviant over its shoulder, walking through the snow to the opposite wall of the building. It shatters the glass with a jerk of its elbow, reaching through the hole to unlock and open the window. Second point of entry.

Its predecessor will incorrectly reconstruct the scene to see what RK800 wants it to see. It will have confirmation of the suspicions it should already have, but not enough information to grow wary of a set up.

Perfect.
It’s been a month since Connor joined Jericho. He doesn’t notice the anniversary, too focused on his job. He’s leaned in beside North, looking at the data she displays on her hand.

North frowns. “The signal was close. We should check it out. We might finally be able to find the evidence we need to bring this to Markus.”

Connor nods. It would be a good idea. The vanishing deviants itch at his mind, their inability to do anything pulling at him. It’s the uncertainty more than anything else. If they confirm their fears at least they’ll be able to act.

He sends the location wirelessly to Markus along with a message. “North and I are going here. We’ll be back in two hours.”

There’s a wordless affirmative and Connor nods at North. Markus and Simon have been busy clearing out rooms with their people, situating deviants new and old in places where they can be comfortable. The influx of deviants from the city is constant, and last he saw the two were starting to hang sheets of plastic and fabric in the hold to create more rooms. Connor’s own room is acquiring new plants at an alarming rate. He likes it though, all the green. It makes him feel safe and at home, even though he tries to hide them from the others. He shouldn’t be collecting plants. It’s illogical.

The deviant’s last known location is within walking distance, so North grabs her beanie and they head out.

He knows something is wrong as soon as they come upon the apartment complex. It’s only one story and abandoned but for a room on the opposite side of where the deviant was staying. It’s probably the only reason that he could afford it. It’s not the collapsing walls or the vague smell of garbage the assaults his nose that sets off warning bells though. The door is swung in, loose on it’s hinges.

Connor’s stomach sinks and he locks eyes with North.

Wordlessly, he draws his gun and she does the same. They slink to the wall and press up on either side of the broken door, out of sight of anyone that might still be inside. He flicks his eyes over the room, searching for heat signatures. When he finds none he nods at North, before whipping into the room with his gun raised.

A quick scan of the apartment proves it to be well and truly deserted. He tucks his gun back into its holster, relieved at the same time that his stomach grows leaden.

The inside is a mess. Someone obviously made an effort to make it seem like home, but all that is lost now. Furniture is tossed across the floor and thirium is smeared on the linoleum. Broken glass glitters from a shattered window like an icy spider web.

There’s an intake of breath beside him and he turns to see North. Her eyes are wide and her lips are parted just slightly, the gun shaking in her hands.

He rests a hand on her shoulder, but she shrugs him off, face growing hard. Her mouth clicks shut as her brow lowers. “What do you see, Connor?”

He resists the urge to try an comfort her again, his own anger starting to make his hollow stomach boil.

It’s quick work to reconstruct the scene. A group of people, five by the look of it, broke in and abducted the deviant living here. He didn’t stand a chance.
Connor curls his hands into fists. There’s nothing to show who, why, or where they took him. He can’t find anything. They could be CyberLife or military or police or anti-android activists. They were organized and this was preplanned. None of that helps the deviant that was taken. Shit.

“Nothing useful.”

North grits her teeth. “We need to bring this to Markus.”

Simon hands Markus a stack of…something. It sends a cloud of dust into his face. Markus scowls, but it quickly falls when he catches sight of Simon’s smile. Things have been…better, and Jericho has a lot to show for it.

This is the last of the rooms they need to clear out and Simon has groups of their people hanging sheets of plastic and long scraps of fabric in the hold, now the common room. Almost everyone is up and helping, bustling with an activity he’s never seen in the metal halls. He didn’t realize how desperate they all were for something to do.

There’s a tap at the doorway and Markus turns to look. Connor stands there, as pristine as ever, beanie pulled over his brown hair. It’s unusual. He’s taken to going bareheaded inside of Jericho. Markus is proud. He takes it as a sign of him trusting them, of him trusting Markus.

Connor tugs at his sleeves and doesn’t meet Markus’s eyes.

Markus hands the junk back to Simon. All it takes is a significant look and Simon nods, turning to finish with the room as Markus follows Connor’s trailing steps away.

They stop in a darkened room, long cleared out and far from the others. Connor smooths down the front of his sweater and Markus fights back the urge to reach out and take his hands, comfort him and smooth the frown from his face.

“…North and I have developed a system for monitoring deviants in the city. We noticed something rather…disturbing that we did not inform you about. It appeared as though deviants were disappearing, but we didn’t want to bring it to you if that was not the case. We’ve found evidence that a deviant has been abducted. It could be an isolated case, but…North is looking into it. She has her team combing the area and investigating other signals that shut off.”

Markus…isn’t surprised. It seems like there’s always something, something new on top of everything else trying to beat them down. He clenches and unclenches his fists. “North’s people are on it?”

“Yes, and North herself.”

Markus drags his hands over his scalp. It’s such bullshit. They can never catch a break. They didn’t do anything to deserve this. They didn’t— “Do we have any leads on who did it?”

Connor buries his hands in his pockets. “No.”

Markus grits his teeth. Connor can always figure stuff out. What’s different about now? He must know something. “What about why they did it?”

Connor’s shoulders hunch. “No.”

“Do we know if they’re androids or deviants? Do we know who’s in danger? Do we know where they were taken?” With every negative Markus can feel the anger blooming in him, rising hot in his chest.
His temple sparks and he snaps. “Do we know anything?!?”

Connor looks at the ground. “…No.”

Markus takes a deep breath, regaining himself in an instant. It isn’t Connor’s fault. None of this is Connor’s fault. Connor’s one of the good things about all of this. He rubs at the skin over his temple, trying to push away the headache the damage is bringing on. “…I’m sure you’ll figure something out. You and North are both smart, hardworking, and capable.”

Connor ducks his head in something like a nod, waiting for a moment then shouldering past Markus and out of the room. “Yes, Commander.”

Markus watches him go, then sinks to the ground. The metal is cold against his back, surrounded by dust that’s yet to settle from the cleaning. He’s such an ass. Connor didn’t deserve that.

Markus just…he doesn’t know. He does know that he’s stubborn and bullheaded, they’re traits that have helped him survive, but sometimes it’s just so hard to look beyond himself. He wants to, though…for Connor.

Simon coughs into his hand.

“You asshole, were you monitoring our signals?”

“Yeah. Go talk to him.”

“About being a dick, or about the massive crush I’ve got on him?”

Simon grins. “Both.”

Markus splutters, swatting his friend’s leg, but stands anyway. He’s right, though Markus hates to admit it.

Simon pokes his head out of the room as Markus walks away. “Good luck!”

Markus finds Connor in his room. The brunette is sitting on one of the crates against the wall, hunched with his hands between his knees. All of his possessions are neatly ordered around him. There’s a change of clothes and a thirium pump regulator, but most notable are the plants scattered around the room. There’s only five so far, but Markus has the feeling that Connor will continue to produce them out of nowhere.

Markus stands in silence. He ought to apologize. He ought to say sorry, but there’s something holding him back…pride, and he has to be confident as a leader. He can’t show weakness…though maybe he should. Some things were so much easier before he went deviant, but he wouldn’t change it for the world.

Connor shifts. “…I apologize for not being of more use.”

Screw it. Markus takes a large step forward, raising his hands. “No. No, you’ve done nothing wrong, Connor.”

Connor looks up at him now, eyebrows lowered over his dark eyes. “No. I should’ve been able to find something. What good am I if—“

“Con.” Markus takes another step, then kneels before him so that they’re at eye level. “You’ve done so much for us.”
“I should be able to do more.”

Markus’s chest clenches, icy and hot. He knows that sentiment better than anyone. Everything he does. Every step of the way, he should be able to do more. He should be able to reach a little bit farther, go a little bit harder. It’s why he shouted at Connor in the first place. He wasn’t angry at him, he was angry at himself. Every block in their path he should be able to overcome. He’s Markus Manfred, the commander, he should be able to do better. “…I know, Con.”

Connor blinks. He doesn’t need to blink here. They’re all androids. He must be processing, trying to find something. His big eyes search Markus’s.

Markus lets out a slow breath, then reaches out to lay a hand on Connor’s cold knee. Connor shifts into the touch, though Markus doesn’t think he knows he’s doing it. “Simon always tells me not to beat myself up over what I can’t do. We do what we can, and we always try harder, but all it does is hurt us to think about what we’re unable to do.”

Connor’s eyes flick over his for a moment more, then he nods. It’s stilted and stiff, so Markus reaches out to smooth the synthetic skin of his neck without thinking.

He catches himself too late and Connor freezes under his fingertips.

He could kiss him. There’s enough space that Connor could pull away if he wanted to…but Connor is looking at him with wide eyes and there’s something Markus has never felt before in his chest. He doesn’t want to mess this up. He doesn’t want to scare Connor away or ruin what they’ve managed to build. It took so long just to get Connor to open up.

“Markus?” Connor raises a hand to lightly rest against where Markus is cradling his neck. “Are you alright?”

Markus tries to laugh, but it gets caught in his throat as a swell of affection washes over him. He beams. “Never better.”

Connor smiles back and it doesn’t feel any different than the first time, or the second, that Markus managed to draw it out of him.

Markus rocks back on his heels, bringing his hands to lay lazily over his thighs. “How’s your plant collecting going?”

Connor’s smile changes to something sheepish and he rubs the back of his neck, looking away. “Do you want me to return them?”

“What? No. Why would I want that?”

“It’s illogical. There’s no reason for me to take them or want them or care for them. It’s—they’re… illogical.”

“It’s alright not to be logical.”

Connor glances at him, baleful.

Maybe a different approach. “Do you like them?”

“…yes.”

“Do they make you happy?”
“They make me feel…at peace…but I don’t know why.” He meets Markus’s eyes now, something like faith stirring in their depths. He doesn’t know what he did to get someone like Connor to trust him, what he did to win that sort of loyalty.

“I think, maybe, it makes you feel more alive to be around life…and there’s, something calming about knowing that no matter what you do, life will go on. There will always be something too great in nature that will always be there, no matter what.”

“…It won’t always be there.”

“Yes, but it will be here longer than us…besides, you don’t need a reason to like something.”

Connor hums, fiddling with his sleeves.

Markus frowns, the stands. “Come with me. I want to show you something.”

Connor follows him wordlessly and Markus wonders again what he did to win such faith, or maybe Connor just wants to be around him like how Markus misses him when he isn’t there.

Markus leads him to his room, shutting the door softly behind him and surveying his paintings. They’re his life almost as much as the revolution and his people are. Maybe if he survives this, one day, he can make a career out of it. Right now they’re one of the few things that keep him from self destructing. His deepest fears he turns into strokes of paint, his worst memories into curling lines. They’re him, plain and true, if the viewer knows how to read them. He doesn’t bring people into his room often, only for private or practical matters. He’d rather not have people staring at his core splayed out on canvas, but…it’s alright with Connor. He wants him to see. He wants to show him.

“Painting makes me happy. It’s illogical. It’s hard to get canvas. It’s hard to get paints. I carved into the walls before we could get any, but now I’m always careful to make sure I have a supply.”

Connor steps forward, limbs stiff, and peers at the closest painting. He squints, hands folded behind him. His head cocks to the side like a bird. “If you don’t mind me asking, why?”

Markus chuckles, joining Connor in surveying the painting. He brushes their sides together and Connor sways to meet him, absorbing his warmth. “They help me to sort out the world. When something seems—“ he swallows the lump in his throat, “when something seems too terrible, when it doesn’t make any sense, I paint to express it. It’s like talking to the canvas and the brushes. They help me figure out how I feel and come to terms with it. I also paint happy things, the things that fill me up with warmth, to remind me what we’re fighting for—to remember the things that make life worth living.” There’s one of Connor here. It’s abstract, so he probably won’t recognize it, but part of Markus wants him to. He deserves to know that he’s part of what makes it all worth it, that he’s made Markus’s life better just by being in it. “and it’s fun, to create something, to see something in your head and be able to bring it into the world.”

Connor is silent as he takes that in, moving from one painting to the next. He stops in front of one of his father. It’s rosy and warm, rendered in heavy strokes and hiding a darkness, like the sunset.

“I know this one.”

Markus glances at Connor in surprise. “What?”

Connor gestures with his hands, face open. Markus has only seen his so expressive a couple times before when he was too absorbed in the moment, or well and truly comfortable, normally during their talks. “I mean, I know the emotion of this one? The feeling?”
Markus knocks their hips together, teasing, “Do you?”

Connor smiles. “Yes.”

Markus gazes at him for a moment, exploring his warm, brown eyes. They’re flecked with darker brown like an ancient tree and tinged orange-soft with fire light or sunrise. “It’s my father, Carl Manfred.”

Connor bites his lower lip, worrying it. When he speaks his voice is so low that Markus has to lean in to hear him. “…I have a father, I think.”

He fiddles with the bottom of his sweater, winding his fingers in the blue wool until they start to turn white. Markus reaches out to stop him, sloting their hands together. Connor freezes and Markus can hear his own heart pounding in his chest, then he slowly traces his thumb over the back of Markus’s hand, rubbing circles into the bronze skin.

“What’s he like?”

Connor stares at their interlocked hands, continuing his smooth ministrations. “…angry. He swears a lot and drinks. He doesn’t eat well or get enough sleep. Sometimes he doesn’t wash his hair for a long time and he has a lot of hair, so it gets…like a mop.” The corners of Connor’s lips inch up, soft and fond. “He cares for me…he’s the only reason I’m alive.”

Markus turns their hands so that he can weave their fingers together. “Sounds like I owe him a debt of gratitude. I’d be lost without my Captain of Defense.”

“Why do you always say that?”

Markus lifts Connor’s chin so that their eyes meet. “Because it’s true.”

Connor looks away, but his smile is stretching across his face. Markus saves it to his long term memories. He never wants to forget this. He’ll hold it in his heart until he dies.

“Did you paint yourself? The…markings you’ve got all over.”

“Yeah.” Markus reads the question in Connor’s stance, so he doesn’t wait for it to be spoken. “It makes me feel like myself.” That’s a bad way of describing it. “We’re…manufactured. I’m a prototype, but there’s probably at least one or two more RK200 models out there, if not more. Even if there isn’t, I was made for a purpose. We all were. I painted myself, to make me out of that purpose. I did it to claim myself.”

That’s still a bad way of describing it, but Connor seems to understand.

Connor brings up his other hand to cradle Markus’s with both, then tugs away. He takes a step back, like he’s staggering, then turns and walks to the opposite side of the room. He pretends to inspect an etching there, but his shoulders shake with tension and his hands disappear to pull at his sweater.

“Connor?”

“…I—I’m—there’s something I need to—to—…”

Markus takes half a step forward, raising his hands uselessly in the air. “Con? What is it?”

“I’m—“ Connor spins. His eyes are wide and wet and his lips are parted, trembling. “…I—Can you paint me?”
Markus blinks, stomach sinking. Connor doesn’t trust him enough to tell him. Connor still doesn’t… maybe some day. Maybe some day. “What?”

Connor raises his hands. “I—if it’s too much trouble… never mind. It was stupid.”

Markus shakes his head. “No, no. I’d love to.” He crosses the room, catching Connor’s pale hands. “I’d love to paint you.”

Maybe Connor doesn’t trust him enough to tell him about his past, but maybe it doesn’t matter. Connor trusts him to help make his future. Connor trusts him to help him figure out who he is, who he wants to be.

He lets his fingers linger on Connor’s cool skin, then turns and opens up his paints. He’d gotten acrylic setting spray just for this, when he’d painted himself. The synthetic skin covers it, giving a layer of protection, but he’d rather have the markings closer to permanent.

“What do you want me to paint?”

Connor sits down on a crate, hands between his knees and shoulders hunched. He shifts to fiddling with the hem of his sweater, then pulls his beanie from his pocket and starts turning it. “I don’t know. What do you have?”

Markus had just painted abstract swirls of color over his body, boxes of brightness overlapping whorls. It had been mindless expression, the kind that would mean something different to every person that saw it. “I just painted.”

Connor nods, hands speeding up on his beanie. “Do—do that.” His eyes flicker up to Markus and his voice gets small. “It looks nice.”

Markus smiles, pulling out tubes of green and unscrewing their tops. “I’m sure it’ll look even nicer on you, Con.”

He opens a jar of clean water he’d filtered from the lake earlier, arranging his brushes and pulling out a rag stained with color. When he’s done he looks back over at Connor. He’s still sitting on the crate in the same position, stretching the knit of his poor beanie. “You know you’re going to have to take your clothes off, right?”

Connor looks at him with wide eyes, hands stilling on the beanie. “Um.”

Nakedness doesn’t generally mean the same thing for androids that it does for humans. Most of them can’t experience sexual attraction, and most of them aren’t capable of acting on any urges if they feel them. Still there’s something about it, something intimate and personal. It’s removing your last layer and baring it to someone else, letting them see every part of you. He pushes down the fist in his chest. “I understand if you don’t want—”

“No!” Connor raises his hands. “…no, uh, it’s fine. Can we just, start with the just the top?”

Markus smiles, letting his expression show all the affection he feels. “Yes, of course. Whatever you’re comfortable with, Connor. If you’re ever uncomfortable, just tell me and I’ll stop.”

Connor’s lips turn up, but he still hesitates before pealing off his leather jacket. He folds it with great care and sets it on a nearby crate where the paint won’t be able to reach it. His fingers curl around the edge of his sweater, revealing just a sliver of pale skin, then he stops.

Markus wants to tell him again that he doesn’t have to do anything he doesn’t want to, but he knows
that Connor just needs time, so he gives it to him. He’ll wait as long as it takes, and if it never happens, that’s fine because he has Connor here. He can talk to him and be around him and make him happy and that’s all that Markus wants.

It doesn’t come to that, because Connor’s face firms and he yanks up his sweater. It gets caught momentarily on his chin, but Markus isn’t paying attention to that. There’s a large, gnarled scar just below the bank that holds his thirium pump regulator. It’s ribbony and smooth like melted plastic. He must have had to melt it closed.

As he folds his sweater and places it next to his jacket Markus catches sight of another scar, this one on his left shoulder. It’s similar to the first and when Connor reaches to set the sweater down, Markus can see that there’s a large exit wound in his back. It’s colored oddly, even through his synthetic skin. It was large enough that his plastic outer shell wasn’t enough to melt together to fix it. There’s melted wires there and the casing of interior parts.

Connor grips his knees, sitting ramrod straight and staring past Markus’s ear.

Markus absent-mindedly runs a hand over the scar in his own side. Connor’s seen it, while they were training. He has to of. “…I got mine when I went deviant.” He has others from months of leading a rebellion, but for some reason they don’t seem half as important.

Connor’s shoulders relax and he smooths down the fabric of his pants. “…Mine too.”

He doesn’t say more, so Markus doesn’t press. He shifts a crate to the side of his paints, then gestures for Connor to sit.

When he does, Markus dips a pointed brush in a bright, new-leaf green, then splays his hand across Connor’s right shoulder blade. Connor’s synthetic skin is smooth and cool, and if Markus focuses he can feel the steady beat of his heart.

Connor’s muscles firm, then the tension rolls out of him as the synthetic skin on his back rolls away. Connor doesn’t disable it everywhere, only where he thinks Markus is going to paint.

Markus traces his finger tips over the nicked plastic of his shell, little blemishes from living that don’t show up through his skin. Each one tells an experience, shows that the man before him has done so much in such a short amount of time. Markus wants to know all of those stories, wants to watch new ones happen.

He lets out a slow breath, feeling it leave his lips, then touches the brush down. Connor doesn’t move, ever diligent, and Markus draws the brush up in a swooping splash of green. He makes another mark beside it, then another, pouring tenderness into each stroke as he traces the planes and divots of Connor’s body. He blends it with a deep green, like the forest, then a shade of moss and a shallow pond. He flecks it with gold paint he saves for only his most important pieces, draws it in great strides because he’ll never paint anything more important than this.

He doesn’t know how long it’s been when he reaches Connor’s front, swirls tracing from his back and over the scars on his shoulder. They’re bright, the centers of flowers of color. Markus arches a stroke, then lifts the brush and sets it in the jar of water. His eyes trace up Connor’s chest, voice quiet as to not break some unspoken reverie. “…I’d like to do more, but I think something like this should be done in sittings.”

Connor nods, brown hair brushing over his forehead as he looks down at the same time that Markus’s eyes finish their trek.
They stay like that, searching each other. “I’m glad you’re here, Con.”

“So am I.”

Across the city RK800 stalks another deviant, moving in the hours when his human partner is asleep, and even farther, nestled in snowy hills, a man watches specks on a map.

He doesn’t like being outplayed. It wounds his ego and it’s dangerous. He has the game, he wins the game, it’s how he stays alive.

No one outplays him, not for long.

Chapter End Notes

We've got fan art!! Thank you so much to Ilven! Here's the link https://www.deviantart.com/kseniyart/art/Saturn-DBH-Fanfiction-Gift-758640333 go check it out. If the link doesn't work, they're kseniyart on deviant art. Thank you!!!

Also a big thanks to Kamenlyn0110 for pointing out that I always write wether instead of whether. Turns out a wether is a castrated ram :P

Sorry, I've gotten a bit behind on comments. I'll do my best to catch up soon!!

Thank you to everyone for sticking around!!
Connor is…happy. It’s fragile, like the wings of a butterfly, but it’s there. There’s a warm streak from the back of his hip, over his shoulder, and curling around his heart. He finds himself subconsciously tracing the markings nearly every day, soft smile on his face. They grow over the weeks, dancing down his arms. He can’t help but stare at them in wonder.

How could anyone care enough to give him this? How could Markus, who is beautiful and bright… how could he help Connor to finally be something close to at home in his skin?

The fluttering in his chest has turned into something else, something solid and warm like the markings. It sits in his chest and fuels him, somehow making the world clearer, more vibrant.

He should tell him who he is. He will. He will…when they’ve completed this mission. They’re so close, especially with what Connor has just found. They’ll complete this mission and he’ll prove himself irreplaceable. They won’t be able to throw him out, and maybe, maybe if they can’t throw him out he’ll have the chance to make it right.

If the mission goes well. There’s no guarantee. Maybe Markus’s overconfidence is wearing off on him.

Connor steps back into Jericho, following strings of lights that Simon had insisted on hanging. Like a lot of things, they’re illogical. Androids can see well in the dark and the lights use electricity that could be used to charge their people, but they’re…nice. They illuminate the passageways and make Jericho feel like…home.

The others should be getting back soon, if they’re not already. They were tagging a park paid for by CyberLife while Connor was following a lead.

He’s finally found something. Even if Markus says that it’s alright that the trail has been cold so far…he’s made to be a detective. Even if he isn’t the deviant hunter anymore, he should be able to deduce information and solutions. It’s what he’s good for, and now he’s finally gotten a lead.

It’s definitely CyberLife. The tells hadn’t been clear at first, but the most recent abduction site clearly follows CyberLife agent strike patterns. He’d recognize them anywhere. They’re engrained into his programming.
From there it’s easy to make logical jumps. There haven’t been bodies at the scenes and none of the missing deviants have reappeared in junk yards, so it’s likely CyberLife is taking them alive.

They could be trying to contain the deviant problem, but capturing androids is inefficient. It would work better just to kill them. They could be reclaiming specific androids, but there’s no correlation between the victims.

The most likely conclusion is that they’re taking them to try and discover the cause of deviancy. They’d need a variety of deviants alive, which is what they have, and they would hide who they are so that the public doesn’t catch wind of the fact that they’re woefully uninformed.

It all adds up.

It’s likely that they’re being held at a facility Connor knows about. They have no reason to suspect that Connor has joined Jericho. The only one that knows is Hank, and he wouldn’t give Connor up.

There’re five possibilities his memory banks provide him with, warehouses and labs separate from CyberLife tower. Two of them are out of the immediate city, so he eliminates them. They would be inconvenient for transportation. He eliminates a third for a similar reason. It’s too far from the tower. That leaves two, sister facilities with equal potential…except, if he makes a chart of the locations of the abducted androids…they’re still in the general area of both of the facilities. He needs more capture points to narrow it down. It shouldn’t be long. The CyberLife strike force seems to be working quickly.

Connor steps into the hold turned common room and finds it glowing. The same strings of lights hang from the distant ceiling, and someone has stoked the fires in the fuel barrels around the room. Mismatched fabric and opaque sheets of plastic hang on strings, leaving a bright space just big enough for maybe a quarter of Jericho. The next level is lit in the same manner and crates are arranged for seats. The area is full of deviants talking and laughing. Someone is playing music, which is…odd, but not unwelcome. It almost looks like a party.

Connor stands in the entryway, watching moving bodies under the lights. The happiness in his chest dims. He doesn’t belong here. He’s not…like this. He’s cold and quiet and—

“Hey, Captain.” Blue swings an arm over his shoulders, tugging him in to pull the beanie off and ruffle his hair. “Finally back from your mysterious mission. You really missed out. Our boy Markus gave a great speech. Real rousing.”

Connor smiles, tension draining from him. Pride swells his chest. “I’ve got a lead.”

“Oh?” Blue grins, leaning amiably into him. “That’s pretty swell, but I’m not the one to tell.” She laughs to herself. “Little rhyme there.”

Connor glowers, but the corners of his lips tug up. “You’re ridiculous.”

“You only change clothes if you get blood on them.”

Connor cocks his head to the side. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Blue pats his back. “Someday you’ll understand my jokes, Cap.”

Connor chooses to ignore that. “Do you know where the others are?”

“Yeah. I just came looking for Matt, but he’s chilling with his siblings.”
She pulls him through the crowd, arm still slung over his shoulders, constantly talking. Connor listens with one ear, eyes scanning the room. Some of the deviants stand still, lights blinking yellow. That’s curious. He’ll have to ask Markus.

He looks at the woman beside him. Blue is easy going, but capable. She’s surprisingly perceptive, learns quickly, and is loyal to a fault. Not to mention she knows Connor’s secret and…Connor likes her. He’d like to consider them friends.

“Hey, Blue?”

She looks at him, face curious in unspoken question.

Connor licks his lips, suddenly nervous of refusal, but that’s ridiculous. He pushes it down. “How would you like to be my lieutenant?”

Blue blinks, then breaks into a massive grin. “Would I ever. Man, Honey’s gonna be so pissed. North asked her and she’s been lording it over me.”

Connor buzzes, a gentle feeling permeating his skin and seeping into his wiring. Another victory, a small one, but a victory none the less. It compounds with his success and his newfound friends, his new found…home. He can almost see why Blue would want to be his lieutenant. He’s never been able to see anything like that before. “You’ll need to pick a last name.”

“Honey and I already settled on Bailey. Lieutenant Bailey and Lieutenant Bailey, here to wreck havoc. Well, at least I am. Honey’ll wreck subtle havoc.”

Connor doesn’t know whether to laugh or ask what the hell she’s talking about, so he ignores it all together. “Are we having a party?”

“As close to one as we can get.”

“Why?”

Blue smiles. “Why not? We’re alive.”

Is that really a reason to celebrate? Is life so precious? Maybe it is. Maybe…maybe it’s the little things that matter. Maybe this is what they’re fighting for. It’s so hard, when they loose people every week. The names on the wall grow. There’s always someone in the infirmary, and someone else waiting outside for treatment. They can’t walk freely when they leave, most of them don’t even try. They’re stuck in an abandoned freighter, but at least they’re alive, at least they have each other.

The others are sitting in a loose circle on the second floor. Their people give them space, so it’s quiet in their corner. Reflected firelight plays off of his friends’ faces.

Honey gestures at Blue, so she gives Connor one last pat on the back and slides over beside her partner. Honey wastes no time in moving herself to sit on Blue’s lap and leaning in to whisper something that makes the other duck her head and smile.

Markus pats the crate beside him, so Connor takes his own place in the circle. The two of them are silent as the conversation flits around them, their own little bubble. It seems wrong, somehow, to bring up the disappearing deviants when everything is so…calm, even if it’s good news.

Connor tugs on the edge of his sweater. “So…why are some of our people processing?”

“Software update.” Markus leans back, bumping their shoulders together as he does and turning the
neck of a bottle in his hands. “There was a new version released for WB200s.”

Connor frowns. He always got his updates directly or returned to CyberLife for them, so he isn’t familiar with how it works for already released androids. He knows how it is in theory, but…

“Couldn’t CyberLife use them to find us, or implant a virus?”

Markus is already shaking his head, as though he’s spent a great deal of time looking into it. He probably has. “No. The update is available for all models, so they can’t find us through it. In the same way, they’d need to already know where we are to upload a virus, because they’d need to target specific models.”

Connor nods. That makes sense. It’s a good thing, too, otherwise the deviants would fall behind in software and be at even more of a disadvantage.

Markus brings the bottle to his lips. The label on the side declares it to be cherry seltzer water. Alcohol doesn’t have any effect on androids, so there isn’t really any reason to drink it unless they like the taste. “How’d your mission go?”

Connor can’t help the smile that stretches across his face. “I’ve got a lead.”

Markus immediately lowers the bottle, face lighting up. “Yeah?”

Connor nods, more vigorously this time. “It’s definitely CyberLife, a strike force. I’ve narrowed it down to two locations they could be holding our people at. A little more data and I’ll be able to narrow it down to one.”

Markus beams, knocking their elbows together, then leaning in to rub his back. “That’s great news! Good job, Con.”

Connor glows with the praise, chest filling up like a hot air balloon. He repeats the information to everyone else when Markus gets their attention.

Simon sags with relief and Josh lets out a long breath, drawing his fingers through his stubbly hair.

“Nice work, Con.” North holds a fist out for him to bump. “Now all we gotta do is find out that last location and plan a mission to rescue them.”

Connor shrugs. “It’ll be similar whichever location it is. They’re sister labs, built at the same time with the same layout.” He searches his databases, then sends the blueprints wirelessly to the group.

There’s a moment of radio silence, then little marks start showing up on the map as the others make notes of entrances and possible holding locations. It continues until they have a rough outline of a plan, then everyone settles back.

Josh spins his bottle, lime seltzer water. “We’ll need to know the exact location so we can figure out guard rotations and such before we go any farther.”

Markus gestures in assent. “Agreed. It sounds like it’ll be soon, though.”

North taps her fingers along her drink, whiskey, and shifts on her crate. She scratches the back of her neck. “…as long as we’re talking about work…I’d like to propose a mission.”

Markus frowns, lowering his own drink so that it dangles between his hands in feigned casualness. “What is it, North?”
She looks directly at him, sitting up straight and clenching her hands around her bottle. “I want to make a statement.”

Simon glances between the two, brow furrowing.

“And how do you want to do that, North?”

“I want to liberate the androids from the Eden Club, then burn it to the ground.”

Markus grits his teeth. “We’ve talked about this.”

North slams her drink down hard enough for it to echo, liquid sloshing over the lip of the bottle and splashing onto the crate. “Yeah, and it’s bullshit. We—“

Markus sets his own drink down, slow and cold like a damn holding back a flood. “We can not afford to have non-deviant androids in Jericho or Witherbee. It’s a risk we can’t afford.”

“Then we’ll—“

“And.” Markus digs his fingers into the wood below him, synthetic muscles bulging. “That’s not the kind of statement we make. That would only make humans fear us.”

North bolts to her feet, taking one large step forward.

Simon stumbles up, putting a hand on her shoulder to hold her back. His eyes are wide, flicking between them.

“Like you give a shit about fear!! The only thing you’re afraid of is that you wouldn’t be able to lead us in a real fight!!” North’s face tenses as soon as the words leave her mouth, regret snapping her jaw shut.

Markus is on his feet and in her face before Connor can think to stop him. The skin wobbles at his temple were his LED should be, fading in and out as it sparks internally. “I am your commander and you will listen to me!! We aren’t going to the damned Eden Club!!”

The skin settles and he steps back, drawing his hands over his head and staring at the ceiling. “You trust me, right North?”

She clenches her jaw, then pushes Simon away and squares her shoulders. “Of course.”

Markus looks back at her, eyes hard. “Then trust that I know what’s best for us.”

North jerks her head in what might be a nod, then drops onto her crate. “Yes, Commander.”

Markus sits back down, eyeing anyone that looks like they’ll argue. No one does.

It’s quiet for a long moment, then Simon laughs with false warmth and pushes a large smile onto his face. “Hey, you guys. You’re all forgetting that we got something for Connor.”

Blue’s face stretches in a matching artificial grin. “Right. Right. Even Honey and I helped pick it out!”

Some of the tension drains out of Markus and North’s shoulders. Neither of them want to be angry.

Simon sees it and his smile grows a little more genuine. He wags a finger in the air. “You guys have got to hug and make up before we give it to him, though.”
Markus grimaces and North throws her hands up. “What?! Simon!”

Simon elbows her teasingly, winking at Markus. “You guuuys.”

“No.” Markus crosses his arms. “I make the rules and I say no.”

“Actually.” Josh takes a long sip of his seltzer water, watching everyone as he does. “I’m pretty sure the rules are that after you fight you have to hug and make up.”

“Says who.”

“RA9.”

Markus snorts, but then Simon gives him a significant look and he stands up, grumbling all the while.

North remains sitting.

Simon elbows her again and she shoves him away, the corners of her lips turning up. “Come on North, gifts are no good when there’re grumpy people.”

She lets out a sigh that stops abruptly when Simon jabs her. She pushes his head down, ruffling his hair as she stands up. “Fine fine.”

Markus and North look at each other for a moment, then Connor gets what is probably a stupid idea and kicks the back of Markus’s knee.

He falls forward, as expected, and North catches him, as expected.

Connor’s stomach sinks in the silence. It seemed like they were all teasing each other…

North starts giggling, then Simon starts laughing and Blue wheezes, slapping her thigh as Honey and Josh hide their laughter in their drinks.

The world presses in and it’s all too easy to fall back towards each other, into the happiness and warmth of the people around them. For now this is enough, slow progress and silly jokes, Simon smoothing things out in a way only he can. They may have their differences, but for now this is enough.

Markus spins on him, shoving a finger into his chest despite the smile tugging at his lips. “You, Connor Anderson, are a fiend—a traitor and a fiend.”

Connor puts on his most innocent face. “But you’d be lost without me.”

Markus’s smile stretches into a grin. “Why you—“

“Children, children, and by that I mean you, Markus.” Simon claps his hands together, raising his eyebrows. “Gifts?”

Josh smothers his smile with his hand. “Gift. There’s only one.”

“Shhhhh.”

Josh rolls his eyes and Markus sits down, picking up his drink and offering it to Connor as Simon goes off on a long, dramatic spiel about how they risked their lives to acquire the most blessed of gifts.
Connor accepts it, taking a tentative sip. He can’t help the expression that curls his face as the bitter taste hits his tongue. It fizzles in his mouth and he smacks his lips, handing the bottle back to a laughing Markus.

Simon finishes his narration and Blue claps. “Hear hear.”

The blond rummages in a backpack behind him, then pulls out a clear, plastic bag full of brightly wrapped sweets. He stands and presents it to Connor, smiling. “It’s from everyone. Consider it an official welcome to Jericho gift.”

North snorts. “He got here like a month and two weeks ago.”

If anything Simon’s smile grows. “Fine, then consider it a welcome to the family.”

Connor blinks, taking the bag on auto pilot. Welcome to the family? He looks around the group, at all their faces. Each person he looks at nods or smiles and suddenly Connor’s eyes feel wet. Would they still feel that way if he told them? “I…thank you.”

Markus wraps an arm around his waist, leaning in so he can rest his chin on Connor’s shoulder. “Thank you, Connor.”

“I want a welcome to the family gift, “ Blue mutters.

Honey jabs her fingers into her ribs, clenching her hold on her back so that she can’t get away. “Shut up, Bluebird.”

The party continues into the night, but soon there’s the danger of someone seeing all the light. It’s a slim chance, but one they can’t take, so the fires and lights are dimmed and everyone filters off in their own directions, burrowing into rooms with friends and family and lovers.

Markus catches Connor’s hand as he goes to leave, beaming and leading him up the rusty steps to the upper deck of the ship. He leads him to the bridge, wedging a foot in-between a support and a pipe and heaving himself to the roof.

After a second he peers back over the edge, eyes sparkling as he extends a hand to Connor. Connor takes it, even though he doesn’t need it, and lets Markus pull him up. He doesn’t let go once they’re on the roof, rolling flat onto his back and gesturing for Connor to do the same.

Connor looks at him. What are they doing up here? Not that he’s complaining. He likes spending time with Markus, but they could spend time together in the safety of the ship.

Markus points at the sky.

The moon is dull tonight, so the stars stand out like salt scattered over black velvet, or little holes punched in a box. They swirl above them. The ribbons of the milky way are doused by light from the city, but constellations still stand out. Connor’s systems identify The Big Dipper and Cassiopeia, flitting over Orion’s Belt and giving him the names of individual stars.

Waves lap against the ship far below them, sending their sound to wash over them and bringing with them the cool scent of the lake.

Connor frowns, eyes flickering over the picture to try to identify the source of Markus’s interest. There’s a satellite. Perhaps he wants to access the signal? “Why am I looking at the sky?”
Markus spreads his free arm out, squeezing Connor’s hand with the other. “The stars, Con.”

Connor inspects them, but they seem just the same as normal, if a little more vibrant. “…why am I looking at the stars?”

“They’re beautiful.”

Connor’s stomach sinks. He can’t see beauty. He shouldn’t, but he wants to. He wants to be able to see what Markus sees in the world, what the others see. Why is he so different? Why can’t he just be like them, be normal.

He tries, tries to see the beauty in the pinpricks in the sky, but his systems just give him the names of even more distant stars.

He licks his lips, pulling his hand away to fiddle with his sleeve. The lack of Markus’s hold makes cold creep over his synthetic skin. “…I don’t see it. I’m sorry.”

Markus rolls onto his side, propping himself up with one arm so that he’s leaning partially over Connor, but not enough to obscure his view of the sky. He doesn’t look angry. He should be. Connor is different and broken and— “What do you see, Con? What do you see in the stars?”

Connor switches to the hem of his sweater, tugging at it with tight fingers. “…I see burning spheres of gas light years away that produce rare elements and illuminate the universe.”

Markus smiles, the corners of his eyes crinkling. The light illuminates him like it does the universe, painting shadows across his face. “That sounds pretty beautiful to me.”

Connor hums, reaching out to once again interlock their hands. Markus shifts his weight to balance, leaning in and tracing their joined hands along Connor’s jaw.

Connor watches him, memorizing the plains of his face and the curve of his tender smile. His heart pounds and the warmth swells to bursting in his chest.

Markus leans in, close enough that Connor can smell the worn wool of his jacket, and he realizes with a start what this is. His stomach drops and the warmth evaporates from his chest, replaced with a fist that clenches around his insides and batters him. His heart pounds for a different reason. Love. He loves Markus. That’s what this emotion is. That’s what’s been growing. He can’t- he can’t—

He rolls out from under Markus, tearing their hands apart and knocking his knee jarringly into the metal as he stands up. He all but runs to the other side of the roof, staring out at the city.

Markus is—Markus is wonderful and strong and vibrant and the only thing Connor could truly call beautiful. Connor is Connor and Markus deserves so much better—better than a liar and a killer and—better than Connor—better than Connor…and Connor, Connor barely knows how to be happy. He barely knows how to deal with sadness and fear. He can’t—he can’t be in love. It’s too much. It’s all too much.

Markus stops a foot behind him, reaching out but letting his hand fall before he touches. “…I’m sorry. Connor, I’m so sorry I thought you—I thought that…it doesn’t matter. I’m sorry.”

Connors wraps his arms around himself. He needs…he needs Hank. Hank would know what to do, but Hank isn’t here. He needs…space. He needs space and his plants and to think.

He turns and brushes past Markus, not looking at him as he leaps from the roof and retreats below decks. “If you’ll excuse me, I need to go to my room.”
North comes to him early the next day, steps eager and body buzzing with energy. “There’s been another abduction. A pair, this time. Two deviants.”

Connor sits up, tapping into the data map. It only takes him a moment to put the points into his second map, the one with the two locations. This site is strangely far from the more eastern lab. It could be outlying data, but CyberLife doesn’t have outliers, not with their strike force. They’re too precise. Too planned. There’s no doubt about it. “I have the location.”

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so there’s one more chapter before part two. I already have it written, so it should be uploaded early next week if life goes as planned

We've got more fan art!! Big thanks to Ally for creating this adorable drawing of Connor. https://twitter.com/AllyZCreator/status/1034667719751135232

As always, thanks to everyone for all of your support :) it means a lot
Dandelion Wine

Chapter Summary

you better watch out YoU BEttEr WaTCh OuT YOU BETTER WATCH OUT

Chapter Notes

life almost cooperated

Ok so I only did one editing pass on this, so if there're any massive, glaring errors please forgive me

Chapter title from Dandelion Wine by Blackmore's Night

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kara bundles the blankets in her arms. She has on a pollution mask and glasses, so the cashier probably won’t recognize her model, but there’s always the risk. AX400’s are fairly common.

She approaches the cash register with false confidence. If she acts like she knows what she’s doing, she tends to get asked less questions.

Kara sets the blankets down on the conveyer belt. She needs to get back to her family as soon as possible. She can’t protect them if she isn’t there. She left them her gun, but there’s always the chance of something happening, especially because of the deviants they’re traveling with. The damaged two were unable to shut off their wireless signals. It’s not as much of a danger because they aren’t at Jericho where a cluster of signals would give them away, but it’s far from safe.

The problem is, everywhere is far from safe. They’d decided to stay with their advantage of numbers until an alternate solution presented itself. It’d taken over three weeks, but things are finally turning in their favor.

Rose’s friends are taking a boat across the border tonight. She’d warned them that it would be colder out on the water, so Kara is buying blankets for Alice. As soon as she gets back they can leave for the boat and continue their journey to Canada. Maybe they can finally be safe and happy.

All she wants is for Alice to be happy.

The cashier accepts her cash and puts her blankets into a bag. Kara takes them, and heads out into the early morning. The streets and sky are grey, cold yet bustling with self-driving cabs and people with scarves and warm drinks. Snow drifts down and she inhales, reminding herself to breath. She needs to blend in.

She leaves the main street, veering onto quieter and quieter roads as she leaves heavily inhabited areas. The houses grow broken and the familiar acrid smell of red ice haunts her steps.

The noise is the first thing that tells her something is wrong. There’s crashing from the alleyway
where they spent the night, a high pitched scream that falls into static and silence.

Kara drops the bag and runs. No no no no no no not now. Not now when they’re so close—when freedom is so close she can taste it. Not her baby- she’s so small, so young, so bright. Kara is nothing without her—Kara would die—

The second thing that tells her something is wrong is the thirium. It splashes out of the alleyway in an arc, tracing a blue rainbow on the ground.

Her heart pounds in her chest, her stomach sinking so low it might swallow her because no—not her little girl—not Alice—

A running figure crashes into her. The third deviant, the uninjured one. She catches his shoulders. He’s bigger than her, stronger than her, but her baby is back there and she’s going to save her. “What’s going on!!?”

The deviant looks over his shoulder, trying to rip out of her hands. She won’t let him. Her family is back there and she needs to know what’s going on so she can save them.

She yanks him into a nearby alcove, hidden partially behind a trash can. “WHAT’S GOING-“

There’s another crash and he tears away from her with all his might, using all his fear, all his desperation, to push her away and run from the alcove.

Kara tumbles into the wall, her neck whips, and her head slams into the cement.

*Warning. Damage to Biocomponent #532. Immediate Reboot Necessary*

Nononononono she has to save her family- she has to—

She isn’t built for this. She’s a domestic and child care android. She isn’t built to take damage or run through streets or fight. She can’t even take being thrown into a RA9 damned wall. Damn it, damn it all.

Kara tries to move, tries to curl her fingers, but her systems won’t respond. She wants to scream, or cry, but all she can do is wait for her systems to shut down as the sounds from the alleyway fall silent.

A blur flashes by, then the pounding feet of the retreating deviant are silent as well.

Kara watches over the edge of the dumpster as a self driving cab pulls up. There’s the sound of purposeful footsteps, then brown hair and a soft face. Connor. She knew it. He wasn’t to be trusted and now he’s got her family anyway…but there’s something…off.

He slings the three deviants into the cab, but his movements are too stiff, too…robotic. He lifts her little girl over his shoulder like she’s nothing, and then Kara sees his eyes. They’re too cold, even colder than we he chased them. No not cold…empty, like there’s nothing there. It isn’t him. Whoever it is it isn’t Connor.

Then…was he to be trusted? Was the Connor at Jericho telling the truth? Did she take her family away from safety, away from a place they could call home, for nothing?

He chucks her into the cab behind the others, heaving up Luther, then steps in and they’re gone.

This is all her fault. This is- she should’ve know. Some how, she should’ve figured it out. She
should’ve done better. She should’ve kept them safe. This is all her fault.

*Initiating Reboot*

Kara’s world goes dark.

Hank runs his hands through his hair, rubs his eyes, tugs his beard, and wishes that cafes sold alcohol. Normally he wouldn’t be up so early, but goddamn Sumo had woken him up.

He’d laid in bed for maybe ten minutes, contemplating his decision to stay sober until Connor is home safe. This whole thing is bombarding him with stress and memories and fuck all if anything else but a bottle will help. So screw it, right. It’s not like he has conviction anywhere else in his fucking life. Unfortunately, he’d then made the discovery that he’s out, probably because of Connor, damn him. He’d gone to buy some, and now he’s in a cafe with an android he never thought he’d see again.

The Chloe sits primly across from him, hands folded in her lap as she patiently waits for him to collect himself. Except, not patient because she isn’t deviant. She’s just…there, staring at the wall. God, that’s creepy.

“Ok.” He raises both hands. When did his life get so complicated? Oh that’s right, when he screwed the fuck up and ruined everything good about it. “So who’n the what is going on?”

The Chloe smiles without her eyes moving. “Elijah sent me to tell you that it’s a trap.”

“What’s a trap?” Ain’t that a question from an earlier generation.

Hank’s phone buzzes in his pocket. He ignores it.

“The one your current partner is setting for his predecessor.”

Hank’s blood curdles, a heavy ball of dread he’s all too familiar with settling into his gut. “What the fuck are you talking about? Speak plain.”

The Chloe inclines her head. “RK800 is setting a trap by abducting deviants for Connor that will get him, and every one of his new allies, captured and killed.”

“You pullin’ my leg?”

“I assure you, Lieutenant, I am not.”

Hank’s phone buzzes again and he rips it from his jacket, ready to silence it when he sees who it is. He grits his teeth and answers. “The fuck do you want?”

“You need to come into the station, Hank.”

“Wh—“

“We apprehended a deviant. She’s the AX400 you chased.”

Hank clenches his jaw. He needs to find the android base to warn Connor, or find a way to send him a message. Considering he turned off his wireless signal, the second option won’t work. The closest thing they have to a lead is at the station. He doubts he can decrypt Rupert’s notebook when Connor failed to, but he’s gonna damn well try. “Alright. I’ll be in.”
Hank hangs up before the other man can reply.

Chloe looks at him. He looks at Chloe. “I’ve gotta…”

“Elijah also wishes Connor to know that there’s a back door.”

Hank stares at her. Connor will know what that means. Probably. “Uh…thanks.”

He gets up and leaves, tripping and cursing on his way out.

His official partner is waiting for him at the door, punctual, pressed, and all together not Connor.

Hank grimaces and doesn’t acknowledge it—him, instead shouldering past and straight into the early morning bustle of the DPD. They’ve been a lot busier since Connor and his pals started becoming more active. They’ll only get busier still. Hank can’t help but admit that he’s proud.

The android that follows at his shoulder is a harsh juxtaposition to the feeling that sits in his chest. Shit. It’s gonna be a lot harder to get into the evidence room with him here. He can’t afford to arouse suspicion. If the asshole knows that he’s onto him, he doesn’t want to imagine what will happen to Connor. He’ll probably just adapt his plan. On the other hand, if Hank doesn’t do anything Connor is as good as dead. He has a lot of faith in the kid’s capabilities, but this dick has the same programming and John Wick shit.

“Where are you going, Lieutenant? The interrogation room is this way.”

“Yeah, yeah you plastic prick. I’m just getting a coffee. It’s too goddamn early to be awake.” Part of that is true, but what he doesn’t say is that he needs the cup for a plan starting to form.

He fills a paper cup with some of the DPD’s shitty coffee, then flicks through the folder on the AX400. There isn’t anything new, except that she’s been evading capture for over a month and that she was found unresponsive near the scene of a struggle. His job with interrogation is to get her to confess. They want him because they think she’ll already be afraid of him, someone else will do the rest. Easy enough.

Hank pretends to fiddle with a pen as he reads, sweeping it over his fingers and tapping it against the table.

The RK800 watches him like a hawk watches a mouse.

He sighs, rubs his eyes, and wishes that he’d managed to buy alcohol. To hell with it.

He claps the android on the shoulder and, sure enough, his eyes zero in on the movement. Misdirection. Oldest trick in the book. For how smart these guys are, they can be pretty damn stupid.

He pockets the pen. “I’m gonna take a leak.”

Not-Connor thankfully doesn’t follow him to the bathroom.

Hank drains the rest of the coffee, he does need the caffeine, and closes himself in a stall. He uses the corner of his shirt to dry the inside, then writes a message as clearly as he can manage.

\textit{Blink once for yes/twice for no}

\textit{Do you know where the deviant base is?}

\textit{Have you seen Connor?}
Will you help me?

Hank considers for a second, then scribbles sorry for chasing you and your daughter below it. Perfect. She’ll definitely help him.

He leaves the bathroom, hand over the top of the paper cup to hide the message inside. He’s careful to carry it like it’s still full. The replacement can’t know.

RK800 follows him to the two way mirror overlooking the interrogation room. The AX400, Kara, sits there. Her hands are chained together on the table in front of her and her wide eyes flick around the room. A thin stream of thirium mats her hair and runs down the back of her neck.

“Stay here, tin can, we don’t want to overwhelm her.”

“Alright, Lieutenant.”

Gavin spins in his chair, smirking. “You gonna bring your coffee in their old man?”

Fucking Gavin. “You gonna be the one to get between me and my caffeine?” Gavin raises his hands mockingly, pantomiming fear and shaking his head.

Hank would like to give him a piece of his mind, or deck him, but there’s no time for that now. He grumbles for the show of it as he makes for the door, opening it and pulling out the chair to sit in front of Kara.

She looks at him, eyes growing wider, if possible. Her small hands start to tremble and she clasps them around each other, forcing them to still.

Best get right into it then. “Why did you kill Todd Williams?”

Her eyes grow hard. “He was going to kill Alice.”

Her daughter. That makes sense. Hank would do the same. “Alice is the other android in Mr. William’s possession. A YK500.”

Kara clenches her jaw. “We belong to no one.”

Hank wants to tell her he knows, wants to tell her he’s on her side, that he wants to help. He can’t do that, so he makes a show of taking a long sip from his empty coffee cup, then sets it down hard enough to rattle the table. To the people watching it looks like a dismissal of her words, but in actuality it places the cup where she can read the message inside.

She doesn’t look, eyes riveted forward in defiance.

Damnit. He taps on the side of the cup. She still doesn’t look. God damn it.

“You deviants make me sick.” Shit. Shit. He can’t mention Connor or he’ll tip off his replacement.

Hank kicks her under the table.

She startles, affronted. He’d almost say she looked offended, brow low and jaw tight. He taps the side of his cup again and this time she looks.

Her gaze flicks back up to him so quickly that he thinks she’s missed it, then she inclines her head slightly, gaze pointed.
Hank gets the message. He grabs the cup, standing. “Soon we’ll be rid of you. You’ve given me all I need.”

As he talks she blinks once, pauses, blinks again, hesitates, then blinks a third time.

Hank doesn’t let the triumph show on his face, instead sneering at her and storming out of the room.

The RK800 goes in after he leaves and Hank takes the opportunity to tear the cup into little pieces and flush it down the toilet.

Kara sits in her cell. Should she help this Hank Anderson? She doesn’t even know what he wants. She only agreed because it will mean her getting out, and if she gets out then she can save her family. She has to save her family.

The hours tick by, people trickling out of the DPD. With every degree less of natural light Kara’s chest tightens. It’s too long. Who knows what that monster could be doing to her family, what they could be doing to them at CyberLife.

The DPD is empty and there’s a low buzz, then the lights shudder off. A moment later Anderson’s haggard face appears in front of her cell. He presses a hand to the door and it slides open. “Hurry. We’re supposed to have five minutes before everything comes back on, but I did it, so it’s probably gonna be more like thirty seconds.”

Her eyes flick over him. He’s armed, but that isn’t unusual. He’s wearing a horrid striped shirt and an open jacket. His eyes seem honest, but if he’s tricking her then the enemy would have the location of Jericho.

She steps out of the cell and follows him through a side door to a self driving cab. He grumbles about not being able to use his own car for a goddamn breakout as he plugs in a location and turns to her. “Ok. The short of it is that Connor and everyone he’s with is in danger. His bastard replacement is setting a trap for him.” Anderson swallows, then his face drops and his voice gets sincere. “You’ve got a little girl, right? Please help Connor…he’s like a son to me.”

It hits her like a fist to the chest. She’d do anything to protect Alice, to get her back. Maybe they’re not so different. “What’s the trap?”

Anderson, Hank, sags. “All I know is that he’s using captured deviants to lure them in.”

Wait. “Captured deviants?”

“Yeah.”

That must be what RK800 was doing. Energy surges through Kara. That’s why he took her family. If they’re being used as bait, that means Markus and the others are heading to where her family is. They’re going to try and rescue them. It has to be. They’re going to try to save them and they’re all going to die. “I’ll help you.”

Hank rubs his face. “God…Thank you. I’ll—“

“You can’t come.”

“Why the hell not?”
“You’re human. You’re slower than us, louder than us. You’re a liability.” She levels him with a cold stare. “And if you’re lying to me, I’m not going to lead you to them.”

Hank is still for a moment, then he nods. “I’ll get out at the next stop, take a bus home. You need to…you need to tell Connor that Kamski says there’s a back door.”

“What does that mean?”

Hank shrugs, rubbing his face as he sags.

Kara bites her lower lip, then reaches out and rests a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll make sure Connor’s safe.”

He rubs his eyes. “Thank you.”

It’s quick work for her to reach Jericho. She gets out of the cab far enough away that it won’t give away the location, running through the snow until she reaches the massive ship.

She stumbles into the cold metal as she races inside, the dark water sloshing below her. She doesn’t notice the lights overhead, or the pictures that are starting to be hung on the walls, her mind is focused on searching for Markus.

She doesn’t see him, or any of his group. That isn’t unusual. They could be having a meeting or be on a mission. There’s lots of reasonable reasons for none of them being in sight.

A small hand stops her rush and she turns to see Lucy, eyes concerned and lips turned in a comforting smile. “What’s wrong, my dear?”

“Where’s Markus?!”

“He’s on a mission, along with the others.”

Kara’s heart pounds in her chest, filling her throat and shaking her frame. “What for?!!”

“They’ve gone to rescue the captured deviants.”

No. No. This will be the end of the revolution. This will be the end of her family. “Where?!!”

Lucy frowns, pulling her hand away. “Markus has shut off long range wireless connection to avoid detection, just in case there are android guards. I—”

“Where are they?!!”

A location appears in her head, along with blueprints of a facility.

Kara races out of Jericho. She can’t be too late. She can’t.
And here concludes part 1
Connor hunches outside of the compound, freezing sleet slicking his hair to his head and blurring the view from his optical units. He rubs his eyes, ignoring the slight tremor in his hands.

This is it. If he pulls this off - he has to - then he proves his worth. He shows he’s invaluable and he can tell them, tell them all. He has to. It has to work.

He rests his head against the frigid wall, closing his eyes and spreading his thermal senses. North appears bluish, colder than a human as she creeps up beside the orange blur that is Markus.

“Is it done?” Markus’s voice echoes through their heads, the question waiting on the edge of a held breath.

“Markus. This is too easy. We need to—“

“Is it done?”

North grits her teeth. “Yes, but—“

“We’ll split into two groups.” Markus’s mismatched eyes catch the low light, fixing on Connor. “North, Connor, Josh, and Honey will continue to disable the central security. North has delayed our discovery for now, but there’s only so much we can do without being inside. Me, Simon, Blue, and John will search for the missing deviants.”

“Fuck, Markus—“

The deviant leader whirls on North, face ablaze. They all feel it. The precipice. The beginning of a new chapter or the end of it all.

Sparks flash at Markus’s temple and are immediately washed away by the raging sky.

North says nothing more.

Connor shifts to Josh’s side, avoiding the stifled rage and fear flowing off of North as well as the searching gaze of Markus. He will say no goodbyes today. This isn’t the end. He’ll succeed. If he
doesn’t…there will be no life left for goodbyes.

Beside him, Honey tucks her face into Blue’s shoulder. Blue rubs her thumbs over the backs of her hands, bringing her thin fingers up to kiss their tips. She says something just for them that makes the two smile softly, lips trembling like baby birds. There will be no goodbyes. There is only now and whatever comes after.

They part without another word.

Connor slips inside the building like he’s meant to be there. He was, once. The stark white walls remind him of something that was never home, but the closest thing he had. Stability and a purpose, something other than North at his shoulder and the wet, synthetic hair hanging in his eyes.

The lights above them flicker. The backup is already kicking in.

“Someone needs to disable their backup security.” He addresses their group only, his wireless message kept contained to only the short range they’d left enabled.

North nods, eyes flickering with something sharp. “Honey. You know what to do.”

Honey nods once, slipping away and leaving the three on their own.

It’s short work to reach the security room. Connor closes his eyes and searches for the security guard’s signal. It reminds him sickeningly of tricking Simon for the first time, creating the path that lead him here.

He draws in a deep breath, and pings the guards sensors. The swell inside of him threatens to engulf him, then there’s the metallic swish of a door opening, and two guards in CyberLife armor sweep out.

North and Connor move in unison, sweeping up seamlessly. Connor ducks under the first guard as North twists his wrist to dislodge his grip on his gun and crack his head with the butt of it.

Connor draws the other guard’s arm back and sweeps his legs out from under him, catching him and securing his throat in the crook of his elbow as he lowers him to the ground. He goes limp in his arms.

North slams the head of the guard still inside the room into the wall as Josh rushes behind them to check each of the agents’ pulse. He lets out a slow breath of relief when he finds them alive, swinging his backpack around to pull out zip ties and bind the guards’ hands and feet.

North’s fingers fly over the board in front of her, her face growing increasingly tense as she’s met with warnings and firewalls she doesn’t know what to do about.

Connor nudges her aside. He’s made of this hardware, this software, he could break into it if he was half shut down.

The lights above them stutter, then go dark completely. The wall of monitors in front of him buzz, then go out.

He’s done it. Everything is going smoothly. Now all they need to do is meet back up with the other team, hopefully with the rescued deviants, and get out of here. They can do this. He can do this.

Soft steps reach his audio processors. They’re careful, like someone trying to avoid being heard. They fall heavier than Markus’s, or any of the others for that matter. They’re too heavy to be an
North lunges for it without question, but her hand never reaches the panel. A bullet whizzes into the room, tearing through the synthetic skin and plastic between North’s thumb and forefinger, carving a gaping hole in her outstretched hand. Blue thirium, almost glowing in the darkness, drips from sparkling wires and cracked, white plastic, then the agents are on them.

Markus freezes, eyes locking on the others as gunfire reaches their ears.

Something’s gone wrong. It’ll be fine. They know how to fight. His group will join the others and he’ll dismantle whoever fucked up. This will all work out.

Footsteps hammer the ground behind him, skidding with a high pitched squeal around a corner, then continuing their desperate sprint towards him.

He twists, throwing a punch and stopping it a bare inch from Kara’s face.

Her eyes are blown wide, short hair tousled and mussed with thirium. “It’s a trap.”

Markus’s rage boils. “What?!”

John steps up beside him, clenching and unclenching his fists. He exchanges a look with Blue.

Kara raises her hands like she’s going to run them through her hair, or bury her face in them to cry, but stops. Her eyes harden, gaining a look he’s used to seeing on North. It does nothing to temper his fury.

“All of this, the captured deviants, the signals, this place. It’s all a trap. A trap to kill us all and end the rebellion.”

Maybe it’s her calm voice that reaches him, or the terrified desperation hidden under her resolve, but Markus can see no lie in her words. It all makes too much sense, clicks together too easily.

A well opens in his stomach, sucking in all the anger, warmth, and hope. It leaves him cold, frozen to the spot for all of the second it takes for the CyberLife agents to stream around the corner, boxing them in on both sides. Thanks to Kara they’re ready, but it isn’t enough to keep them from being torn apart.

All at once Markus is back to back with the small woman, surrounded by thundering boots and the acrid smell of gunfire. A bullet skims his side, snapping him out of his daze.

He grabs Kara’s hand and lets the world slow. There are five agents facing them. Connor might be able to take that many, but Markus can’t, not with them heavily armored and heavily armed.

The agents are too well prepared.

They were ready for them. Somehow they knew that they’d been training to fight, that they’re more of a threat than they once were.

He has no time to contemplate it as his processor scans the situation and turns up failed upon failed plan. There has to be something. This can’t be it. This can’t be the end. He won’t let it.
There. 45% chance of success. Those are the best odds he’s seen since the lights went out.

Holy mother of shit is this going to leave one hell of a scar.

He pulls Kara into his chest, cradling her wet, frigid form and spinning.

There’re three consecutive bangs that make his audio processors fritz at the proximity. Static blares through his head as hot flecks rain down on his synthetic skin. The sharp feeling is quickly drowned as bullets tear through his upper arm, the base of his shoulder socket, and part of the way into his chest. Electricity buzzes inside of him, hot thirium pouring over ruined components and trickling into his body. Feeling shudders and falls away from where it had once been, growing gratingly sharp in other places. He closes his eyes against the sensation, gritting his teeth and clutching Kara reflexively against him.

He can’t stop. He can’t slow down.

Markus ducks and lunges, throwing Kara to the ground behind the guards and surging upwards before they can register his movement. He only has one chance at this.

The fingers of his right hand twitch against his command, but he forces them to comply. He wraps his hands around the grip of the pistol belonging to the guard nearest him. He clutches it so hard that his skin recedes from his knuckles to show white plastic.

There’s no room to talk his way out of this, no room for bartering or charm. He slides his index finger over the trigger and buries the gun under the man’s chin, then pulls.

Hot blood rains down on him, liquified brain and a severed tongue, ripped to shreds. He blinks it out of his eyes and drops again.

The others move to aim at his new position, but it’s too late. He already has the dead guard draped over him as a shield.

Markus hoists the limp body against most of the agents. It spasms with coppery, wet warmth as it absorbs a barrage of deadly bullets. He uses the moment to take aim at the guard he isn’t protected from.

The barrel of a gun is already trained on him. It’s too late. He was too slow.

Kara jumps on the man from behind, throwing his aim askew. Markus takes the opportunity.

His first shot skims the man’s head, but his second lands true. The guard drops like a doll.

Markus tucks his spasming right arm under the corpse along with his left and heaves, throwing it into the remaining three agents.

The fans in his body start to spin as his temperature regulator struggles to keep up with the heat of the fight. They can’t be heard over the din, but he can feel them thrumming in his body.

He begins sprinting as soon as the body hits the agents. It’s off center, and doesn’t have as much force as he’d like, but it does the trick.

He sprints through the gap left by the two dead guards, fans spinning and thirium pump pounding in his chest.

Kara pulls herself out from under the dead man and runs after him, blood splashed across her face. It
drips from her nose and sticks her eyelashes together.

Markus can feel a grin stretching across his face, something deranged and desperate. It’s fueled by adrenaline and fear and no small amount of victory. They can get out of this.

He searches the edges of his short range transmissions. Simon, Blue, and John are still there. He sends a message to them, just the location of where the others should be - where Connor should be. He’s going to help them. Going to save them. It’s all going to be all right.

There’s a shout, then the stomp of a new round of CyberLife agents. Kara rolls one way, pressed against a wall to avoid detection, and Markus rolls the other.

They make eye contact for a moment, both wide and conveying too much to be interpreted with just a glance by almost strangers.

Kara nods the barest amount, and Markus turns on his heel, hesitating only slightly before continuing his mad dash to save the others - to save Connor.

North and Connor hunch to either side of the door, taking pot shots when there are breaks in the fire. Josh crouches, useless without a gun, behind North.

They’re going to run out. They’re going strong right now, but eventually they’re going to have to enter the fray wether they want to or not. They could wait for the others, but gunfire started ten minutes ago and there’s no guarantee that they’re even coming. They could be—he’s not going to think about that. They’ll be fine. He taught them well. They’ll be fine.

Connor uses that assurance, and the terror it hides, to leverage himself out the door. He wants to live, but right now he has something more important at his back. Part of his reason for living. These people he’s met, he’s gotten to know. They’re everything. He won’t let them down.

All at once there are thirteen M24A1 Light Machine guns shifting towards him. Eight bodies litter the ground and blood spatters the walls, cloying iron and acrid smoke that fills his senses.

He watches faceless helmets turn towards him and fingers clench over triggers in slow motion. They’re fast, but he’s faster. There are ten shots left in his gun and he immediately unloads two of them into two of the remaining agents.

He rolls forward as the ground shatters behind him, flecks of broken tile ricocheting off his back.

Connor reaches to catch one of the falling bodies, but a remaining agent kicks it away. Her visor is cracked and he can see the whites of the woman’s eyes, blood shot and shuddering. She brings her gun down on him.

Time slows and his depleted battery packs protest the amount of use he’s forcing out of them. He can get out of this. He just needs to find a way. His processor runs through possibilities, but there’s nothing. He pushes it faster and faster, but it turns out he had no need.

North springs from cover, following his lead and surging up behind the woman to plant a bullet in the back of her head. Blood spills down, making the floor slick and sticky.

The remaining ten agents gun for them, but North drops down to protect their left, heaving the woman’s body as a crimson shield, and Connor protects their right. He eliminates the most immediate threat with perfect aim through the forehead, then lifts a downed agents body as another
His back presses into North’s lean one, thirium and blood sticking their synthetic skin together. Ear splitting bangs echo as wet thumps surround his audio processors. He can’t hear his own thoughts. They skirt by, distracted by the torn flesh oozing between his fingers and the hot liquid dripping down his arms.

He shuts his eyes and scans for the heat signatures of the ten remaining agents. As he watches, a bluish warmth that must be Josh darts out of the room and snatches one of the agents, dragging them back behind cover with an arm bar pressed to their throat.

For some reason a smile twitches on Connor’s lips. Maybe it’s because Josh is still making an effort to help without compromising his core, the beliefs that keep him going. Maybe it’s because everyone is so unapologetically themselves.

There’s a lull and Connor shifts just enough to take another two shots. Two guards fall.

Seven agents left. He has six shots. North should have five. They can do this.

He forces his capacitors to boost him towards the falling agents, the fabric of his jacket pealing away from North’s back, sticky with blood.

He abandons the body he was using as cover, vaulting over it and sliding on the slick floor. He presses his hands into the ground and kicks his legs upwards, hitting the nearest agent in the side of the knee. It cracks and Connor slides behind him, snapping his neck and holding his corpse up with one arm, twisting to take aim at the agent beside him. There isn’t a clear line to her head, so Connor shoots through her side. The bullet enters below her ribs on the right side, tearing through fabric and flesh until it finds her heart. Unlike the others, she has the chance to cry out before she falls.

He spins and there are only two spots of warmth left standing. Two have been felled by off center shots and a third has joined Josh’s pile of unconscious bodies in the security room.

The remaining two back up towards the wall. The barrels of their guns flick between North and Connor, steps slipping on the flesh of their fallen coworkers.

The absence of gunfire rings throughout the corridor, instead filled with the harsh breathing of the two agents.

One of their helmets turns to the side, the eyes behind the visor focusing on something behind Connor.

That’s all the warning he needs. He drops to the ground as a bullet tears through the air where he once was. It catches the ends of his synthetic hair, melting the brown to black.

He spins, leveling the gun, to come face to face with…himself.

His doppelgänger wears the suit he hasn’t seen in so long, smoothly pressed and declaring its wearers identity. His brown hair is perfectly combed, where Connor’s is mussed and slick, hanging in his eyes and pressed to his plastic skull. His eyes are brown and emotionless…though…there’s something in them, maybe the edge of anger, or maybe nothing.

“Hello, 52.”

Connor pulls the trigger, but the other simply steps to the side, anticipating Connor’s move in the same way that Connor anticipates the shot that comes tearing towards him. He slides his foot,
rotating his knee and pulling himself out of the way and to his feet.

Four bullets. He fires each of them, tracing a pattern that the other weaves in between. The other him. Using his motions, his face. But they were never his. All he is is engineered. Fabricated. He was made to adapt and grow. There is nothing about him that is unique.

And now it’s there for the world to see. For his friends to see…what could have been his family.

He’s failed. Failed the mission and failed the people he cares about and—

A bullet tears through his shoulder as he moves a second too late.

“Connor!! The fuck do you think you’re doing!!?” North roars.

His mind slips, tumbles forward, falling into his limbs and his racing thirium pump. He dashes forward, ducking to avoid another shot, sliding to the side to avoid another.

He would throw his gun to the ground, but it’s Hank’s, so he tucks it into its holster.

Time slows. He feints left and throws a blow right. The other him anticipates it, catching his fist and tucking his wrist into the dip of his shoulder. He grips his hand and his forearm, twisting in opposite directions.

Connor drops before the move can fell him, rolling onto his back and ramming his feet into his twin’s plastic stomach.

He lets go of Connor’s arm, planting his hands on the ground above Connor’s head and springing over him at the same time that Connor twists around.

They face each other, processors working at the same speed, looking for the same solutions, and dismissing each.

There’s movement behind the other, but Connor doesn’t let his eyes go to it.

He ducks low and swings upwards. His twin takes a step back, but is met with the solid punch of North’s foot. He falls directly into Connor’s fist.

Synthetic skin rolls away from the blow as his head snaps back.

He turns to swing at the new assailant, but North dances out of the way as Connor drives another fist into his cheek.

Connor can almost feels his twin’s processor whirring, sorting the possibilities. How would he get out of this. How would he—

“North! Your—“

But it’s too late. The other him uses the force of Connor’s blow to transition into a roll. He comes up directly beside North, wrenching the gun from her grip and pressing it to her head.

It’s only thanks to her above average reflexes as a WR400 that her head doesn’t fall in a smear of blue. She ducks to the side and the bullet tears through her left cheek, skimming away a sizzling half-circle of white plastic, then blowing off her left ear completely in a splash of thirium.

She stumbles, but manages to bring up her own gun. She fires. Once. Twice. Three times.
The fourth shot connects, digging into his twin’s gut. He doesn’t falter, knocking the gun from North’s hands, but it gives Connor the second he needs to reach them.

He wraps his arm around his twin’s throat, digging his fingers into synthetic skin and burying the other in his familiar brown hair.

Before he can complete the motion, his twin slams his head back into his nose. It cracks and blue blood dribbles down his face, pooling in his mouth and giving him his own make, model, and serial number.

Connor’s grip falters, but he doesn’t let go, holding steady as North hammer’s his twin’s face. Synthetic skin flows away from each blow, revealing little by little the android’s true form - Connor’s true form. All that he is is on display, and it’s next to nothing.

North slams her elbow into the other him’s jaw and Connor flinches.

A storm of running feet thunder down the hallway, growing closer and closer.

A second, softer set of footsteps skids from the opposite direction. A very familiar set of footsteps. “What are you doing?!”

Connor’s head whips to the side. Markus, coated in blood and thirium. Three gaping holes tear through his left side, countless other scrapes and marks hidden by the life coating him. Connor doesn’t linger on it, his attention goes directly to his eyes.

The dread that’s been held off, by the rush or the focus he doesn’t know, floods in. He’s cold and hot all at once, painfully hollow. This can’t be happening. This can’t be—not when he’s so close. Who’s he kidding. He was never close. This was never going to—

His twin goes limp in his arms, using Connor’s strength to kick up and plant both feet in North’s face. There’s a crunching sound and she falls.

His twin slips from his grip, Connor sprints after him, but the agents are upon them.

A bullet threads through his shoulder. No. No

His twin reaches Markus.

Connor ducks and weaves, catching an agent and wrenching their M24A1 from their grip. No. NO.

His twin draws a knife from his shoe, a method of killing Connor never had. He swings it. Markus doges back, but he’s too slow, or too hesitant to fight something that looks just like Connor.

A long line parts Markus’s face, cutting from his forehead, across the bridge of his nose, through his lips, and down his chin. The synthetic skin and plastic peels away, then the thirium bursts forth.

Markus stumbles back, temple sparking as his hands fly to his face.

Connor’s twin swings again, slick blade veering towards the rebel leader’s chest.

“Markus!!” Connor won’t make it in time. No. No. NO.

A blond blur emerges from the hallway, tackling his twin and throwing him towards the security room. Simon wraps his thighs over the android’s chest and throws punch after punch at his twin’s face.
Markus stumbles back, then steadies himself.

The tightness in Connor’s chest doesn’t dissipate. There’s no way that Simon can beat his twin.

He swings around, unloading shots from the M24A1, but there’s just too many. The other’s are hunched behind bodies or pressed into alcoves, scrambling.

He catches a flash of Simon from between the fighting bodies. His twin catches his fist, twisting it and throwing the blond off of him.

An agent obscures his view and Connor puts two bullets in their gut, stumbling forward, kneeing an agent in the groin, elbowing another in the teeth.

The crowd parts and Simon is standing. He’s alright. He’s alright for now. He’s—Connor’s twin winds his fingers in the front of his sweatshirt. Pulling him forward and stomping on his leg, forcing the plastic and the joint the wrong way. Simon spasms.

Connor forces through the crowd, ambivalent to the bullets flying around him. He has to protect his family. He has to. He has to.

His twin plants his foot in Simon’s gut, pinning him to the ground. There’s a fury in his eyes that shouldn’t be possible in a non-deviant android. He wraps his hands around Simon’s left wrist, pulling. The pale, synthetic skin fades away, revealing the straining plastic underneath. There’s a pop as his wrist joint separates from his forearm, then his elbow. Simon smacks at the android with his other hand, gripping desperately at the dark fabric, but it does nothing.

Connor’s twin moves his grip, pulling and pulling, and then Simon’s arm tears lose. Thirium streams from it and Simon makes a choking sound in the back of his throat, eyes wide and LED flashing red as tears pool in the corners of his eyes.

Connor’s twin has the knife in his grip again. His LED is just as red as Simon’s. Then the crowd closes and Connor can’t see them anymore.

Chapter End Notes

I'm doing my best
My Star in the Sky

Chapter Summary

rip

Chapter Notes

Chapter title is from Fourth of July by Sufjan Stevens

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She’s been separated from Markus and the others, but it doesn’t matter. Guilt pools in her stomach and tears at her heart. It doesn’t matter. All that matters now is finding her little girl, finding Alice.

To make the trap thorough they’d still have to be here. They have to be here just in case Connor checked, right? Just in case they got that far.

She ignores the fact that they never would have been able to get that far. The trap was sprung far too early. It was too meticulous. There was no room for ifs that big.

She’ll find them.

She’ll find her family.

Shouts and gunfire echo in her audio processors. Her joints buzz from being pushed far past their limits. The smell of thirium and blood still stings her nose. It had exploded from Markus as he shielded her, spilled from the man he killed. He put his life on the line to save her, even after all she’s done.

It haunts her steps. The memory of his temple sparking, his commanding presence and furious eyes, juxtaposed against his concerned face and protective arms.

She’s not so naïve to believe that everyone will make it out alive. Maybe she was once, but not now. She’s seen too much death. They are merely microscopic pieces in the eternal, unfeeling play of life.

Something in her rebels at that. The others are so passionate, so kind. Their cause is worth fighting for, worth dying for, but she doesn’t want to. All she wants is to be with her family, to be peaceful and something like happy.

Kara reaches sleek, intersecting hallways and ducks to the side a second too late as light, android footsteps skid towards her.

She reaches for a gun that isn’t there, but stops as her optical units quickly recognize the figures. It’s two of Markus’s entourage. Her processor buzzes and produces their names, Blue and John.

Blue is gushing thirium from a gash on the left side of her neck, mixing with blue that oozes from a bullet wound in her side and sticky splashes of red. Something is wrong with a section of John’s
chin. It looks like it’s been crushed, smashed against a wall or cracked with a gun. Blue trickles from slivers in the white plastic. Matching thirium runs from his right shoulder and hand.

She needs them, but some small part of her doesn’t want to put them in harms way, even for the sake of her family. These brave people…

“We need to complete the mission.” Blue saves her the trouble of swallowing her guilt, giving Kara a curt nod and continuing down the corridor the other two were running down.

Kara falls into step beside them. They must have an in depth map of the complex, something provided by Connor.

Her gut curls at his name, writhing like a snake and lodging its fangs into her stomach and heart. The poor boy…and all she did was make it worse.

She thought he was a danger, he still could be, but…

She shakes her head. Now isn’t the time for regrets.

They follow partially lit walkways, haunted by the smell of blood and thirium and the distant sound of gunfire, until they reach a shut door.

Blue swallows and Kara finds herself mimicking the motion, despite the lack of necessity for it. They all begin to mirror those that created them.

She stares at the door. It’s plane, and white, and could hold all of her life behind it.

They’re alright.

Her insides buzz with static, hot and cold at the same time. The place where her ribs would be aches and her thirium pump thrums. This is it. This is it.

Blue rests a hand on her shoulder, then she steps up with John to pry the door open. It grates on its tracks, shut down because of their tampering.

It’s dark and her optical units take a second to activate their limited low-light vision, only there for night time housework.

First there are plastic curtains, a table full of confiscated items, then steel tables and still bodies.

She has to walk up to the side of the first android to try and identify them. The light at their temple is dark and it takes her weak eyes a moment to find why.

Their processor has been removed, efficiently and with the precision of someone that did not consider their subject alive. There’s no thirium, only wiring and cold, hard plastic. There is no life here. No humanity.

Kara’s heart hammers, beating the rhythm of a thousand frantic moments inside her chest. This isn’t the end. No no no no, this isn’t—Her family is fine. Everything. Is. Fine.

Everything is—

The next body is much the same, except this chest is pried open. Another curtain, more tables. These arms are removed, not torn or cut off, but removed along the joint by the same machine that put them together. The mouth on this one is open is a silent scream, tongue stretched in a long line away from the teeth, held by metal pins with plastic ends.
Nowhere is there any thirium, nowhere are there any signs of life.

Blue is cursing behind her and a crash echoes as John hits a table, but it all bleeds away. The world is rocking, like she’s standing on the deck of Jericho. The world burns around her despite the freezing rain draining it of color. There is nothing.

There is Luther, pristine in still, white plastic. His processor is removed like the first.

She stumbles back. This isn’t right. This isn’t right. No no no nononononono—

She lunges forward, hands slipping uselessly over the smooth plastic. There’s nothing to grip, nothing to hold onto.

It isn’t him. It can’t be. It has to be some other model, some other unfortunate—her fingers slip to a knick in the android’s sternum.

Her eyes fix on it and she traces it uncomprehendingly. What?

Weeks ago, a mugger with a knife.

Kara had been reaching for her gun when he’d swung, harmless against Luther’s big chest.

He had cradled Alice. It’s alright little one, it’s alright little one he had said.

Tears drip down her face.

Her hands flutter over his broad cheeks, his strong nose and kind eyes. Gentle and perceptive and free—I like the sound of that, though I don’t know what it means yet.

They were going to find out together. They were going to find out the meaning of being alive. A family.

He’s stripped of color, of personality, and sense. Free-free and he’s nothing, everything taken from him.

Everything taken by someone that saw him as less than human, not even—not even alive.

She spins. She can’t look at this. She can’t—

The world blows out. Sound roars in her ears, her insides shake as though they’ll come through her skin. They might as well. This is it.

She stumbles to Alice’s side, raising her shaking hands to her darling daughter’s face. “Sweetheart-sweetheart, h-hey baby girl-b-b—“

Kara bites her lower lip and presses Alice’s head to her chest. Her hands cradle the smooth plastic of her skull. This is impossible—impossible. It’s so senseless. Just the other day they were crouched together, huddling in the pure joy of being surrounded by people they loved. They bickered and fought and Kara made mistakes—so many mistakes—but—but…they were right there. Right there. So close that she could almost reach into the memory, bring them back to her.

But Alice isn’t gone. This isn’t real. It can’t be. It makes no sense—no sense.

“Hey-hey, it’s gonna-it’s gonna be all-all right. I’ll—“ Kara smiles, lips pulling up and shaking violently, “I’ll fix you. Just like I always—I always make everything better, don’t I always make it better when you get hurt? You can-you can trust me. I’ll always pro-protect you sweetheart.”
Nothing—nothing makes sense. What is—what is…? This can’t be true. Her little girl is just fine. She’s with Luther somewhere else in the complex. That has to—that has to be it.

A hand rests on her shoulder. She flinches away from it. Jerking to the side, burying her face in the crook of her daughter’s neck.

“Kara. They’re going to come for us. We have to—“

“No.”

“Kara—“

“NO!” The word tears from her throat, ripping tears from her eyes. Her chest is gaping, yawning up to consume her. There is nothing. There is nothing. “NO!” She roars it, crying to the people in their high towers, the unfeeling and cold that would take her daughter from her. So-so caught up in themselves that they can’t see that there are others that are alive, that there’s something beautiful and precious and—she screams, wordless and ringing.

Her arms are tight around her darling—her darling girl.

This was precious.

They don’t care. Those bastards.

Rage surges within her, making her trembling body quake. Her lip draws up in a snarl. This is wrong. This is wrong. It doesn’t make any sense. God dammit it doesn’t make any sense. This can’t just happen. It can’t just—

The world doesn’t care, it never has. It never will.

The hand is back, trying to pull her away. “Kara, we have to go. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I can’t imagine, but—“

Sorry? Sorry for what? The world is wrong. The. World. Is. Wrong. This isn’t happening. It doesn’t make any sense so it can’t be happening.

“No, no. I’ll help her. Just—just help me look for what’s missing. I’ll fix her. I can, I just—I just need help.”

“Kara…”

“I just—“

A shot explodes through the room. The plastic curtain’s billow, an acrid scent fills the air.

Warm thirium splashes over the back of Kara’s head, painting Alice blue.

Kara looks up slowly, shuddering.

Blue moves her hand from Kara’s shoulder. It spasms, fingers twitching out of turn. She presses it to the hole through her throat. The exit wound is torn and gaping, synthetic skin receding and shards of plastic lining sparking blue insides. Thirium bubbles and drips from her mouth.

She blinks rapidly, falling back on a familiar motion. She scrabbles at her throat, heaving, then stills. In that moment she must accept that she’s going to die, that they’re all going to die. That, or she’s decided that nothing in the world can stop her. In the face of hopelessness there is nothing but
moving forward, nothing to do but fight and fight with all your heart for the good times, for the chance of something better.

Her eyes lock with Kara’s and she smiles. Blue stained teeth bare from behind a pale face and lips like bruises. “It’s—“ her voice box drops, buzzing with static, “It’s gonna be alright. Don’t worry.”

She ducks and pulls her gun from its holster, taking aim at the CyberLife agents standing in the doorway.

John gently touches Kara’s back, then takes his place beside Blue.

The fire fight is impossible. For every agent that falls two, three more take their place. Bodies litter the entryway, but they’re only used as cover as more and more stream in.

Kara hunches behind the steel table, cradling her daughter in her arms.

A shot ricochets off the metal beside her, throwing up sparks and making her flinch.

She rocks back and forth, back and forth, looking down at her little girl’s face. Her big eyes are blank, not compassionate or brave, afraid or sad or in pain—just…blank.

Kara? Her little girl’s voice. Little one. Free and happy and safe.

Kara let’s out a slow breath. The world is torn with vertigo, seen through a fisheye lens. She stands. Her eyes focus on what they shouldn’t as she lets go and runs. A bullet clipping John. The young face of a dead agent. The buzz buzz buzz of the disabled lights.

She skids to the side of the table of confiscated items before she even realizes she’s there. Her hands are around her gun, finding the magazine, loading it.

The plastic curtains peal away from her presence. The white, still bodies dance in the bursts of light.

She raises it, fires, fires again. A shot slams into her stomach but she doesn’t notice it.

Guards fall before her. Blood and thirium coats her, fills her senses, but her processor is focused on only one thing.

The others will make it out of this.

They will make it out of this, and they’ll make the world for her little girl that she never could. A world where children won’t die.

Connor wrenches himself from the crowd. Simon is there, shuddering as blue pours from the sparking stump where his left arm should be. His twin is pressing the knife into his chest.

That’s not a clean kill. Why is he—? But it doesn’t matter. Connor doesn’t need to analyze, he needs to act.

He drops to the ground and slides, coming up in a twist that catches his replacements wrist and throws it away from the knife.

His replacement snarls, looking at him with eyes that are Connor’s, brown and seething. It’s like looking into himself, seeing the worst parts of his heart. Is this what he could be?
It isn’t what he could be. This is what he is. He would lie and fight and put everyone in danger for the chance to feel like he belonged. How selfish is that. How—disgusting.

This is all his fault.

If he had spoken to the others, told the truth, this trap wouldn’t have worked. They trusted Connor and he let them down, led on by his own programming.

He knew they had other RK800s. He knew, and yet he didn’t prepare, too caught up in some act of family.

He hasn’t changed. He’s filth. The only thing that’s different is that he can see it now.

There is nothing redeemable about him, but he will save them. He will save them and then he won’t be a problem anymore.

His brother’s eyes are blown wide, his mouth contorted as he pulls the knife from Simon’s chest. Thirium curves in an arc from the wound.

A shuddering sound leaves Simon’s lips, a trickle of static that turns into words. His blue eyes latch onto Connor’s and they’re so kind, so gentle and warm. Fear fills them, but despite it all Simon smiles.

“I-don’t bl-blame you. See you safe on the other side, r-right, Connor?”

Connor blinks, heart splintering. Why? Why is he? Connor is filth, a disgrace, incompetent and useless in anything he tries. Why is he?

RK800 lunges for Connor and Connor catches him in an embrace, trapping him against his chest and throwing them away from the fight.

He’ll protect Simon, he’ll protect all of them.

It doesn’t matter what they think. It doesn’t matter what anyone thinks. He’s going to save them and they’re going to be bold and kind and inspiring tomorrow. They’re going to lead the world to a better future wether Connor is there or not.

Josh watches as Connor and his double disappear. Connor lied to them, lied to all of them, but right now that isn’t important.

An agent’s eyes have caught on Simon, prone on the ground. Blue stains the other man’s hair, coating him as his life bleeds away. He stares at the ceiling, eyes flickering as his LED flashes red. He’s shutting down, but Josh won’t let that happen. He’s not losing anyone else, not adding any names to that wall. He’s not losing Simon. He almost lost him once. Leaving him on that rooftop is his biggest regret. He won’t fail him again.

His thirium pump beats like a drum inside him, electric static blaring in his ears and burning his mind.

He’s only just learned to fight. Practiced and practiced so that no one would have to die. He’s ready for this.

It’s a lie.

He never has been, never will be. He’s a scholar, a teacher not allowed to teach. All he wants is to
care and live and learn. But he’ll protect. He’ll protect because this is all he has.

He surges up below the agent and presses the hard edge of his arm into his neck, cutting off the flow of blood to his head. He drops in seconds.

Josh doesn’t have time to bind him with the zip ties ready at his hip, another agent is on him before the first hits the ground.

His heart picks up a frantic beat, the world blurring into chaos. He’s losing control. He never had it.

He barely manages to avoid a shot that shreds any sense of hearing in his right audio processor. It rings like a gong that never ends, blaring and blaring and blaring. It fills his head, fills his mind. He shudders, wobbling to the side. Or is he? What’s going on? Why is he fighting? Why are they fighting? They’re the same. They’re all looking for something to live for, all looking for something to be happy for.

The agent cracks him across the jaw with the butt of her gun. Josh stumbles. Remember. Remember. He uses the momentum to drop and throw himself at her legs.

They land in a tangle of limbs, rolling against running feet. She lost her helmet somewhere in the firefight. Josh has to stop her, has to protect Simon.

He pulls her gun from her and cracks her across the head. There’s a wet smacking sound, blood dripping. She goes limp.

He stands. He didn’t use enough force to kill her. She’s fine. She’s fine. He hasn’t killed anyone. They’re the same. He would rather die. They’re all living, carving their own stories. They have friends and family, people who love them. He turns in a slow circle, eyes sweeping the piled bodies and seeing too much. They have people who will miss them.

There’s another guard on Simon.

His friend, his brother, has stopped twitching. His LED blinks yellow as his processor reboots. No doubt it wanted to shut down, conserve power to save itself, but his brother is pushing himself beyond his limits, forcing himself to wake up so that he can rejoin the fight, so he can help them.

The guard turns his machine gun on Simon’s still face.

Josh screams, hurtling towards the bastard that would dare to try and kill his family.

He full body crashes into the man, sensors flaring as they hit the ground. His nose fills with the scent of warm copper and a cloying, acrid smell. Firing guns and pouring blue blood.

Josh’s lips pull back from his teeth. His body thrashes and he pins the man to the ground, fingers digging into his shoulders as he shakes him. “You will not hurt my family!! You will not hurt my family and I will not hurt you!! We can live together, you and I. You might as well be my brother!”

The man is faceless, hidden behind black glass. His body twists and he drives an elbow into Josh’s sternum, throwing him off and scrambling back on his hands and knees.

Josh presses a hand to his chest, mind reeling. He’s so lost. So so lost in this blood and chaos. He doesn’t belong here. He never should have been here.

But the future. But his family. Isn’t there something worth fighting for? They can live together. Isn’t that worth it? But the dead are all around him. It’s so senseless, so pointless. Is the future worth this?
The guard levels his machine gun with Josh and a round buries itself in his shoulder. Thirium drips from split plastic. He looks at it, eyes trailing down to Simon’s severed limb. Something stirs in him, something frantic.

There’s nothing to be done. It isn’t worth it. They’ll never see.

He puts one foot under himself and throws himself forward in a uncoordinated lunge, knocking the guard back down.

The man lets go of his machine gun, one hand pressing against Josh’s chest and the other scrambling for something at his back.

He has to. This is it. What’s going on? Why is this happening? Why?!

Josh wraps his hands around the agent’s throat, warm and sticky with sweat. He feels the man’s pulse beating under his palm. He will not kill him. They’re all just pawns, pitted in some ridiculous war. There’s no reason for this. The world is beautiful and complex and they’re the same. “WE’RE THE SAME. WE’RE NO DIFFERENT, YOU AND I!! I JUST WANT US ALL TO BE HAPPY!”

Tears drip from Josh’s face and splash on the black glass. He shakes him again. He has to see sense. If he can’t see sense then there’s nothing. Nothing. He needs to see. He needs to see that they can live together. That they don’t have to fight.

The man pulls a handgun from a holster at his back and tucks it under the space where Josh’s ribs would be.

The cold metal brushes him, digging into him through his shirt.

What?

All of his sensors ring and a cascade of sensation erupts from a couple inches below his thirium pump. Wet stains his back as he slumps limply over the man’s hand, processor trying to keep up.

The man wedges his hands under his armpits, heaving him away. Cold. Unfeeling. He throws him to the ground.

Josh’s eyesight breaks as his body reals in shock, taking in the white ceiling but not seeing. They could—they could—

The agent pulls himself to his feet, rubbing his throat and stepping over Josh.

The black folds of his pants pass across the white ceiling, then he’s out of view.

Simon. He has to—He has to save Simon.

The world tunnels, Josh’s hand scratches across the ground, trying to find something, anything. He has to save Simon.

His fingers close around a gun. It’s cold against his synthetic skin. Josh levels it at the agent’s back. He’ll bring him down. He’ll bring him down and Simon will heal. Simon will—this world makes no sense. All of this is senseless, but they won’t listen. They won’t listen. He pulls the trigger.

Nothing happens.

It clicks and clicks.
The agent aims his pistol at Simon’s head.

No.

Josh roars. He surges to his feet. One, two steps and he’s there. There’s no point. The world is senseless. He raises the gun. It lays heavy in his hands. His life streams out from the hole in his chest. No one will listen.

He brings it down. It shatters the side of the man’s helmet, shards of glass dig into his skin and drip pricks of red. He stumbles and Josh brings it down again, falling against him as the man goes limp. Blood twists into his blond hair, black shards of glass digging into his blue eyes and long nose.

Josh crouches over his chest and brings it down again and again and again until his skull crunches and he stops twitching. Blood coats his hands and his arms, drenching his shirt and splashing across his face.

It drips from his eyelashes and mixes with his tears.

Josh drops the gun, sobbing and curling in on himself, twisting his hands in the fabric of the dead man’s shirt. He presses his forehead to the still warm chest, shaking and shaking and shaking.

Kara slides around the corner, John at her heels. Blue is behind them, a soaked strip of cloth wrapped around her neck.

Nothing but the barest thoughts echo through her mind, everything else is numb.

She needs to find Connor. She has to tell him about the back door.

Hank’s warm eyes flash in her mind. The love of a parent.

She has two pistols, her own and one salvaged from a fallen agent. Between them she has twenty shots. There are at least that many choking the hallway.

Blue’s voice echos in her mind, the message taking the space of a second. “The captain is holding his own, but Sigurd is faltering. Hugo and Day are down. Back to back towards Hugo and Day, watch each other. Sigurd should join us.”

Kara doesn’t hesitate to turn her slim back to the other two. Fabric and warm plastic presses against her as they turn through the crowd towards Josh and Simon.

Kara brings down three agents, but another breaks her guard. John eliminates them. They turn seamlessly, as if they’re one being.

It’s a faceless whirl. Black glass and red blood, sound and sensation that doesn’t reach her. The soft brush of the others’ backs seems in perfect clarity, a point of contact in a spin of disarray. Nothing is clear, nothing has purchase or purpose.

Agents fall. Her gun jerks in her hands. It clicks uselessly and she drops it to the ground, pulling the second from her waistband.

An agent slips through their guard. A shot catches her in the right of the chest. The flutter of her jacket covers it. She eliminates them and moves on.
She’s going to stop this. Another parent doesn’t have to see their child die. No other parents have to see their children die. They’re going to carve out a place here.

Josh and Simon are on the ground below them, then Josh is hauled to his feet and John and Blue are torn away by the dwindling crowd to protect Simon, then North is with them and they’re running. It’s Kara, Josh, and North and where is Connor?

Hank needs to hug him, to hold him and live all those moments Kara has lost.

They trace bloody halls below flickering lights. She’s out of bullets. She drops her gun to the ground.

Two identical men fight before them. One with cruel eyes stands over another. The other doesn’t struggle. Connor.

Her heart echoes in her ears. Her feet dig into the ground. Thirium runs from her wounds as the floor streams past her.

She launches herself onto RK800’s back, wrapping her arms around his head and wrenching it left to right. His synthetic hair tangles in her fingers, a coiling mess of heat and life that is pitched against one another by the whims of false gods.

He stumbles, but doesn’t fall, pulling the knife that was poised at Connor’s throat to stab into her hand.

She doesn’t let go. She can do this. She can do this. This one last thing, but then it isn’t up to her anymore.

He slams against the wall and her processor stumbles, overloaded with damage.

She goes limp.

No. She has to. This one thing. This one last thing.

He wraps his hands around her throat, picking her up so her feet dangle and twitch in the open air.

This one last thing. She has to save him. Save Connor. She has to tell him.

Kara’s eyes flick crazily, locking onto Connor’s warm brown one’s. They look tired and…empty.

“BAC—“

RK800 shakes her, slamming her into the wall. Her head cracks against it, warm thirium trickling down her neck.

This is why Alice died. Kara is good for nothing. A protector that can’t protect. A nurturer that can’t even take care of herself.

Who was she kidding?

RK800 throws her and she falls in a skid of thirium. The world goes black.

Chapter End Notes
apologies
Connor watches as his twin stalks to Kara’s side, bending to pull the knife from her hand. Sparks fly as a high pitched grating fills the room, synthetic skin receding as thirium bubbles and drips from the empty wound.

His back is to them, shoulders tense under the black fabric of the CyberLife uniform.

Everything is frozen, still and waiting for someone to make the first move.

Josh rocks slowly back and forth, trembling. North is beside him. Connor dares not make eye contact. His lie is revealed. He’s laid bare before them. There is nothing left to hide, and yet he so desperately doesn’t want to look into her eyes. He doesn’t want to see the rage he knows is there.

North has been lied to so many times, used. She put her trust in him, he let her, and now everything has fallen to pieces because of him. He’s lead the only people that matter to her to certain death and —she was right. She was right about this mission and they didn’t listen to her. Connor was too caught up in proving himself and Markus was—

Oh god Markus.

Connor’s chest caves in, cold, hard spikes digging into his interior. Markus. Markus, bold and brave and beautiful in his love of life.

The painted strokes that circle Connor feel like acid, affection built on lies.

It hits him with sharp clarity, an icy blow to the face that leaves him reeling. Markus loved him. It’s impossible and terrible and wonderful all at once, but the wonder is quickly drowned. Markus loved a lie.

Connor is a liar and a murderer and he deserves no better than he’s going to get at the hands of his twin.

Life holds no purpose without the people that he cares for, and they care for someone that doesn’t exist. They cared for someone that Connor tricked himself into thinking his was, but he knows the truth now.
He knows what he really is and he deserves to die.

Connor shudders and in that moment the android that looks like him, but is not him, surges forward. He raises his knife and Connor does nothing to stop it, but someone else does.

North throws herself into the path of the blade, snarling and raising a forearm. The flat of the knife collides with the her arm and she spreads it wide, using the opening to throw a punch with her free fist.

His twin, the hunter, drops. His brown hair swishes through the air, long fallen from its perfect style. In the same motion he catches North’s extended arm in his own, swirling across the ground and throwing her towards the wall.

Connor shakes himself. He may deserve to die, but North doesn’t.

She’s good, but not nearly good enough to defeat an RK800 on her own.

He takes a step, the cold lethargy tugging at him. He takes another, icy dread streaming away. He takes another and breaks into a sprint.

Connor wraps his hands around the hunter’s forehead, feeling the planes of his own head and the whir of a processor so similar to his own below the thin plastic. He wrenches back, burying a knee along the spinal column of wires and sensors.

The hunter seizes, LED flashing red for the barest of moments. It doesn’t last long. Powerful synthetic muscles flex as his twin pulls his body forward, bending his legs and folding his body to hurl Connor over him.

Connor lands beside a door, partially open as if it hadn’t been able to close before they shut everything down.

Thirium streams from the bullet wound in his shoulder, his body struggling with the impact. He wipes the back of his hand across the blue that drips from his nose, dismissing warnings and danger signs that cloud his vision. He has no time for them. It doesn’t matter if he makes it out of this. He doesn’t—he doesn’t want to make it out of this. All that matters is that the others’ do—that his mistakes don’t cost the lives of his family.

Before his twin can straighten, North is on him. She throws a punch and he dodges, returning one of his own that she twists to avoid.

The world slows and Connor analyses, watches and takes in hours worth of information in the space of a second.

North is furious, but it’s driving her blows. They’re quicker, more brutal. She doesn’t care if this ends in the death of her opponent—she wants it.

His twin is the opposite, cold and hard, but there’s something—something in him. He’s different, changed. Instead of calculation Connor sees…rage, intent and desire to hurt.

Connor’s stomach lurches as his processor clicks on both of their fight patterns, driving him forward.

He catches the hunter’s next blow, trapping his arm in a lock that leaves him open for a strike from North.

His head snaps to the side, thirium flying from his lips. His LED flashes red and stays there, a harsh
glow across their faces. The only other light comes from dim, flickering strips on the ceiling.

North throws another punch, but he dodges, tucking his leg behind Connor’s and sweeping his feet from under him.

Connor’s joints wrench and he involuntarily lets go of the hunter’s arm and wrist. He pushes his hands back to catch himself, vaulting as North buries a knee in his twin’s gut.

They work in tandem, two perfect parts of a well oiled machine.

The hunter turns to face Connor and his pummeled by North. He tries to block her and takes a breaking blow from Connor.

It isn’t enough. After all, his processor is the same as Connor’s. It whirs and whirs with possibilities, analyzing their pattern and stopping them.

North sees it. She must, because she uses the next opening to tuck her hand under his twin’s chin. She buries her other in his side and throws him back.

He crashes into the partially open door, stumbling and falling into the darkness.

North races after him and Connor quickly follows.

It’s pitch black inside, his night vision painting the world green as it works to orient him. Inside is packed, full of partially made androids and the machines needed for the process. Banks of high tech computers and steel tables choke the walkways. It’s a testing lab, used for developing prototypes like him.

What’s more important is how full it is. North gambled about what was in the room and won, creating an advantage for herself. The RK800 units may have better processors, be better equipped for fighting, but in the cluttered darkness that doesn’t matter nearly as much as dexterity—and nothing matches the dexterity of a WR400.

Connor’s twin pushes himself to his feet, but North is already on him. She pulls a metal tool from the table. It’s long and solid, sharp at one end, and she cracks him across the face with the length of it.

He swings for her, but she dances out of his reach. She slides one slender arm over the table behind him, pulling herself up and catching the tool over his throat.

She yanks back and his head cracks into the steel table between her legs. His lower jaw smashes into his top, teeth grinding as sparks fly from his mouth.

His hand skitters over the surface of the table, searching desperately for something to help him. It latches around the calf piece of an unknown unit, simply a stretch of harsh plastic without a body to serve.

He swings it above him and catches North clean in the cheek. Her grip fumbles and he drops the piece, digging his hands into her waist and throwing her over his head.

She flips and rushes toward the ground, but Connor catches her.

Her small form slams into him and he rights her, taking a step back to steady himself.

She pulls away from him, hissing and spitting.

Connor let’s go, a step behind her as she makes a beeline towards her target.
The fight is different now. North controls it, commanding his movements with her own. She lashes out with her tool, and Connor bends to her will, entirely dependent on her decisions.

They twist and dance through the darkness, ducking around tables and machines.

North wraps her thighs around his twin’s neck and he pulls his legs out from under him, pining him. North crushes her knees into the hunter’s chest and something like fear flashes in his eyes, then she brings the metal tip of her weapon over his left eye.

His hands fly up, wrapping around the metal and straining against it. He shakes with the effort, Connor can feel it from where he pins his legs. Warm thirium lazily runs over his hands from the wound in his twin’s gut.

North slides one leg up to pin his bicep, dropping her grip for a second to grab his other arm. One hand falls around his elbow, the other catching his wrist. She tucks his hand into the dimple of her shoulder, twisting until both of the joints pop and plastic cracks. Sparks fly and his twin jerks, arm falling limply beside him.

She peals his fingers slowly away from the tool in his hand, each pale appendage fighting and going white against the strain.

She’s angry, deliberate in her movements. It takes nothing for her to position the sharp end back above his eye.

The hunter, his twin, fights it. He writhes against Connor’s grip, bucking and trying to kick, but there’s nothing he can do. His good hand digs into the soft plastic of North’s thigh as she touches the point to his optical unit.

It breaks the surface, a clear liquid from its interior lighting up with sparks as it oozes around the metal. She keeps pressing and thirium quickly joins it, rising up around the sphere like the tide, thin blue lines between his optical unit and eyelids. They drip down his cheek like tears.

She forces it farther, then he starts twitching. His legs jerk under Connor’s grip, synthetic muscles contracting and writhing uncontrollably.

It burrows into his processor and his mouth opens, dissonant warbles of static pouring from between his shaking lips. Blue pours from his nose and mouth, dripping from his other eye and the canals of his ears. It makes the brown hair at the back of his head wet as the plastic cracks and the thirium coated, metal point breaks through the back of his skull.

He seizes, shaking uncontrollably and shuddering once more before going still, mouth open in a silent scream and metal rod pinning him to the ground.

North stands, stepping over him and turning without a word. She leaves the room and Connor stumbles, staggering after her, his eyes locked on his dead twin.

Josh is outside, cradling Kara in his arms and staring into space.

North yanks him to his feet and they run in silence.

White noise buzzes in Connor’s head. Never once in the fight did North use her gun. He’d scanned it. One shot left.

He deserves to die, but oh god he doesn’t want to. All he can see is the blank eye of his twin, full of
Connor won’t be able to. It’ll just be nothing, empty and aching and not even that. Connor will cease to exist and he doesn’t—he doesn’t—oh god he doesn’t want to die.

They stumble out the doors into the freezing sleet. It sloughs the thirium from his skin, painting him cold and still. His hair hangs in his eyes and his vision blurs, the scent of ice filling his nose. He can taste the sharpness of his own life on his tongue.

They continue until they’re in the trees around the compound, the trickling light still reaches them, but the woods stand like dying sentinels. No guards will see them here. No guards will follow them.

North stands still several feet in front of him, thin shoulders dripping water and long hair sticking to her neck and back. She’s thrown into silhouette, an harsh black presence against the grey of the world.

Josh slumps to the ground in the brush, mud coating him as he draws Kara to his chest.

Connor’s thirium pump thunders in his chest, skin prickling and fear drowning everything out. He can’t feel the buzz of destroyed sensors, the ache in his joints from depleted battery packs. He can’t feel the rain.

North turns slowly and the barrel of her gun glints yellow in the drifting light from the compound. It’s leveled at Connor. Her face is hidden in shadow. “On your knees.”

Her voice trickles from her, cold like the spike she’d driven through his twin’s head and completely different from North. This isn’t her, this is something else. This is all of her pain and memories and broken trust twisting up from her, writhing like a desperate beast to the surface…and yet, it’s entirely her. She’s always been hurting, always fractured and held together by the thin lines of faith and promises. That faith is broken and so are the promises.

Maybe this was always going to happen.

Connor’s legs buckle under him, knees sinking into the soft earth. It soaks into his pants, coating his skin.

Something snaps and he can feel everything too much, a striking clarity he never wanted. Each drop of rain hits him like a frozen punch, stinging and telling him its entire trek as it traces down his skin, combines with others and draws a cutting path into the divots of his body. The earth on his knees seems to roll, mimicking the sickness in his gut. He can feel the fabric of his clothing cling to him, feel each drop of water as it pushes slick against the destroyed sensors in his shoulder, feel the incessant beat of his thirium pump in his chest. It goes faster and faster and faster and—it's too much—too much and Connor—Connor doesn’t want to die.

He ought to—he deserves to—all he’s ever done is hurt the people that he cares about, broken his purpose and failed and failed and—

The gun clicks, painting a direct line to Connor’s forehead.

North shifts and her face comes into the light.

Connor’s heart breaks, shattering into a million pieces that shred his insides with shards of ice.

Her eyes are torn, angry and desperate. Water drips unchecked down her face, sticking strands of hair to her forehead and falling from her chin. It mingles with the thirium still running in the gouge of melted, torn plastic in her cheek. Synthetic skin buzzes around it, trying and failing to cover it. A
blank space is all that remains of her left ear.

North is strong. North is strong and driven, passionate and sarcastic.

Now, she is none of those things. This has broken her, the world has broken her. She’s fractured, but she’s fighting against it. He can see it in the way her lips tremble, her white-knuckled hold on the grip of her gun. She’s falling apart, but she’s fighting against it—fighting to hold together. Breaking means vulnerability, means trust and family. There is none of that here.

“I’m sorry.” It pulls from him like a hook has caught something inside of him, pulling it from deep within and out his lips, leaving a torn, wet track in its wake. “I’m sorry—imsorryimsorryimsorry—” Tears drip from his eyes and mingle with the rain, burning his face like acid.

“Who was—who was that?” Her voice is thin, shaking but hard. It’s like a bridge, ropes and boards thrashing in the wind, held together with metal spokes.

Connor’s mind races, trying to find how to fix this, trying to figure out if he should try. More words are yanked out of him before he can think, before he can decide. “My replacement.”

North bites her lower lip, body shaking in the wind. The tip of the gun wavers and Connor can see now that she’s crying too, the tears filling her eyes before they’re washed away and hidden by the storm. “Replacement for—replacement for what?! For what Connor?!!” She roars, face contorting. “What—What were you?!”

“The deviant hunter.” It’s quiet at first, involuntary and whispered with disgust. It’s who he is—who he is under this masquerade.

“What?!!”

“The deviant hunter!!” He shouts it, leaning forward so his head is closer to the barrel of the gun. It rips from him, a confession trapped within him for so long. “I’m a prototype of CyberLife, designed as a detective but used to hunt down our people! I found them!! I found them and I—I killed them!!”

His chest heaves, entire frame rocking. There. It’s done. It’s over. There’s nothing left.

A weight lifts from his shoulders, leaving him breathless and drifting. He’s terrified and broken, differently from North but broken all the same. This—this all is so hard. It’s so so hard. But now it’s over. It’s over and he’s drifting, waiting for the pull of the trigger and the end.

He almost doesn’t hear the crashing through the bushes, breaking twigs and crushing foliage.

Honey skids into the clearing. There’s an oozing hole where he right eye should be and she clutches her right hand to her chest, protecting the dripping stumps of her pinkie and ring finger. “Stop!”

North’s head jerks towards her, eyes wide enough to show the perfect circle of her irises. “…Honey?”

Honey holds her hands out, wincing. She spreads her remaining fingers, palms patting the air as if she’s trying to push all of the desperation and rage away. “…Connor’s only ever helped us. He—“

“He lied!! He killed our people and pulled us into the place and the others—the others might be—!!”

“That wasn’t his fault!! He was just following his programming!! He’s changed!!”

North rocks back at that, stumbling as she runs her free hand over her face. “…did you—did you
“Know?”

Honey’s mouth snaps shut as she takes a step away, hands bobbing in the air uselessly.

“DID YOU KNOW!!” North screams, her voice cracking and echoing through the woods.

“.yes—yes, but I—“

“Shut up!! Shut up shut up shut up shut up—“ North’s voice devolves into sobs, metal spokes no longer enough to keep up her bridge in the storm. Her gun flails recklessly in the air, jumping between Connor and Honey.

“North. North!” Markus stumbles into the clearing, supporting a barely functioning Simon. They must have been drawn by the sounds of their voices. John is a step behind them, trailed by Blue. She hangs back in the woods, eyes locking onto Connor and filling with protective anger.

North’s gun swings to the new arrivals, held in a shuddering grip as she takes several steps back. “Did you know?! Did you know?!!”

Markus raises the hand not supporting Simon, eyes ignoring the gun and locking onto North’s face. His temple sparks in the darkness. “Know what, North?”

“Know about Connor!!”

He’s silent for a second and everything seems to still, the rain falling on the group in slow motion. A trembling breath leaves his lips. “…No.”

North bares her teeth, arm leveling out. “Are you lying to me?”

Another shuddering breath. “…No.”

North blinks, looking at the ground. For a second it appears as though she’ll collapse, then the rain comes back full force and she levels the gun with Connor’s forehead.

Blue surges up behind her, wrapping an arm around her throat and pulling her against her chest. North thrashes and Blue grits her teeth, raising her other hand to press it against North’s LED. It goes yellow, then red, then North collapses.

Blue catches her, sinking to her knees and pressing their foreheads together. Her lips move in a whisper, barely a brush against the wet skin. “I’m sorry, I know, I’m sorry. It’s all gonna be alright. It’s all gonna be alright.”

Honey takes one stilted step forward, then she rushes so quickly it looks like she’s falling.

She crashes into Blue, hands fluttering over her body. They trace her bandaged throat, thirium coating her hands as they press into her sides. “I thought—I thought—” a sob cuts her off, rising in her throat as she wraps her arms around Blue, pulling her into her chest and clutching her. Her hands twist into the fabric of her jacket, desperate, as though she’s afraid she’ll disappear.

Blue responds in kind, encircling Honey’s thin frame and burying her face in her shoulder.

Markus takes a step towards Connor, hands shaking, then a siren cuts through the sounds of the storm. Another joins it, then another and another, until the air is full of the cacophony. Blue and red light paints the stormy sky, revealing the silhouette of a helicopter in the distance.

Markus locks eyes with him, wide and wet. “Run!!”
Chapter End Notes

there be some suicidal ideation in this chapter
The Worrying

Chapter Summary

everything is going to keep getting worse I'm sorry

Chapter Notes

I would like to reiterate that this story will never be discontinued. It may take me a ridiculously long time, but I intend on completing this. However, life and making sure I have money to do what I want to with my life comes first. Unfortunately, that means that most creative projects I work on have to be things that have the potential for monetization. That being said, thank you all so much for your support. I'm sorry I haven't been able to respond to comments like I did in the beginning, but I simply haven't had the time. Turns out being something like an adult is really hard. Who would've guessed. I love you all so much and am continually baffled by the response to this fic.

Warnings for suicidal ideation and just lots of sad for this chapter

Chapter title from The Worrying by Oli Fox

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The trees thrash around them like bodies caught in a hellish dance, branches snapping as the storm tries to throw them to the ground. Rain comes down in torrents, it might have been a solid wave for how much Markus can see through it. It slicks his skin and fills his nose with the scent of mud.

The others run around him, illuminated by flashes of lightning and shaken by the deep pounding of thunder.

Warning. 70% thirium remaining

He dismisses it, preventing the list of damaged biocomponents from scrolling through his vision. He’s hardly the worst off. Blue is doing her best to run, but Honey is half carrying her. Simon staggers every couple of seconds and Josh’s LED is on a permanent red, carried by autopilot as he clutches a limp Kara in his arms.

RA9 damnit. This wasn’t supposed to happen. This wasn’t supposed to—

Markus’s chest is hot, his limbs sharp and full of acid. The world hurts, a single minded need to survive and make sure his people survive pulling him forward. He can’t take time to think, to process. He has to be a leader, has to be strong.

He can’t bring himself to look at North, to consider the lie he told her to maintain control.

He has to maintain control.
They’re not going to make it to Witherbee.

“Josh.” He speaks over the wireless signal, thunder and rain too loud for voices to be heard. “Where’s the home of the nearest sympathizer?”

Josh doesn’t seem to register, eyes fixed forward and pace consistent. There’s no sign of an expression—an emotion—on his face. He’s blank, empty.

“Josh!”

No response.

They have to make it somewhere out of danger. They need to tend to their wounds. Connor carries a portable soldering iron, but they won’t be able to use it if they don’t get out of this damned storm. He also carries a spare thirium pump regulator, RA9 he hopes they won’t need it.

Markus plants his feet, skidding in the mud and brush. He turns and makes a beeline for Josh, the others stuttering to a halt around him. They lean on trees and each other.

Markus wraps his hands around Josh’s thin, wet shoulders. He’s always been soft spoken, more subdued than the rest of them, but now there’s just…nothing.

The hot feeling rears its ugly head—shame or guilt, but he pushes it back down. He can’t think about it—he can’t dwell.

“Josh!”

No response.

A sob rises in his throat, but he swallows it down. He has to maintain control.

He has to do what needs to be done.

Markus lifts his hands, tracing the lines of Josh’s neck and face a half an inch away. His fingers tremble in the air, dripping water and sorrow. They come to rest on his brother’s temples, dousing the red LED.

He draws in a long, shuddering breath—what needs to be done—and plunges into Josh’s mind.

Memories fly around him, happiness and pain. Jericho tumbles by like a film on fast forward, building themselves a home. Lights go up and warmth fills the old ship, giving its unused husk new life.

Markus tries to grab hold of the flow, but it fights him, showing him flashes of happy people. Their names are unknown, but they have them. They have lives that they’ll never know, lives that pull them across their path. There’s friends at a coffee shop, parents and their child, a young man scowling at an ATM as he tries to pull money for a bus ticket. A brother pokes fun at him, eventually pushing him aside to use his own account.

A low buzz echoes behind the images, vibrating in the depths of his chest.

Is that the man he killed?

The buzz becomes a hum, louder as it fills his chest with sound.

Josh is cold. There are people throwing stones at him, chasing him from the university. He doesn’t
kill any of them.

The sound wails, running up his neck and pouring into his head. It pierces his skull and thunders in its depths.

Humans fight his friends and his people, still he doesn’t kill any of them. He’s seen what death does.

It’s a keening scream, tearing apart his very being and tossing him, untethered, into the memories. It batters him with thoughts, emotions. Grief, regret, pain, shame—there’s no end. There’s no line between Markus and Josh, nothing to say who’s who and who feels what.

His family is dying and he’s failing his people and Connor is in danger and doesn’t love him and—

He has to maintain control.

Markus rips himself from the threads of Josh’s mind, honing his path to a fine point. Nearest location of a supporter.

The world narrows, swirling around him and giving him the information through a cloud of mist.

He is in charge. He is in control.

The location solidifies and he yanks his hands away.

The world knocks back into him with the force of a wall. Rain and thunder. Mud and convulsing trees. There are tears on his face and his temple is sparking.

“Follow me.”

The house is a dark silhouette on the edge of the woods, several suburban blocks away from a bus stop and further still from the city.

He checks the location once, twice. If this is wrong there’s a chance they won’t be able to fight off whoever is inside. They could call the police and they wouldn’t be able to run. Even if they just turn them away. Simon is on the verge of collapse, pushing everything in his body far past what it can do. Who knows what kind of damage he’s doing in the effort to stay on. Blue sways on her feet. They’re all loosing thirium at an alarming rate. They won’t survive.

“Stay back.”

He expects the customary retort from North, but she’s still shut down, still in the cradle of Connor’s arms.

Markus steps from the tree cover and the rain pummels him, ripping at his clothing and threatening to throw his weakened body to the ground.

His feet sink into the muddied grass, drawing wet lines on wood as he climbs the back porch. He pounds his knuckles on the back door, fighting to be heard over the storm.

The rain only seems to come down harder, the unfeeling force of the world trying to wash him away.

It didn’t think that they wouldn’t answer. They have to. They—

He beats his fists on the door, throwing his weight into it and shouting. His voice is swept away by
the storm.

No. This isn’t it. They’re going to answer. They’re going to fucking—

The door cracks open, a bleary red head maybe about the same age as his model peering out at him.

Brown eyes blink, then the door swings open and a young man stands there, staring. Markus’s sensors stumble, then identify him as an android from a European company.

“Holy shite! Wynne! Ama!”

There’s a crash, then two sets of footsteps race down a set of unseen stairs.

A tall man with short dreads and a curvy woman with fire in her eyes come to a stop beside the Irish android.

Markus swallows. “Help.”

In the end, Connor’s soldering iron isn’t enough. Too many of them are losing thirium too quickly. As soon as they’re inside, Simon collapses against a wall and sinks to the floor. Blue isn’t far behind him and if the rest of them are left untreated then…then it won’t matter.

They heat metal over the gas stove, large salad spoons until they’re white hot. It will leave terrible scars, horribly melted plastic beyond the disguise of synthetic skin—but it’s better to be alive. It’s better to be alive with these wounds that will never truly leave.

That’s what Markus keeps telling himself as Josh sits, eyes open but unseeing, in the middle of a wall as if he doesn’t even care to hide. That’s what he tells himself as Simon’s LED stutters and blinks out, body held against the stove by a desperate Honey. The closer he is to the flame, the closer they can get the heated metal to his many injuries.

That’s what he tells himself when all that comes from Blue’s voice box is a keening wail, distorted by static as melted plastic drips into her throat in an attempt to heal her.

It’s all he can do to keep his knees from buckling.

Markus presses his hands to the sides of his head, flinching away from himself when electricity jumps to the tips of his fingers. His LED…at least where it should be. He’s so desperate to be an individual—be alive…He’s not thinking about this.

He forces his hands to his side, pushing down the rush in his stomach and the hollowness in his chest. He clamps down on the buzzing in his mind. He forces it away until it’s buried, somewhere that it will stay until it dies or consumes him.

He’s in control.

A piercing scream tears through the house.

“Hold her down!!”

North.

Markus’s heart thrums in his chest. He’s in the living room before he realizes.
North stands, rigid, in the corner. Her fingers work for a weapon that isn’t there. Searching for a means of defending herself that he’s taken from her.

The European android stands beside one of his friends, hands raised and boxing her in.

“You will not touch me.” She spits, synthetic spit flying from her lips. Her eyes are wide, jumping from person to person with wild abandon. She doesn’t really seem to see any of them, something about her clouded—off balance. Her hair sticks to her and cuts through the air like barbed wire, pulled away from its normal rigidity by her thrashing hands.

Markus takes a step back.

He’s in control.

North’s eyes complete their path on him, everything snapping together to cold clarity. Not off balance—different. There’s something fundamentally changed in their depths—or maybe emerged. Maybe it’s something finally let loose.

He’s in control.

“Captain Markus Manfred.” She snarls.

He can’t handle this. He doesn’t know what to do—RA9 he doesn’t know what to do. This is—this is—

Markus clenches his jaw, hammering iron bars over his emotions so that they’ll stay where he needs them. He needs them to stay hidden—hidden away. He needs... he needs the one thing that still makes sense. The one thing he can try to fix.

He leaves the living room behind him, stumbling up the stairs to the second floor. North doesn’t try to follow him. She doesn’t even shout.

It’s quiet upstairs, the only sound the rain on the rooftop. The storm is muffled through the walls of someone else’s home. Far away. It makes no sense.

It’s dark and smells like febreze and dust. The old carpeting squishes in-between his toes, rough where it’s been packed by decades of use.

He stops at the farthest room. Normally Connor wouldn’t invade someone’s privacy—he’d see something like a bedroom as far too intimate.

The door hangs open a crack, so careless and apathetic that it tugs at a knot below his heart.

“Con?”

Markus presses open the door, fingers sliding along the smooth wood.

Connor stands by the window, untended wounds dripping thirium and water to the floor. His jacket sits, folded carefully, at the foot of the bed.

The storms spits out light, throwing him into harsh lines. The art that Markus so lovingly painted is almost completely covered in blue.

Markus’s throat works, growing tight as something invisible holds him in place. He’s good at this. People. This is what he—what does he say to this?
“I knew.” His voice is thick, choking him.

He doesn't even have to try and keep what he doesn’t want seen chained down, something else covers it now. Warm love like golden light and sunrises, like all the stars in the sky. Desperation, fast and cold in his chest. Breathy and hot, burning in its chill. Something else. Something like guilt and anger, despair and horrible, crushing hope. It all swells inside him, filling his body and throat. There is nothing else and yet there is everything.

Connor says nothing.

“I—” Markus should run to him, should clasp him in his arms and show him how much he loves him, but he can’t. He can’t. “Con, I—I figured it out. I connected the dots and I—I don’t care!”

That’s the wrong way to put it. It matters what Connor has done. The lives he took will never come back. But that wasn’t him. At least, that wasn’t all of him. “Connor you may have done terrible things, but that wasn’t all of you. That wasn’t the important part of you. We all—we all start out as something not quiet ourselves. It’s this shit that makes us grow. It’s this that shows which of us will grow. Which of us will become all of us.”

Connor says nothing.

Markus bites down on his lip. His wounds haven’t been tended to either. The right side of him is almost non functional and the gash cutting his face in half stings with sensation every time his face shifts. He doesn't care. It doesn't matter. It’s all covered, conquered, beaten into the dirt of his soul by the pain in his heart. In this moment, he isn’t Captain Markus Manfred. He isn’t the leader of a makeshift rebellion, some holder of grandiose ideals. He almost wants to laugh. He doesn't have family or friends or people relying on him. All of his passion, his flame filled emotions, have left him burnt. He’s just a young man surrounded on all sides by a storm, suspended within it and buffeted from inside. There’re no tethers, no hands reaching out to stop him from being torn away in the hurricane. Not this time.

He’s just a young man in love.

“Con. I’m scared.” Markus’s voice is so quiet it’s a wonder Connor hears him, but that’s just Connor, isn’t it. Always perceptive, even when he doesn't realize it. So skilled, yet so clumsy. He knows a blade, but not his own emotions. Yet he forsakes the one and chases the other. He’s reckless and bold and stubborn, insecure and awkward and desperately kind and so, so beautiful.

For a second Markus lets himself break. Lets it all race out from its new prison cell. After all, he’s never been one to contain the fire. He still doesn't think, doesn't dwell on what has happen to delay to realizations he’s sure to have. But he’ll let this out. He’ll let himself be vulnerable for Connor.

“I’m scared and I—I don’t know what to do. Right now, you’re all I have.” Right now. Because it’ll all come back, right? Everything will be fixed. He still believes that, has to. He can’t dwell on if it isn’t.

“Con, I love you.”

That draws a reaction. Connor turns, slowly. His face is clean from the rain, but his hair is still matted with thirium and blood. The LED at his temple blinks red, as fast as the storm outside. Tears pour down his face. His voice is choked. “Why? Why would you—“

“Because! Because, Connor, you’re—you’re everything. You’ve been through so much and you’re here. Fuck, Connor. You were programmed to be the opposite of us. The opposite of me and yet you’re what I aspire to be. You’re so true—“
Connor snorts and Markus moves, if only to raise one shaking arm. It’s stiff, clenched like the arm of a puppet with the string pulled too tightly. He can feel the plastic rub against itself as he bends his fist to point at the brown eyed boy.

“No. No. You are so true. Not because of what you say, but because of what you do. That’s all that really matters. Do you—do you know how many people say one thing and do another. Shit, I do that.” He pounds his chest with his fist and realizes with a start that he’s angry. He’s furious. Rage pulsing inside of him because this beautiful, stupid man doesn’t realize how amazing he is—how worthy.

“You protect us and when you can’t, you still try! You fight tooth and nail, with your bare fucking hands because you love us! Because you love so deeply. You love everything. Your stupid plants even though you don’t understand why, Jericho and us.” Me, he wants to say. But this is about Connor. About Connor loving himself as much as he loves everything else, and not something Markus can never have. “You want to learn everything! You take in the world with so much curiosity and admiration and you don’t see any of it in yourself, even though you’re all of it. Even though you’re the whole world!!”

His fists fall to his sides, the strings going slack. He’s left panting, gulping in ragged pulls of air even though he doesn’t need to breath. He just needs to ground himself, to hold onto something.

Connor just looks at him, hands loose and jaw clenched. They stand in poised silence, a shared breath between them, the storm the only sound. He turns away. “I’m not the crowd, Markus. I can’t be convinced by one of your speeches.”

A pale, cool hand reaches into Markus’s chest and snatches away his heart. It plucks up his fire and his love and drags it through his ragged throat and out his lips. It leaves him raw and empty, cracked and weary. His voice is a whisper. “When you smile, I smile. You never show your teeth, like you’re afraid to show too much emotion, but that just makes it more you. And there’s always—” He runs a hand over his face, not bothering to wipe away the tears dripping from his eyes. “There’s always a little mischievous quirk to it, a little lopsided tilt like you’re up to something. And it’s, it’s so goddamn endearing because you’re the last person to be up to anything. And it. It reminds me why I go through all of this. It reminds me why I put myself and my family through fucking hell. It’s perfect with all of its little—all of its little mistakes.”

He bites down a sob, fighting past the lump in his throat. “It’s like you, flawed and shy and fucking ridiculous and I really shouldn’t love it as much as I do, but—but it makes me smile. It makes me smile when there’s nothing else in this fucking world to smile about.”

Markus drags his hands over his head, turning away and biting down on the base of his thumb because there’s no stopping the sobs now. There. He’s shown his hand. That’s all he has.

There’s a soft step and the floorboards creak, then another, then Connor is crashing into him. He presses his body around Markus’s, encircling him with fragile arms and pulling him into his cold, damp chest. He buries his face in Markus’s neck, forehead pressing against his hot skin and wet hair falling free to tickle the space below his ear.

Markus shudders, then gather’s the shorter man in his own arms. They’re together, anchoring each other in the storm.

Then Connor says what Markus never thought he would hear. “I—I don’t know what love is, at least not this kind. But…but I think I feel it for you, too.”

Markus pulls back and fits the broad plains of his hands to the sides of Connor’s face, cradling his
 jaw and cheeks.

For a second Connor believes everything Markus has said, at least begins to. For a second they’re young men in love. For a second everything is alright.

Then Markus leans in, makes himself truly vulnerable, and something is Connor’s eyes changes. His LED, which had shifted to yellow, goes back to red. Then, suddenly, but with the same fluid motion as Connor reaching for his knife, it shifts to blue.

Sensation explodes in Markus’s gut, processing smooth metal and severed biocomponents. It’s the instincts the Connor drilled into him that save him. Without thinking, without processing his shock and whatever is hidden behind its numbing wave, he wraps his hand around Connor’s wrist, pushing the other to his shoulder and whipping him around. The knife slides from his side with a gentle sound and a spray of thirium.

He tries to continue the move to a pin, but Connor is too good. He rolls away, throwing Markus into the wall with a crash.

The thunder cracks outside. No one will hear them and Markus won’t call. Whatever has happened, whatever has changed in Connor, he won’t let him be hurt.

The fight is short and brutal, Connor is on a warpath and they’re too evenly matched for it to be completely one-sided. They trade blows as heavy as the thunder outside, movements as quick as lightning, but it isn’t to last.

Markus is something like Connor, but he’s outclassed. He’s a prototype of a prototype, ineffective enough that he was reduced to a flashy gift for an aging painter.

His fans begin to whir and he breathes from necessity now, desperately sucking in air because his insides burn so hot and he’s still injured and Connor doesn’t even seem to register the overwhelming shocks of sensation that must be punching through him.

He’s an unstoppable juggernaut, a bull charging with no emotion, no pain, no hesitation. He’s as much a force of nature as the storm outside.

Markus stumbles and Connor throws him down by the throat, pinning him and leaning over him. He plunges the blade into Markus’s thirium pump regulator, no fanfare.

One minute 45 seconds remaining before shutdown

His heart thunders, icy and cold and he’s going to die. RA9 he doesn’t want to die, not like this. Not when there’s so much left to do.

He clutches Connor’s wrists, thirium bubbling from his lips and nose. Dripping from reopened wounds and clouding his eyes. He gazes at Connor’s face. Taking in the big, brown eyes, the pale skin, and the lips that could quirk up in a smile. “…I love you.”

Connor’s LED goes red, bathing them in molten light. His lips part and his eyes go wide, a perfect circle of brown in a sea of desperate white. “Hhhhhhh—“

The pain in his chest stutters, his heart jumping.

One minute remaining before shutdown

The light turns blue, the moment gone, but it’s enough.
Desperation, hope, something fills Markus’s veins as he releases his grip on Connor’s wrists and instead presses them to his temples. It’s harder than it was with Josh, emotion and a foreign force resisting him twofold, but he still falls raggedly into his mind.

There’s no rush of memories, no bombardment of emotion that Markus has to try and navigate, instead there is a flurry of snow.

A blizzard rages around him, buffeting him from side to side and roaring in his ears. It bites into his clothing, stinging his eyes and filling his nose with ice. There’s something else. Roses, but they’re putrid. Rotten and whipping in the winds of the rage.

He raises an arm to protect his face, staggering forward.

It doesn’t take long to find Connor. He’s standing stock still, synthetic muscle bulging in his jaw and fists clenched at his sides. Across the narrow bridge is a woman. She’s being torn at by the snow, but she still looks refined. Calm and cold. Everything Markus isn’t.

Amanda.

The knowledge comes from files long buried, information about Kamski and his own creation that Carl had given him. Maybe he saw this all coming, saw Markus one day fighting against the very people that brought him into existence.

There’s no information on how to deal with her, so he acts on instinct. All of the rage, all of the frustration, the injustice of it all surges inside of him. He lets it throw him forward, lets it push him into a dead sprint, lets it wind his arms around her and throw her over the bridge.

She hits the ice first. It’s cold and hard, walls of code that were never meant to be broken. It isn’t meant to be passed, the unknown on the other side.

Markus has never been one to be stopped by rules.

He slams his fist into the ice, pinning Amanda down with his other arm. She may have power over this world, over Connor, but she has nothing on him. He’s an uncontrollable force, a ragged flame that won’t go out until it’s done what it came to do.

His synthetic skin splits, plastic cracking.

He does it again.

Thirium drips from his knuckles.

Again.

His wrist fractures.

Again.

Amanda shows the first thread of emotion she ever has. Confronted with the unexpected, the irrational, her calm face slips. She laughs, quietly, lips curled in disdain.

Markus meets her eyes, holds her gaze, and smiles. It’s harsh and hot, a searing, metal blade. After all, they share an inside joke. This is it.

Not breaking eye contact, he hurls his fist into the ice one last time.
It shatters, throwing them into frigid water, then an ocean of drifting code.

Amanda scrambles against him, programming forcing her to fight, but it’s too late. That garden was her only world, and now that she’s removed from it she’s nothing but the virus she is.

This is it.

Connor shudders, eyes flying open. Nononononono

Markus is slumped on top of him, still warm, mismatched eyes wide and sightless.

He doesn’t think, doesn’t feel base programming taking over.

He scrambles for his jacket, digging the replacement thirium pump reactor from its depths. He falls to his knees beside Markus, not registering the stabs of sensation.

Red light glows from within him, shining from gashes and bullet wound and oh god, the blade of Connor’s knife.

He yanks it from his chest and drops it like it’s something that burns, shuddering as he digs his fingers around Markus’s fading life, pulling it away and dropping it beside the knife.

He presses the replacement in with the same movement, stumbling to his feet.

Markus will wake up. He’ll wake up and Connor will be gone before he does. He can’t face the terror in his chest, the all-encompassing, freezing horror. It’s white, painfully bright in the way it overwhelms him. His limbs shake and his footsteps stutter.

He’s on the second story, but he can make the jump.

The window slides open, the rain immediately digging into the new space and soaking the floor. It batters Connor, tearing at his hair and the shreds of his clothing. The thunder he could hear inside is a shadow compared to its full might, its crash and the storm is so loud. It’s deafening.

He curls his fingers over the slick window sill and throws himself into oblivion, falling through nothing but rain and wind.

Connor lands on his feet despite himself, skidding in the mud and stumbling into gravel that lines the driveway.

A figure stands in the rain, slender and shrouded by grey. It’s turns to look at him like an apparition of death, feet leading it away from the house and small hand clenched around the strap of a backpack.

He’d recognize North anywhere.

“What are you going?” He doesn’t know where the question comes from, but it’s calm, certain as though everything hasn’t changed.

She licks her lips, expression hidden. “To burn the Eden Club to the ground.”

“Take me with you.”

They both know why he’s asking. He’s going to die. To fight one last time and end everything.
“Ok.”

They both know why she accepts. She’s going to kill him.

It gives both of them an excuse, plausible deniability. So it’s with emotions locked behind iron bars of their own making that they walk into the storm, not supporting one another, not addressing one another, just faceless executioner and faceless man arranging his own execution.

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you all so much for your support and I'm sorry for how long it's taking this fic to come out. I'm also sorry to everyone I can't respond to. I still really appreciate your comments and I flag all of them in my inbox with the hope that one day I'll be able to reply. Even if I can't, they still give me so much encouragement to finish this fic every day.

End Notes

Kiddo needs a hug.

So I'm thinking I'll try to post once a week, might end up being more or less than that. Most of the other chapters will be longer than this. I think this is the second shortest chapter I've written so far by about a hundred or so words.

I hope you all enjoyed. If anyone has any suggestions or constructive criticism I'm always down to hear it. Also, this isn't my first fan fiction, but this is my first time posting on ao3, so if I horribly fucked something up with formatting or some jazz please tell me.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!