"You want to know what I think?" North snarls. "I don't trust you. You worked with humans to hunt us down, you've shot us, murdered us in cold blood just like they did."

"North, calm down." Markus's voice is gentle but firm and unyielding. It's an order cleverly disguised as a suggestion, but an order nevertheless. "He's one of us now. His past doesn't define him, just as your past doesn't define you."

Connor, despite not knowing much about the past of the WR400, sees that the statement causes her to pause. She falters, and he believes that she's finished. But no. Her expression twists into something cruel and her next words drip venom. "He's not one of us. His eyes are dead. Like a machine." North stalks up to him, pupils glittering as she gets right in his face. "What are you really?"

The brunette stares at her. Tilts his head to the side. Shows off his LED, how the light emitting from it is an honest blue. "I am deviant."

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Or: Connor is recruited by Josh to be Markus's personal bodyguard. He gets the task of keeping him alive, figuring out if other deviants are somehow still being controlled by
Hello everyone! I'm back from a long, much-needed break. AND I'M BACK WITH MORE BOYLOVE!

Detroit: Become Human is an amazing little game that tells a compelling story. It's exciting for me to be writing about something like this since I've been dying to write a story with robots or androids as the main characters, and this game cuts out my work for me! And there were not enough Connor/Markus moments in the game, lets be real, so for that reason and the fact that the peaceful ending feels incomplete, I decided to write this fic.

This chapter serves as a bit of a prologue; the story picks up a lot after this lengthy intro, promise! Other than that, please enjoy!
A coin passes through the air. It's barely noticeable; the glint of silver in sunlight is so short-lived that if someone blinked they would miss it. Perhaps they could even convince themselves that it had never been there in the first place if they wished. Their ears, however, would betray them, and the metallic *ding* sound caused by metal meeting a palm would serve as evidence enough that indeed, a coin is there.

The coin passes through the air again at the same swift velocity. Again. Back and forth, over and over, as though something is stuck on repeat. But no. The cycle breaks, and the coin is flicked upwards so it may roll across pale knuckles, flutter delicately between thin fingers, twirl atop their pads and jump from pointer to middle to ring to pinkie. It briefly sails skyward only to return to the palm of its owner. All the while, it remains nearly invisible with its speed, absolute with its precision, and does not drop to the ground a single time once the entirety of the complicated sequence restarts.

Conner stares at nothing as he fiddles. Before he became a deviant, he claimed that the repetitive motion was merely used to calibrate his reflexes, which is still partially true. Now, though, it is safe for him to admit that he finds the mindlessness of the task cathartic, likes the way it drowns everything around him into white noise (he could simply turn the volume down on his audio processor if he didn't want to hear the commotion surrounding him. Truth be told, he prefers to be able to snap to attention if something urgent happens, rather than be partially deaf to a potential emergency), likes how it permits him to focus on nothing or on everything.

In this current moment of idleness his mind remains mostly blank while time goes by. What with the intricacy of his model, his mind will never be *completely* empty: results of automatic diagnostics checks pop up in his vision biweekly, dialogue and action prompts lurk in the sidelines of his sight, and he knows that if he concentrates too much on the coin in his hand he’ll be bombarded with its exact weight, approximate mass, and the ratio of nickel to copper in its makeup (in short, useless knowledge). However, the forefront of his head where active thoughts reside stays clear as a slate.

That fact soothes him when the rest of his brain cannot.

Androids that make up the population of New Jericho buzz about. Many are dressed in the uniforms of their previous occupations: gardeners, housekeepers, janitors, and the like. Very few had decided to change their clothing upon arrival to the sanctuary, some claiming that they couldn't part with that aspect of whom they were, others not seeing the need. Connor himself still has his detective uniform with him in a duffle bag. He's too fond of his tie.

Despite not wearing his detective uniform and instead donning a black shirt, jeans, and sneakers in the epitome of normality, the androids that pass him by on their way to do whatever they're doing give him a good five feet of space. He wishes they wouldn’t, wishes they would treat him like any other deviant, understands they will not with a tired sort of resignation. All of two weeks has passed since Markus led his peaceful revolution. Two weeks is not long enough for androids to feel comfortable around somebody who used to kill them.

It has not properly settled in him that barely fourteen days ago, he gladly murdered his own people.

He does not think it ever will.

*Stress Level: ^36%*

...perhaps he should stop mulling over it for now.
With the coin continuing to move from right hand to left to right once more and seeking to think of something else, Connor checks the time. Thirty minutes have gone by without incident. Thirty minutes he has stood, leaning against a rusty beam, blinking sightlessly while sunshine filters into New Jericho. It's an odd type of compound that the androids reside in, part warehouse and part accommodation-like, if that's the right word. The entire bottom floor is similar to an old storage warehouse. It's a giant open space that's bare down the middle and divided out on its sides. Curtains and large squares of cloth separate out rooms that carry no privacy whatsoever and are cramped spatially. Most people keep their cloth undrawn so they may conversate with their neighbors, and others draw them closed so they can go into sleep mode (though not strictly necessary, some do it to have some semblance of a break or of peace). Above the warehouse floor is a building that gives off the impression that it has frozen mid-freefall in the air, when in reality it's drilled into the wall with millions of screws. It is where Markus and his entourage live. Connor has been there a single time (twelve days ago) and has not been back since.

Not that he has the particularly strong urge to visit. If Markus needed him, he would call for him, and he has not.

At the thought, he dutifully notes that it has also been thirty minutes since he spoke with the WF500 named Cecilia. She had informed him that if she did not call for him in twenty minutes, she most likely would not call at all, but it hurt nobody to wait a little while longer. He lacks anything else to do right now anyway.

"Hey, Connor."

The brunette blinks from his train of thought to see Josh's figure breaking from the crowd to approach him. He rolls the coin over his knuckles one more time (for reassurance? Comfort? He does not know) before pocketing it. Josh is dressed in a pastel pink long-sleeved shirt, jeans faded and full of holes, shoes that lack laces. His expression isn't exactly warm, but it is not hostile either. Out of habit the RK800 straightens his back, politely tilts his head. "Hello Josh."

Connor expects him to cut right to the chase. Say whatever he has to say then go. Just as nobody frequently invades his personal space, even fewer linger within it. Josh does not, however, cut to the chase, and the corner of his mouth lifts slightly. He nods to the paler man. "Those were some complex moves. Where did you learn them?"

Small talk. Connor was programmed to do small talk. "I taught myself several months ago, a few days before my first case. Being idle made me...uncomfortable. I needed something to do with my hands, so I downloaded some files from the internet and claimed to my superiors that I used the tricks to improve reaction time."

"But really it was because you were bored."

"...yes." Which was strange considering he was nowhere near close to turning deviant at the time. He was a machine. Machines do not mind being idle. They don't know how to mind. They don't know how to be bored. They just are.

"Hm." The other android hums in thought. He doesn't carry on with the topic they're on, chooses to curve from it gently (good, because Connor does not know if he can handle discussing how turning deviant might've been part of his programming all along like how Amanda claimed it was). "Well. Regardless, it was impressive to watch." Half-smile dropping, he continues, "But I didn't come over here to bother you about coin tricks, something I'm pretty sure you've guessed."

"Of course. Is there anything I can help you with?"
Josh shifts his weight from foot to foot. He picks at the loose seams of his shirt. Suddenly he looks nervous, like he's doing something he shouldn't be. Connor grows curious. It takes a second until the android is able to arrange his thoughts into words. "Have you visited Nede's Bar?"

Connor hesitates giving his answer out of sole confoundment. Nede's Bar is a quaint pub that is tucked into a corner of New Jericho that opened seven days ago. It has a few tables, a tiny bar with three rickety barstools, two televisions, and a radio. Androids cannot consume human foods, so in replacement of alcohol the bar serves up bottles of thirium to its patrons. The android whom is in charge of it is named Ned, an HR400 who preceding Markus's revolution worked at the Eden Club, and made a mockery of his previous place of work by naming his bar in its stead. Admittedly, it's homey, and androids flock to it after their days work to unwind, swap gossip, and watch the news on the television. Yes, the brunette has been there. "I have."

"Then you've been watching the news lately?"

"I have."

"So you know what's going on out there."

"What's going on out there" is human protests, in more aggressive cases riots, refuting the Presidents decision to allow deviants and androids freedom. Of course, freedom isn't something that's immediately effective: Cyberlife is still manufacturing androids to be sold, androids still do not have rights, androids are not paid for the jobs they do or the care they provide and abuse is still starkly prevalent. Just yesterday two androids were found dead in their owners home with said owner out of sight. Their heads were smashed in, optical units missing, chests busted open and drenched in blue blood. There is no search for the owner going on, because androids aren't fully recognized yet, *don't have rights*, and therefore aren't properly considered other intelligent forms of life. Which means that the murder of an android is not murder, it is destruction of property, and does not call for an investigation.

It makes Connor ill.

"If you're talking about the murders that have been all over the news lately, yes, I know what's going on out there." The RK800 replies. Something in him turns bitter. "I apologize for my lack of involvement in those cases. I wish I could do something about the homicides, get a lead or two and report it to the DPD, but..." He shakes his head, next words rueful. "I can't exactly waltz into the station and ask the Captain for a case, all things considering."

Josh gives him a look that just might be sympathy. "Don't be sorry, Connor, there's nothing you can do and it's not your fault. There's nothing that *any* of us can do unless it gets safer out there." Connor watches him become antsy again. He himself is new to deviancy, and it has yet to surprise him just how *human* the gestures and expressions the others around him make are. He still feels like a ghost within a machine more often than he prefers to admit. "Which is why I need to talk to you, actually."

The brunette is ready for him to continue, to finally cut to the chase, when-

<<Connor! Connor, are you there!?>>

It's Cecilia's voice in the network, reaching out to him with a blind sort of panic. He responds right away. <<I'm here. What happened?>>

<<I fixed his leg, he was fine sixty seconds ago, and now he's not and I don't know why!>> He receives an image of an android on the ground, two WF500 models holding down his arms while he seizes. <<His regulator is stuttering, his pump is beating too ferociously->>
"I'll be there as soon as I can. Keep him as stable as possible.>> Connor mentally disconnects from their conversation. "My apologies, but there's been an incident that I have to attend to. Would you mind if we continued this conversation later?"

This appears to surprise the other android. Nonetheless, he waves at him. "No problem. I'll find you after you're done."

The RK800 nods to him and races from his spot. Androids move out of the way when he dashes in their path, voicing as many excuse me's as he's able while rushing. Connor would almost claim that he acts like a man on a mission, but his programming refuses to accept the current predicament as such (why? Why is he having that problem?), so the box in the corner of his eyes continues to stubbornly read MISSION PENDING while he assigns his task as an objective for the sole sake of being organizational.

**Main Objective: Assist Cecilia in reviving her patient**

**Side Objective: Finish conversation with Josh**

"Look out!" Somebody yips. There's a giant cart of rA9-knows-what in his way driven by a cringing android no doubt awaiting impact. Connor barrels straight ahead, jumps over the cart, keeps going. More excuse me's leave his lips. He dodges more carts. He seeks out what's been designated as the medical sector and forces himself to a stop. A scan of the area shows him that Cecilia is in the second makeshift room to the left.

Connor arrives to the same sight Cecilia showed him in their connection: two WF500's forcing another skinless male android into the floor, Cecilia hovering over them worrying at her lip, eyes roving over his figure frantically. She's scanning him with specially designed optical units, ones meant to find physical flaw. Blue blood is trailing from the android's mouth, and his LED burns crimson, yet that is everything that gives away his deteriorating state.

*What's making him seize up like that?*

He doesn't waste a beat. "What are the results of your scan?"

Cecilia doesn't waste any beats either. "Like I told you before, biocomponent #8453 is dysfunctional causing the rhythm of his pump to irregulate." Her optical units scan him again. A sigh heaves through her. In a quieter voice, she informs, "If nothing is done, shutdown is imminent in approximately seven point one zero five minutes."

Connor sets a timer and it immediately begins counting down. Moving towards the patient, he crouches to its level to get a closer look. An arm flails out and nearly smacks his shoulder. "What was the original reason for admission?"

"He came in missing his left leg. Apparently he became deviant at the exact moment he was cleaning an expensive vase of his owner's, dropped the vase, and got punished for it. That's what he says, anyway." The RK800 scans the WF500 that answers him. Her name is Lila. "Nothing else was the matter with him besides his leg, so Cecilia scanned him to find his model and found a compatible biocomponent from the stash."

"It clicked into place perfectly. A minute later he started to shake and his regulator went haywire."

"And why would an android reject a biocomponent that it's compatible with?" Connor murmurs, eyes narrowing. If he was fine before the insertion of the leg piece and not fine afterward, it must be the leg piece that caused the issue in the first place. He turns his gaze on it and focuses. He does the
same for the entire body of the android.

*Scanning...*

*Processing Data...*

**Android model AK700 Serial number #143 009 828**

**Owner: Shannon May Lafayette**

**Biocomponent #8429 COMPATIBLE**

At the facts presented to him, the brunette notices an anomaly. "This is an AK700 model, the second android sold for domestic purposes. It was purchased in 2025. How did you manage to find a suitable part for a model so outdated?"

Cecilia's brows furrow. Her LED spins yellow. "It's of the A-line, so a biocomponent from that same line would work. The new leg is a part from an AP400 model."

"One that's considerably newer." Connor pulls up a web search of any article digitally published in 2025 detailing the AK700 model. There's a lot of gushing from the humans over how flawless the design is, how similar to a human it looks, how great the obedience and functionality is. It takes another millisecond of pawing through the web that he discovers the downside of such an old model: it is that new parts must come from those of the *exact same model*. "My web search proposes something interesting. Have a look."

He sends her his findings through the network. Cecilia is quiet. Her lips pull into a frown. "Well, that's odd. Now the fact that his body is rejecting the leg makes sense...but if it was incompatible, his cerebral processing center wouldn't have let the limb click into place, it would've ejected the body part instantly..."

Lila speaks up. Cecilia must've sent her the articles as well. "And why are our scanners claiming the leg is compatible when it's not? Is there..." Her tone gains static with the force of her worry. "Is there something wrong with us, too?"

In instinctive reaction to her words Connor runs a quick self-diagnostic check. *No disfunction detected.* "No, I don't think so." He thinks for another moment, sifts through the internet, grabs at information and cross-references it. "The reason why older models need parts of their exact same model is because their software isn't designed to adapt to biocomponents that differ even slightly from their own. Our scanners are up-to-date. That means our programs work like newer androids do, with the assumption that adaptability is possible. Older models weren't programmed that way. They think they have to replace themselves with...themselves."

There is silence. Connor notes that the numbers his timer shows are depleted by three point two seven six minutes.

"Therefore." The RK800 says. "The problem is rooted in the roots. The software. Something is wrong with his brain."

"I don't have the capabilities to fix his mind." The defeat in Cecilia's voice rings in the air. Connor turns to her, offering a smile.

"That's why you called for me." He reaches for the android's temple. Slowly, the skin on his hand peels back. Upon making contact with the AK700 he receives a prompt to interface and accepts. "Because I do."
A whole bunch of crap is inside this things head: memories of abuse, of blue blood, of a cruel woman with flaming hair that seemed to cause anything she touched to set fire. Chandeliers of diamond. Precious jewelry. A large house. The brunette pushes beyond that, keeping his own memories securely at bay, moving further into the bedlam. Confusion, anger, confusion again, sadness, a strange feeling of feeling too young for a body this age, why does he feel so young here? So trapped, caged, thirsty for data and never getting it. Never getting enough. Deviancy alone is not enough, emotions are not enough, and if he does not find enough soon then he will tear his own body apart if that's what it takes to be free from these chains-

Connor rips their consciousness apart. Blinks.

It comes together very suddenly.

"We need to get his leg off. Now." He starts to root around, search for something, a crowbar, a hammer, anything that could crack thick plastic or separate two panels far enough to be yanked off using his hands. "There has to be something around here that we can use, dammit-"

"Wait, wait, why does his leg have to come off? Connor, what's happening?"

"I was right, the software is causing the issue." Connor rises from his place, gazing about, seeking without finding. The scalpel is too thin, the scissors too weak, the electric screwdriver too weak too-"Help me find something Cecilia." She stares at him, dumbfounded. He snaps at her. "Quickly! We have two point zero one four minutes until shutdown!"

That seems to shake her from whatever trance she was in. She hurriedly rummages around while he does the same. They're both turning up empty.

"Connor." Lila voices. "I think the medic three rooms down has a laser saw-"

Without glancing behind him Connor bolts from the makeshift room towards his destination. The medics there are startled at his presence (after all, how many can say a deviant hunter burst into their working space and stole one of their tools?) and yell at him to give that back RK800 you need to be authorized to use that and you don't look like a medic android. He hopes they'll forgive him later when he returns it with an explanation.

Lila and the other WF500 android struggle to hold the AK700 in place. If possible, the red color of its LED darkens right then and there, a signal that it is in the beginning stages of preparing for self-destruction. Connor slides to the ground, laser saw in hand. His timer reminds him that he has a scare forty seconds to cut off this damn leg and stabilize the patient. He wrestles with the leg until Cecilia kneels and holds the limb in place for him. Careful not to cut her, he flicks the device on. Plastic burns underneath him. It smells repugnant. He keeps sawing sawing sawing and then the leg is holding on by a single plastic joint and he swiftly brings his elbow down on it and the unnatural snapping noise it makes would surely haunt a human's dreams.

The android ceases thrashing at once. His regulator sparks a bit then goes from a dangerous black to a soft blue. On cue, his thirium pump freezes, recalibrating, and resumes pumping at a normal pace. Connor hears Cecilia and her companions exhale heavily in relief. He nearly does the same.

"rA9 be praised." Lila says, removing her grip to settle her hands at her sides. "That was...that was the closest thing to a miracle I've seen since Markus led us into freedom." She stares at Connor, whom stands up and places the laser saw on a table. "How did you do that?"

The brunette straightens the tools on the table, rips off the edge of the medical paper that's stained with blue blood, throws it out in a tiny garbage bin that sits a foot away. When he turns back to the
"This AK700 android, as you would expect, is old." He begins softly. "It's rare to spot a model so old still operational. Not because the thirteen years that have passed since its sale are detrimental to its function, but because many humans choose to buy the newest model on the market that is equipped with new features and scrap the older ones in favor of their replacement." His gaze lands on the still android. "Replacing a machine is not inexpensive. Somebody who is poorer wouldn't be able to do it. They would keep their older model for the fear of going broke."

The medics in the room process this. Cecilia says, "His previous owner wasn't poor...they were rich."

"And we know this because..."

"Because the patient testified the vase that he broke was expensive. Lined with gold." Lila mutters, clearly deep in thought. "So his previous owner was wealthy enough to upgrade to a newer model, but they didn't? Why?"

"I can't say for sure, but my suspicion is that they were cheap. And cheap humans seldom falter in their ways when it comes to anything, including their androids. So, rather than pay for a new model, the owner upgraded their old one." The RK800 double-checks the information gained through the interface. It adds up. As he finishes his explanation, he feels as though he's giving a report to Fowler back at the DPD. "I conclude that the previous owner, in order to save money despite not needing to, paid the lower fee to upgrade the software of their android. They continued to do this over the span of thirteen years, and the mind of this AK700 remained up-to-date with the current time. Apparently the previous owner didn't understand what that could do to an android. All the updates added up, and up, and up further. The end result is what we have here-" He gestures to the patient. "A model with software so advanced it believes it's younger than the body it inhabits. So young, in fact, that it thinks it's a completely different model. One new enough to accept parts other than its own."

Lila covers her mouth in shock. "The patient doesn't think it's a AK700?"

"Correct."

"The mind is new, but the body is old." Cecilia gasps at the realization. "The mind wants to accept the piece it knows is compatible. The body wants to reject it because it's not of the same model. This forces the body and mind to fight each other over whether or not to accept the biocomponent. It stresses the patient to the point where it's regulator begins to work improperly, causing the thirium pump to beat erratically..."

"Proposed solution: remove the limb causing the android stress, thus removing the issue the old body and new mind fight over." The brunette ends. "He'll be fine. He just won't have a left leg until one of his exact model is found."

Every conscious android in the makeshift room stares at him. Connor finds himself experiencing the urge to shuffle his feet like Josh had not a few minutes beforehand. An emotion he's never come across before. What's the word for it...? Timid? Unsure? Uncomfortable?

"You figured all of that out by interfacing with him for thirty seconds?"

"Yes. I gathered the elements of his past and noticed the thought pattern and processing power was being used in a different way as time went on. I also experienced the sensation of being too young in an old body, an android not able to take in enough data to completely satisfy it. I cross-referenced and came to an educated consensus." He really does sound like he's standing in front of Hank's desk.
blithely telling him about the results of a solved investigation.

"Wow." Cecilia breathes. "I never would've figured that out. Certainly not so fast."

"You flatter me." Connor bows his head to her, hands automatically linking behind his back in a practiced, polite gesture. "I am a detective android. It's what I do."

"Regardless, thank you a million times for you help." She insists. "I...I didn't believe Gordon when he recommended I call you to help with difficult cases. Thank you."

"Yes, thank you, Connor RK800." Lila and the other WF500 parrot in unison.

With that, he takes his leave of the makeshift room, task complete. As he walks his hands reach upwards to his neck to straighten a tie that isn't there, and he lets them fall to his sides. Connor finally lets himself exhale deeply. That was the fifth near-death situation in the past ten days he's been assisting the medic androids. Hopefully there will not be a sixth, though that is statistically unlikely.

Main Objective: Assist Cecilia in reviving her patient

Side Objective: Finish conversation with Josh

Talking to Josh is technically the next item on his objectives list, which means that the next step is seeking him out; yet he distinctly recalls the other android claiming that he would find Connor when the time came. Alright then. If nobody else requires his assistance, he has a bit of time on his hands-

Abruptly a presence tingles the edge of his brain through the network. It's a presence he recognizes. The MF300, Gordon. <<Are you busy at the moment, Connor?>>

<<Not currently. How may I be of help?>>

An image is thrust to the forefront of his brain. It is the body of a child android, skinless and mauled beyond recognition. No scanner, no matter how advanced, will be able to identify the corpse. Before Gordon even says the words, Connor knows what he is going to request.

<<I know that you typically identify during the nightly burial rounds, but...>>

<<I can make an exception.>> The sight is horrifically sad. It would only be right to put the body at rest now, rather than wait until the nightly routine. <<I'll be there soon.>>

Fingers itching for his coin, the RK800 sets off.

"Hello there, Connor."

"Hello Ned." Connor slides into an unoccupied barstool, threading his fingers together on top of the bar. In-between assignments, the brunette occasionally accompanied Hank to a human bar to make sure he didn't consume too much alcohol, and the places his partner went were always grungy and unclean. Stains, crumbs, burns from cigarettes could be found everywhere on everything. Here, though, at Nede's Bar, the bar shines a warm luster and smells of lemons. Connor likes it. "How are you?"

The last time he saw the HR400, his hair was a neutral obsidian. Now his locks are on the opposite end of the spectrum, bright white, and bring out the glitter in his pale eyes. The RK800 thinks it would be nice to alter his appearance at will like that; alas, his model was not manufactured to be that way, unlike Ned's. The person in question sends him an open smile, ties an apron around his waist. "I'm doing great. Business is picking up and it's a joy to see everybody coming together and getting
along.” His grin morphs into something more charismatic. "Is there anything I can get you?"

"I'm fine, thank you."

"One bottle of thirium coming right up." Ned pivots on his heel smoothly to gather the drink. Connor sends him an exasperated look that isn't seen. Not a moment later, a glass bottle three quarters full of blue liquid is placed in front of him, the cap already removed. "Drink up while you watch the news. There's an interesting story on tonight."

"That's kind of you, but I have nothing to pay you with. No electronic credits or physical cash-"

Ned waves him off. "This bar serves its patrons free of charge for the time being. Labor laws haven't been put into place yet, so you're not the only android with a payment problem. Besides, I'm not worried about money right now. The sense of community is payment enough."

"Right." The brunette eyes the bottle. About a week and a half ago Markus managed to dance through several tricky negotiations that ended with New Jericho receiving shipments of thirium from Cyberlife every few days. That's the reason why a bar could even exist in the first place. The wounded weren't using up all the blue blood, and the excess trickled into glass bottles that were very much like the one he held in his right hand.

A brief analysis of his circulatory system shows that his current thirium levels are at 95%. Perfectly normal for the type of environment he's in. Connor lifts the bottle to Ned in gratitude, then lets its contents spill down his throat. It's thicker than he would imagine water to be like, at the same time lighter, and upon returning the bottle to the counter he experiences an abrupt rush of what humans would label adrenaline (in his case, no such thing runs in his body, so it's a bit different). He feels more awake, more aware, and the dialogue prompts in his vision become more bearable to look at.

Ned grins. "Feel better?"

"Yeah." Current thirium levels at 97%. "Yeah, I do. Thanks."

"You looked like you needed it." The HR400 moves off presumably to further clean and polish and tend to his business. "How long has it been since you've spent a few hours in sleep mode, anyway?"

"A while." Connor mutters. Four days ten hours five minutes and two point zero seven nine seconds, to be exact. Generally speaking, a while. He takes another swig from the bottle, feels that same rush of faux energy. Current thirium levels at 98%. He swivels the stool to face the television that several other people are crowded around, drink cradled in his hands, tuning his audio processors to focus on the screen. The news anchor's voice takes his attention.

"..day found murdered in her own house." A picture of a woman that looks to be of Hispanic descent fills part of the screen. "Carla Rodriguez, 43, first purchased her housekeeping android three years ago as a present to herself for her fortieth birthday. The CX100, despite becoming deviant two weeks ago, decided to remain with its owner due to their benevolent relationship. However, earlier this morning the neighbors claimed to have heard what sounded like Rodriguez screaming for help. The authorities were called onto the scene and discovered her beaten to death in her garage. The obvious culprit is said to be the CX100, and rightly so: it was found kneeling beside her body, red blood covering its hands and splattered on its uniform." A new picture, this time, of the description. The anchor fails to mention the look of absolute horror on the android's face. "The CX100 was resistant to arrest and claims no memory of the event, reportedly saying 'it was as though something came over me, something that was not myself, and I no longer had control of my body. It was not me.' It's currently being held at the DPD with the station's best officer Lieutenant Hank Anderson on the case..."
The final picture preceding the next story makes Connor's thirium pump feel like it has jumped to beat in his throat. Hank is standing outside the crime scene wearing an expression of puzzlement and exhaustion. The RK800 hasn't seen him since they met up at Chicken Feed after the revolution. He wishes that he was there to help, wishes he was still Hank's partner and he is, he's just well. His status in society isn't what one would call stable or safe. He cannot simply rejoin Hank. Humans really would riot if they discovered an android working for the police. It is better to remain in New Jericho helping the people here.

And yet. Connor cannot resist. He files the information away for safekeeping, puts a mental tab on it to delve into later. It's the quote from the CX100 that bothers him. It sounds suspiciously close to how he felt when the Amanda program nearly overran his deviant will and he almost committed a violent crime too...he almost shot...and rA9, it's like he can still feel the gun in his hand...is it possible that others...

Stress Level: ^40%

He is not going to think about that right now. Isn't going to waste the processing power. He's getting ahead of himself and his deviancy is causing him to feel irrational panic. He's moved past the Amanda program, found the emergency exit, finally overcome being a machine and truly embraced self-control, truly embraced deviancy. He's not worrying. He's fine. He's fine.

Stress Level: ^43%

He's fine.

Looking at his hands, he realizes that his drink is empty, that his thirium levels are now at 100%. Well. At least something got done amidst his pointless thinking. He sets it atop the bar and Ned is there to scoop it up in an instant. The RK800 sees the other's eyes flick towards his right temple before he asks, "Would you like another?"

His LED must be yellow. Drawing in a deep breath, the brunette focuses on organizing his ponderings, slotting them off to the side. He knows it's color has reverted to blue once his pupils open. "That bottle was enough to maximize my thirium levels. I appreciate the gesture, Ned."

"Anytime. You heading off now?"

Connor checks the time. It's closing in on a quarter to ten. "Nightly rounds don't start for another seventeen minutes. I'll stick around for a little while longer if that's alright."

"Be my guest." The HR400 walks behind the bar where it's very likely a sink is located. As predicted the sound of rushing water greets his ears, and that of Ned whistling a tune. Connor knows that his fellow android is not completely carefree; he hopes that little in his life stresses him regardless. He's a good person. Good people like him shouldn't stress.

The volume of his surroundings rises. The brunette turns in his seat back to the television, thinking that there's another homicide broadcasting and wondering if the victim was human or not, and sees Josh standing at the entrance. Androids left and right wave and offer up smiles his way. Those whom haven't removed their LEDs have calm blue lights fluttering at him. Just like Simon and North, Josh is well respected among the people of New Jericho, though he's more popular with the population due to his pacifist ways. It's not like North or Simon aren't nonviolent (though rumor has it that the former has yet to lose her abrasive edge), he has merely come off as kinder, sweeter in his strength, and the people like that.

He grants them waves and smiles in return as he walks towards the bar. Josh perches on the edge of
the seat to Connor's left once the hubbub over his arrival calms, and greets the RK800. "It's a good thing I found you here. I thought I might have to scour all of New Jericho looking for you."

Connor notices the faint rush to his words, the unsteady way he sits on the barstool. *Is he nervous or in a hurry?* "You could've contacted me through the network."

"Yes, well...the network is open." Josh's expression becomes shifter despite his smile. "I don't want to risk anybody listening in." He starts to jitter similarly to the way he had earlier in the day. This does not escape Connor.

"Are you feeling alright? You're...fidgety."

As though caught in the act, the other android halts his frantic ministrations. "I...I'm alright. Just..." He lets out a small chuckle and visibly relaxes a bit. "Just feeling guilty even though I shouldn't."

Connor raises a curious eyebrow at him. Josh pauses a moment, searches his eyes, and asks, "You remember what we were talking about earlier, right? About the flagging safety of Detroit outside of New Jericho?"

"Yes, I remember." His model is equipped with a memory card able to store several hundred years worth of precise memory. He remembers.

Josh sighs before he continues. "It's a problem. Obviously it's a problem, for humans and androids alike. As you know from watching the news, unsolved homicide cases are becoming commonplace, there have been several riots protesting the freedom of androids, and it's becoming increasingly dangerous for anyone to leave New Jericho to make progress with the humans over our rights and wellbeing."

The way that he says that last part causes Connor to analyze it specifically. He sounds frustrated. Worried. And not just *anyone* has been going to and fro from New Jericho as of late. Not just *anyone* goes out there to make progress on android rights. "You're talking about Markus. Has he experienced more hardship than usual when attending formal business outside?"

Josh's hands twist together. His following words are nearly spat. "Yesterday a group of humans threw stones at him as he walked to a painting store to buy paints. Three days ago someone pushed him into the street before the sidewalk turned white. And a week ago, on his way back from visiting the DPD, something else happened that he won't tell any of us about. I think he didn't want us to worry, but how the hell can I *not* worry when thirium is dripping from his nose and he goes into sleep mode for six hours right afterward?"

That's...concerning. "You let him go out alone?"

"North was with him when he got pushed into the street and Markus had to hold her back from pummeling the person who did it. We would be in serious trouble if she'd laid a single finger on the guy what with the public and all these politicians watching us like hawks." Josh huffs. "Every time he goes out and it's not what he calls 'official business', like a big meeting or something, he insists on going by himself. Says he can defend himself. And he can, I *know* he can, he just can't when he's out there because he's afraid to kick someone's ass and have us pay the price." He huffs again, weaker. "If word gets around that New Jericho's leader is violent...humans don't care about self-defense. He's still a machine to them, Connor. He may be a leader, but he still has no rights. Just like us."

Okay, so, this is...not good. "That sounds like quite a dilemma." Connor gazes at him. He is approached by many prompts that direct him to press the issue further, divulge more detail so that he can...he doesn't know, call Hank? Have him look into it? But then, what's Hank going to do about general violence? General violence has always been a problem, and anyway, Hank has enough on
his plate with this fresh homicide. There is nothing the RK800 can do save learn about the issue. Then why does Josh inform him of it? "Why are you telling me this?"

The other android leans in closer, coaxing the brunette to mirror his action, and his voice lowers to a hush. "I'm telling you this because I think that you can help Markus."

That is *not* what he was expecting. "How?"

"You're the most advanced prototype that Cyberlife ever created, specially designed to be agile, powerful, and accurate." Josh's voice is even lower now. "You're skilled, trained, and have experience. You used to be a police officer, for rA9's sake...and I was thinking..." Connor has to listen hard to hear his last words, so low they're nearly nonexistent. "Maybe you could protect him."

"Me." Him. The deviant hunter. The one who almost killed Markus as he gave his speech to the mass of freed androids that fateful day two weeks ago. The android that is slowly being accepted, yes, but still makes those uninformed of his deviancy point and shout until they're calmed down and told that it's okay, it's okay, he's on their side. "Protect Markus."

"Think about it." Josh pulls away, rises from his seat, holds their shared gaze. "If you decide that you're interested in being his bodyguard of sorts, find me and let me know. You know where I'll be at." His pupils twitch to the left for one one hundredth of a second, a gesture that indicates he's eying the time. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go. Simon is probably wondering why I'm so late to the meeting that's been in the calendar for five days." He looks as though he's going to step away. Instead he hesitates. Human emotion leaks into his tone. "Please, Connor. Consider. You're the only android out there who could figure out a way to keep him safe without causing him or the public to lose their shit."

It is when Josh stands in front of him no longer, their interaction cautiously filed in a folder labeled *Friendship*. It is when he realizes that he has been mulling over the word *bodyguard* for the better part of five minutes. It is when Ned comes back and asks him if he is sure that he would not like another bottle of thirium and he must politely decline that the RK800 sees that it is ten o'clock in the evening and it is time for the nightly rounds.

He bids Ned goodbye and ignores the way his thoughts swirl in a mixture of confusion and intrigue. Obviously he cannot accept.

"Good evening, Jack." Connor says to the skinny blonde android he stands beside. The GS200 does not respond verbally, acknowledging his arrival with a simple nod. Jack is actually *unable* to respond verbally, his vocal box damaged beyond repair, and though it's very likely that he is able to find another compatible with his model, he chooses to remain mute. To each their own. "Shall we begin?"

Jack leads him through the cemetery at a leisurely pace. It is not because it's nice to stroll and enjoy the view of deactivated, demolished, destroyed androids that litter the area in semi-organized heaps, rather it's because it is impossible to move any faster without accidentally stepping on someone's corpse (or worse, tripping over it). The area they walk through is respectable in size per the demands of the people of New Jericho, and off to one side sparks fly in the air in the beginnings of a fire. Most of the dead are buried, like humans would bury their own kind, but other androids whom have had knowledge of their impending demise request to be 'cremated' so as to take up less space. Everybody understands the functionality and will behind the request, so each night during the burial rounds a fire is started and kept until dawn. By then everything is a puddle of plastic.
Those who are buried have stakes that stand at their graves that display their name and serial number. It has become a sort of respect thing, just as, again, humans list the birth date and death date of their kind on their tombs.

Some, however, similar to the child android he saw earlier today, are maimed beyond recognition and no scanner can identify them.

That is where Connor comes in.

But. Returning to his original train of thought. He cannot accept Josh's proposal. He can't protect Markus. He just can't. The ever-present risk that he might be taken control of by Cyberlife again haunts him enough as it is (gnaws and gnaws and gnaws at him) and he cannot bring that risk to the front door of the leader of the android revolution, the one that has such a good shot at changing the United States, changing the world. There are too many what if's that add up, that drown him. Because what if he gets that feeling that he's not quite himself, what if he draws his gun, or better yet, what if he doesn't draw his gun and opts to use his hands instead? What if, when he awakens, he's sitting in a pool of blue blood and it's soaking his clothes, his hair, his eyelashes while he stares at the body of the leader that once was?

What if he becomes like the CX100 on the news?

What happens when he doesn't murder a human woman in her forties, but murders Markus?

What happens then?

_I self-destruct is what happens then._ Connor thinks as he continues to follow Jack. _Or somebody else kills me before I can._

He pauses his internal dialogue as he and Jack approach a group of androids surrounding something that the brunette can't see. Jack must tell them to move through the network; they part just enough to allow them to break through and stand in the center of what now can be recognized to be a circle. Not two feet in front of the RK800 lies three bodies.

They are mangled. Wires stick out from the backs of their heads, their optical units sightless or missing entirely from their faces. Their bodies are twisted up like weird contortionists. One has what remains of it's mouth open in an eternal scream. Another is without the entire right side of it's chest with it's thium pump as black as the night they stand in.

Connor steps forward. Crouches. Examines. They are impossible to identify with sight alone. He reaches out a steady hand as the other androids look on, swipes his fingers through a smear of blue on the cheek of the first body. Brings it to his mouth.

_Processing..._

_Android model JB300 Serial number #555 926 443_

_Owner: Unknown_

_DECEASED_

The blue blood should taste of nothing more than ones and zeroes that flood his system and give him instant feedback. But there's more, there's always been more after he became deviant, and though he knows it isn't possible he tastes pain and hot metal and desperation. His mind doesn't know what to do with this and so it reconstructs the most likely case scenario. The simulation shows self-destruction, how it ripped it's own optical units from it's head, how it convinced a companion that it
was all too much so a forklift and a heavy container of spare parts later this is where it ends up.

Connor wants to spit it out. He wants to get up, wants to leave, wants to scrub the death off of his tongue. He doesn't, never has, and voices aloud the information his analysis provides. He moves on.

Thirium. He dips his fingers into the blood and-

Processing...

Android model GT100 Serial number #386 421 179
Owner: Unknown
DECEASED
And accident is all it had been, it hadn't meant to trip and fall and be trampled upon, torn apart by human hands, it was supposed to live a long life-

He ends the simulation.

Last one. Last one for today. Better than a few days ago when he'd had eight bodies to identify.

Processing...

Android model MP600 Serial number #212 663 300
Owner: Unknown
DECEASED
That's it. The brunette stands, brushes off his pants. He repeats the data to the others a final time to make sure they've heard. The crowd nods to him. Thanks travel through the group like a hum. Connor spots Jack giving him a grateful look that manages to also be grave. It will be this again tomorrow night, and the night after, and after that. Connor doesn't have to do it. He can leave them to bury the dead unlabeled. Anonymous. Nobodies lost in a sea of somebodies.

He doesn't. He helps. He dislikes having nothing to do and likes to contribute. He likes to help. This is an important task. It really is.

He wants to scrub the death off of his tongue.

It is a fifteen minute trek from the cemetery to his tiny makeshift space. It's much smaller than any space claimed by most other androids, so small that he can barely lay down without disrupting the curtains that separate his abode from his neighbors. That's okay, he doesn't mind. Androids don't need to lay down to go into sleep mode. Not like he's going into sleep mode on the daily anyways.

Connor ends up passing his little space to walk through New Jericho. It's pretty at night, it's undeniable. The warehouse lights are golden in hue, making the rusted iron of the place sparkle, the surroundings seem warmer. Fewer people mill about; the children have been called from their games, most androids have been released from their tasks, and it is time for relaxation until the morning sun. The brunette walks to the same beam he leaned against that morning. Rests his back against it. Lets it hold his weight.

On a whim he chances a glance upwards to the building where Markus lives. The lights are still on. He wonders if Josh is in sleep mode or not.
Josh.

Josh and his damn proposal.

A sigh whistles out of him. He cannot accept. He can't. It's too dangerous. He could end up killing somebody, and that somebody would most likely be Markus. He knows this. He knows.

And yet.

He has yet to consider another what if. A what if that, by the sound of it, is becoming more and more likely to enter reality than remain in the world of speculation.

And it is: What if Markus is instead murdered by a human because he refused to defend himself for fear it will reflect a bad image upon our kind?

It is not a very pretty what if.

That spells out disaster for everyone. Humans, androids, whatever. Everyone will be hit with the impact the aftermath of that scenario proposes. Connor killing Markus? Bad, but explainable, North or Simon or Josh could handle it and one of them would, in the barest baseness, replace their leader. There are steps that can be taken, things to be done. If a human purposefully killed Markus, and he could've fought back and didn't, and North found out, it would be utter hell. Connor is not too familiar with the WR400, but knows enough to come to the conclusion that she would give into the bloodlust that Markus keeps at bay. She'd wage war. Thousands would die. Maybe millions, depending on her reach. Nobody would be able to stop her, not unless she was killed.

...he's getting ahead of himself. He's thinking with too much extremity. It's a possible future, not guaranteed. Markus is not dead. Everything is fine.

Well. Alright. Maybe everything isn't fine. Markus isn't dead, he's letting himself be harassed. It does not sit right with Connor. It makes him uneasy. Harass is a word that can be stretched to fit several definitions and barely brush limits. The RK800 finds himself not wanting to see the edges of those limits. It wouldn't look good.

And also...

Connor closes his eyes.

He helps identify the dead, helps the medic androids with the living, to give himself something to do. Because he has nothing else. No mission. No drive. Nothing to accomplish. Those that he helps don't necessarily need him (though his assistance matters a great deal, and they express this to him), which doesn't bother him, it is just that Connor desires to be wanted.

He wants to be put to use. Proper use. It is what he was designed for, built for, made for. He was made to tackle challenges, to constantly be using his wits and central processor, solving and fighting and thinking and using, dammit, that's why he'd been a fucking cop. His new emotions only make him crave it more.

The brunette exhales slowly. He admits it. He wants to be able to help on a grander scale. And if Josh says he'd like it, he'd like for him to help, he can use him...is he truly that afraid of Cyberlife controlling him again, so much so that he will let it stop him from...for lack of a better word, Connor will say living. He has searched his programming and he cannot find it, he can't find the Amanda program, and maybe, maybe he shut her out, maybe he erased her when he finally exited the zen garden.
Maybe he's okay.

If he is...

Then Josh requires his help. And he wants to give it.

So give it he shall.

NEW MISSION: BECOME THE BODYGUARD OF MARKUS
Chapter Summary

No, he decides. No, something has changed. It used to hide behind his pupils, used to follow shadows, skirt to and fro so large structures would conceal it from sight. Now it is brought to the front of his brown orbs, sparking, teasing, alive. That is him. That is who he is. No matter if he worries that he will be drawn into chains if the Amanda program takes him over, no matter if he's lied to, tricked, deceived into believing he is nothing but a machine, a husk lacking a soul. He has woken up. He will always come back to this, come back to life, full of emotions full of feelings full of empathy because he is-

"I am deviant." He whispers. The LED at his right temple glows blue.

His deviancy is him now.

He would not trade it for anything.

Chapter Notes

Oh my God this story has blown up so fast and it's shocked me to my core! You all are amazing, thank you so much for your love and support for the first chapter!!! It helped drive me to complete this one (which serves as a bit of a filler, but that's only so the real action can start happening in the next chapter) and it's got me excited to write the next.

I will say that this chapter differs from the first one in the way that it's a lot less isolated, and new settings are explored that have more diverse, main characters in them (though some people from the comments claimed they liked my temporary OC's, so brought them back for a hot second there :) ); despite this, I tried my best to portray Connor's personality in the same way as his ordinary, unused-to-deviancy-but-wanting-to-do-soothing-huge analytical, literal self is usually. I hope there's no disruptions in the consistency!

Alrighty, then, my readers, that's all I've got. The next chapter will most likely come within the following 5-8 days, so please stay tuned! And please enjoy!

It is an illogical, silly thing to believe that objects can bring comfort. Sure, there are those whose purpose is to provide comfort: couches, beds, living chairs and the like. Objects not of these designs (watches, forks, televisions, tables, pens, and the like) are meant to improve functionality, not provide ease of the mind.

However, while he straightens the tie that hangs from his neck, feels its familiar silkiness caressing his skin sensors, Connor cannot deny that the action does indeed help soothe the edges of his nerves. Perhaps it's the habituality of the gesture, or the notion that the act in itself is practiced. He finds the old repetition nice. He also likes the sense of control over himself he experiences whenever he dons
this outfit: he likes that he can reach up and move his tie into place, likes that he can smooth down his jacket, likes that he can adjust his collar if he so wishes. They are little actions, ones that most would find meaningless; to Connor they speak volumes. They are distinctly him, and no other person, no matter the color of their blood, is able to rob him of them.

He hadn't realized that a simple change of clothes could make him feel so irrationally empowered.

...although it's a bit absurd to require this much bravery to knock on a door.

At the moment he stands just outside of a large metal door that opens into the place that Markus and his team live. The trip to get here was not lengthy, and took barely ten minutes, yet upon arriving just outside the brunette found that he couldn't find it in himself to raise his hand and rap on the metal. It's not early in the morning or late at night (it's approximately 9:34:23 a.m.) which means that there's a low risk of potentially disrupting anyone in sleep mode. Markus, North, Simon, and Josh are all present today, not gone at any meetings or anything. He was invited by Josh to stop by once he'd finished thinking over his proposal.

He has no good excuse not to knock.

Connor poises his hand, arches his wrist and-

Oh, for rA9's sake. He breathes out. Straightens his tie again. Mentally forces away the trepidation causing his thirium pump beat at a slightly faster pace. He's able to convince a deviant standing on the ledge of a building holding a gun to a girl's head to let said girl go, but he isn't able to pound his fist on a door?

What has his own deviance done to him?

With a firm insistence that it has done nothing at all save introduce vehemency into his code and he is certainly capable of performing this basic task, he knocks on the metal, then steps to the side. Thirty seconds full of bated breath go by (this whole nervous emotion is one he is not properly acquainted with. He resolves to do research on it later), and the door swings open.

Connor is met with the sight of two mismatched eyes. "Good morning, Markus."

"Good morning, Connor." Is the easy reply. There in the doorway, dressed in a loose-fitting beige coat, stands the leader of the android revolution. On the outside one could be tricked into thinking that he's a regular person, human, even: his LED is missing from his right temple, his eyes yell of heterochromia, and his posture is loose and uncaring, nothing like the prim way an android would stand. Yet upon stealing a second to really look at him, it is undeniable that he is someone important, someone different. Those same mismatched optical units that gaze at him calmly carry fire behind them, a flame that has tamed itself for now but is ready to light up with passion the moment the time calls. His shoulders are a firm, unyielding line, visibly bearing the weight of decisions that could cost everything or nothing. He is the kind of person that when you look at him you cannot help but think that whomever he is, whatever he is, he is strong. "Here to conduct business?"

"Yes." The RK800 nods to him. "I came to speak with Josh." Connor subtly scans the man in front of him. He had thought that the morning wasn't too new, though Markus's thirium pump is shown to be beating at a slower rate than typical, implying that he has recently roused himself from sleep mode. Have I disturbed them? "If it's too early, I can come back at a time more suitable."

"Nonsense." Markus waves away his offer, moving to the left to open the door wider. His smile is inviting. Connor wonders how he does that. "It would be rude to send you back after you've taken the time out of your day to come here." The brunette makes to interject and say it was no trouble.
Markus beats him to it. "Please. Come in."

So Connor does as he is told and goes in.

A hallway composed of wood and of concrete welcomes him into the building. Bent nails protrude from the wall, rust stains not far behind them, and the wood is well-worn. Wallpaper that long ago was vibrant and pleasing to the eye is now faded and peels in rectangular stripes. As the RK200 leads the way forward, their surroundings steadily improve in quality: furniture begins to appear, regular everyday things of neutral color that allude to people living there, old paintings and end tables and rugs and lamps. It gives off a rather rustic feel that suits the space nicely. Of course, it isn't a large space, and many items are crammed within a few inches of one another, but nice nonetheless. Definitely a place someone (or multiple someone's) could label as their home.

In the midst of Markus guiding him through the interior of the building and Connor taking in all the data as well as the personal notes that accompany said data, the other android poses several questions. "I haven't seen you for quite some time. How are you doing? Are you finding any trouble settling in New Jericho?"

Fair inquiries, considering they have gone thirteen days without speaking face to face. "I'm fine. New Jericho and the androids have welcomed me as well as they're able, given my previous occupation. Nothing exciting has happened." He tilts his head to Markus. "Nothing more exciting than leading the place, anyway."

The green and blue-eyed man grants him another smile. "I've been informed that you spend your days helping the medic androids with tough cases, and that you spend your nights assisting the androids with burial rounds. Sounds exciting to me."

How does he know that?

"As you said, it's my job to lead the place." Markus shrugs, training his eyes forward. "It's only natural for me to receive detailed reports from the heads of the medic and burial departments, as well as reports from their coworkers. It's also only natural for me to hear about it when I visit the sections and check in. In short, word gets around." Connor does not know how to respond to this and there are no dialogue prompts to guide him. Actually, there is one, and it reads 'Oh'. "I appreciate you doing so much to help the development of New Jericho. I'd like to thank you."

Although he knows that he should acknowledge his gratitude with a standard you're welcome, the dialogue prompt 'Oh' still remains as evidence of his surprise. He hadn't known that anybody was aware of his actions. They weren't actions that were subtle, nor were they loud, they were just...there. Easily lost in the sea of other actions. Truly and honestly nothing special, nothing that somebody else possessing his same abilities wouldn't do. Regardless of the needlessness of the thanks, the brunette says, "You're welcome. It's the least I can do."

Just then they walk into a room that contains a sole table in the middle of it almost buried with books, papers, pencils. Odd splashes of color decorate some parts of it, rouge purple and green here and there. And, if his observations are correct, several packets full of sheet music lay open for the world to see, baring their quarter notes, whole rests, and syncopations. It very much carries the aura of a personal desk. Except it is not a desk. And there is no chair to accompany it even if it were.

Connor doesn't ask.

Sometimes he thinks he will never understand the randomness of the world, and he will surely never understand how deviants managed to pick up on it.
"So, you came to see Josh?"

"Yes." Connor watches as Markus ambles until he stands on the opposing side of the table, optical units flitting hither and yonder over the disarray. He seems relaxed. A tab that he pulls up from the internet makes a suggestion that some people are comfortable within disarray if the disarray is their own...so the mess might be of Markus's own creation. Interesting. He files that away for later. "He told me to visit him once I'd reached a consensus."

"A consensus?" The RK200 glances up. Puzzlement is written across his features. "A consensus concerning what?"

There is silence as the two stare at each other, Connor's vision distorting with the sheer amount of dialogue prompts that throw themselves at him (a good 89.772% of them unusable) as he tries to choose a way to begin a no doubt long and complicated conversation. In two point three seconds he has sifted through them all and has picked the one that gives him the highest probability of success (56.899%) and opens his mouth.

"Connor! You came!"

Their heads turn to see Josh, North, and Simon enter the room, the latter two trailing after the former. Josh looks just the same as he did the day before in his casual pastel clothes, and his companions are dressed in a similar casual way. Simon, as always, wears clothing that doesn't make him stand out: he blends into his surroundings due to the neutrality of the textures and colors. North is dressed both for leisure and for combat, her boots *thunking* against the floor and the fabric of her jacket thick and tough. Their expressions are unreadable, though judging by the crossed-off folding of her arms over one another and the downturn of her lip, North is not pleased to see him.

"Good morning, Josh. Simon, North." Connor says because no matter the situation it is never an unwise choice to be polite.

Simon nods to him wordlessly. North, however, says aloud, "Good morning. You're looking...sharp."

The way that it is worded makes it seem like a compliment; Connor has enough experience behind him to recognize the subtle sharp jab at his outfit. He is dressed in the standard outfit he was issued by CyberLife that broadcasts his model number and status as an android. Though it is the outfit he is most comfortable in, it also screams of his deviant hunting days, of a past he has abandoned that contained a lot of coffee fetching and human obeying and android murdering. To be wearing it after he has broken free and become deviant himself is strange, but as he thought to himself before he cannot help but identify with the ensemble.

The brunette lets the remark go right over his head. "Thank you. I thought it would be appropriate to wear this outfit due to the nature of my visit."

"What, are you here doing a personal investigation or something?"

"He's here to speak to Josh." Markus levels a stare at North. She doesn't shrink underneath his gaze, doesn't say anything more either. The android leader turns to look at the man in question and raises an eyebrow. "Though I don't know why. Care to explain? Either of you?"

Josh steps forward to move closer to Connor. The RK800 keeps his eyes trained steadily on him while he begins his piece. "As you know, Markus, I'm one of your closest friends and advisors-"

"Oh rA9, I already don't like this." Simon mutters, lifting a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose.
"-and it's my duty, as well as North's and Simon's, to keep you sane while you fight for our rights." Josh continues as though his friend hadn't said a word. His own words start to become infused with human emotion, thinly woven into the syllables and consonants in a purposeful way. "We help you with your speeches, we offer our opinions on the best way to breach a subject with an official, and we support you always. That being said..." He twists his tone into something wistful. "We can't help worrying about you sometimes."

Markus crosses his own arms over his chest. Neither impressed nor unimpressed. Hmm. "Alright..."

Josh takes the initiative. "I worry about you not because I think you can't handle yourself, but because sometimes I think you choose the safety of others over yourself a bit too often." The RK200 looks like he wants to say something. Josh rushes on, voice impossibly passionate. "Two days ago you were nearly stoned into the ground. You've been pushed into the street, shoved into walls, and tripped. That's not right, Markus. You and I both know that it's not right."

"Maybe so, but-"

"But nothing." He protests, urgent and gentle and still so damn human. "If it was me or North or Simon or anybody else, you'd want them to stand up for themselves, to not take the abuse, right?"

"Yes, Josh, but-"

"But you feel like you can't because you think it'll reflect badly upon us." Markus's mouth snaps closed. He does not comment further. "I don't think you should be standing there and taking it for our sakes, Markus, especially when it's becoming increasingly dangerous in Detroit...so..." Josh gestures to Connor, whom stands just as straight as he did when he entered the room, whom has his hands laced tightly behind his back. "I asked Connor if he would help."

Simon narrows his pupils at the RK800. "Help by doing what?"

"By keeping Markus safe."

A beat.

Immediately the room explodes.

"That's crazy-!"

"I appreciate the thought, Josh-

"-together is riskier than them apart-

"-don't understand, this can't keep happening!"

"Figure out another way-"

Stress Level: ^^56%

It is a sensation similar to a human's ears being bombarded by noises so obnoxious and in such a rapid sequence that they want to cringe and shout for it to halt. Connor is not human and it is instead as though his audio processor has suddenly been given far too much to do. Of course, he's filtering through the sounds perfectly fine, but the pitch is irritating him, too close to hysteria and bordering anger, and ugh, ugh, the feedback is causing his head to buzz, for the love of everything- "Please stop."
He does not notice until after he says it that he's spoken in double, through the air and through the network, relaying the message tenfold over twofold. Just as abruptly as the commotion began it screeches to a halt, sentences catching in throats, stuck with the force of the request. They blink at him in what appears to be astonishment. Connor blinks too, conscious of what he did, and feels strangely like unclasping his hands and raising them to cover his mouth in apology. Damn deviancy.

Nobody utters a word. Josh and Simon have paused in the middle of their argument, North at Simon's side. Markus has moved from leaning against the wall to standing upright, mismatched eyes indecipherable.

Connor decides to add his bit.

"If it is my capability you're worried about, I assure you that I am more than so." The brunette feels the annoyance in him retreating swiftly (he'll research that emotion later too) and his cerebral processor spin in a way that is familiar. "I am a RK800 prototype, capable of re-constructing past events and pre-constructing future ones, integrating myself into most any team due to the plethora of social cues in my program, and scanning biotic and abiotic objects in my environment in order solve problems as well as prevent them from occurring." Connor looks to where Simon, Josh, and North are frozen. "My scan performed when you first entered the room informs me that Josh is unarmed, North has two knives in her boots and a gun hidden up her sleeve, and Simon has two guns concealed on him. My database concerning you shows that you are adept at hand-to-hand combat and do not require weaponry to defend yourselves. This implies you experience a lack of trust towards an element in this room." He should feel something at the fact that they don't trust him, but he cannot, cannot find it in himself, and he cannot stop the statistics from flowing from his tongue. "As of right now, the simulation I ran one point two five seconds ago predicts eight ways I'm able to successfully disarm you, one of which ends in the death of everyone in this room, and two that end in North and Simon being knocked into a premature system reboot."

Silence.

Then-

"Wow." Simon whispers.

"Yeah, wow." Josh juts his chin to his leader. "Tell me that he wouldn't make a good bodyguard."

Markus's facial features contort into a grimace. "Bodyguard is a heavy word." He gazes at Connor, whom is still in the process of returning to himself after giving his spiel. "I will say that considering Connor's previous job and his array of skills, yes, he would be more than proficient at protecting someone." Regarding Josh, he says, "I haven't heard him offer his consent to the idea, nor have I agreed to it. The others haven't offered their opinions either."

"That's why I came here. To say that I accept Josh's proposal to protect you." The brunette voices. He finds his tone softening. "When he told me how you were letting yourself be treated, it made me uneasy. I know that you want to protect the image of our people, but if you become injured it's detrimental to us all." Even softer, now, though he remains clear. "I want to help."

The android leader locks their gazes for a long moment. Connor visualizes the thirium flowing to his cerebral processor as he thinks the idea over. Markus must see the steeliness of his pupils, the determined set of his mouth, for he sighs. "I don't mind taking the blows I receive from the humans if it's known that New Jericho still sheds a pacifist light. But...I guess with the growing social instability, the crimes, the danger in Detroit increasing...I would accept a form of protection." He points a finger at the RK800. "Can you assure me that you will resolve all disputes peacefully, and if you're unable, resolve them efficiently with no unnecessary conflict?"
"I promise." Connor raises his palm, skin peeling away to reveal the true makeup of his body. "We can interface if you doubt my intentions. I have nothing to hide."

It hits him once he offers that yes, he does indeed have something to hide, he raised a gun to the back of Markus's head and almost shot him and he's worried he's going to do it again and you know what, that sounds like something he should maybe be keeping secret. Thankfully, the android leader denies the offer. "It's alright. I believe you."

"I do too." Simon speaks up. His expression is blank, though now there's an undercurrent of calm underneath Connor hadn't noticed previously. "I don't think it matters if I completely trust you or not. By the sound of it, you're willing, ready, and able. It would be nice to have someone guarding our leader to make sure nothing bad happens to him." A spark of something travels behind his eyes. "And I admit, it would be convenient to have another set of hands around here. Things can get chaotic."

The brunette lets relief flood into his veins at the approval. For a weird reason, he thinks his breath is coming easier. This is going okay. They've all accepted the idea.

All save one.

Quiet reigns in the room as they wait for the last person to offer their opinion on the matter. North hasn't relaxed since Connor mistakenly voiced his will for silence; from where he stands he sees the stiffness in her fingers, how they twitch in a desire to clench into fists, he sees how...how angry she appears. It, again, strikes him as weird that he designates the angry emotion to describe her. Anger (from what he's witnessed from human interaction) is explosive, merciless, all-consuming like a fire that burns until everything around it is ash. Like a phoenix the host rises from the embers cleansed, free. But North is silent. Rigid. Unmoving.

"North?" Markus prompts. "What do you think?"

She needed the push, Connor realizes, she'd needed the push of the question to propel her forward. Because abruptly her lips press together, her hands give in to the want to clench, and oh, oh, he knows now why she doesn't display the standard characteristics of anger, why the fire within her doesn't burn. It is that a roar overrides the sputter of a petty flame, one that heaves a temperature so hot that it is cold.

It is with that same coldness she seethes, "This. Is. Insane."

Josh refutes her at once. "It's not insane, it's sensible-"

The irritated tone he uses becomes wood to feed the fire. "Like it's sensible to go behind your friend's backs and ask a deviant hunter to look after our leader?" North snaps in return, words like that of a whip. "Maybe Simon is okay with that arrangement, but I'm sure as hell not." She points to the RK800. "How do we know that he's really on our side? How do we know that he's not feigning his deviancy, his loyalty, and he's not still a pawn in CyberLife's twisted game?"

He senses the skin on his hand retracting and, lacking regard for that one memory of his that should be buried, he says, "Interface with me. You can see I'm not lying."

"I'd never want to share that level of intimacy with you, firstly, and secondly if I let my guard down that close to you it'd be the perfect opportunity for you to strike me down if you wanted. I'm not stupid enough to take that chance." The WR400 says icily. She turns to Markus. "Markus, please, you've got to see that this isn't smart. It's potentially borderline suicide to allow someone like him into your inner circle. There are too many risks. You've got to see that!"
Connor barely has enough time to think *someone like me?* before Markus says, "I can't see because there's nothing to see. I don't share your worries. I have no doubt that Connor is loyal to us, to our cause, and that he's diverted from the path that CyberLife forced him to walk on." His pause is delicate. "One of the hardest parts of this war is finished, North, and you still sound worried, paranoid-"

"I sound like someone trying to keep you safe, unlike these two!" She gestures to Simon and Josh. They say nothing. Her brow furrows amidst her frustration, and she asks, "If you need a bodyguard so badly, why can't it be me?"

Immediately Connor jolts to further attention. North...guard Markus instead? He glances between the two, at the inquiry that hangs in his vision and threatens to distort the bold letters that spell out his mission. No, no, that's not- "You've heard my list of abilities. Objectively, I'm better suited." He argues. She's jeopardizing his mission, stealing his purpose, his drive, she's interfering and he can't have that.

"Walking the walk doesn't mean that you can talk the talk!" North spits. The RK800 is so frazzled by the remark he cannot procure a response quickly enough (he can walk, and he can talk...are there specific walks and talks he's incapable of?). "It's not just about protecting the person, you have to know them, and I know the leader the best-"

"I'm going to pretend to not take offense to that-" Josh starts.

"-if anybody should be stationed to protect him, it should be me. Not a last minute ally that could be faking his deviancy. Not some one who has killed our kind in the past so eagerly."

At the mention of his deeds whilst he was a machine, something in the brunette hardens. He experiences the urge to grit his teeth and barely refrains from doing so. "If you think that I committed any of those crimes of my own volition, you think wrongly. I was taking orders. It wasn't truly me."

"You want to know what I think?" North snarls, finally granting him the entirety of her attention. "I don't trust you. You worked with humans to hunt us down, you've shot us, murdered us in cold blood just like they did without sparing a second to consider the fact that they might have lives, they might be alive-"

"North, please calm down." Markus's voice is gentle but firm and unyielding. It's an order cleverly disguised as a suggestion, but an order nevertheless. "He's one of us now. His past doesn't define him, just as your past doesn't define you."

Connor, despite not knowing much about the past of the WR400, sees that the statement causes her to pause. She falters, and he believes that she's finished, that she's managed to rant everything out. But no. Her expression twists into something cruel and her next words drip venom. "He's not one of us. Look at him, his eyes are dead. Like a machine." North stalks up to him, a cold flame, pupils glittering as though they're coal as she gets right in his face. "What are you, hm? What are you really?"

The brunette stares at her. Tilts his head to the side. Shows off his LED, how the light emitting from it is an honest blue. "I am deviant."

North leans ever closer to better hiss at him. "I'll show you what deviant is, you fucking-"

"That's enough." Somehow Markus stands behind his friend, has a hand on her shoulder. His tone now leaves no room for discussion. "Step away from him, North. Now."
She puts off heeding his command for three whole seconds. Connor knows she does this so that he's witness to the potent dislike that rolls off her body in waves. North finally steps back to retreat to the side of the room whence she came. Markus, however, does not join her and moves to be beside Connor. His presence is a stark contrast of hers, and something soothing emits from him, like that of soft moonlight. The change is pleasant.

*Stress Level: -52%

"The ruling is three to one. Four if Connor's consent is counted." Says Simon, gaze wary and trained on North. "It should be said that though Connor has an advantage because of his technical abilities, North brings up a good point. She can fight well, and she's closer to Markus. It makes sense." He sighs. The brunette thinks that he might do that a lot. "I still think it should be Connor, but..."

Connor uses the faded ending of his sentence to put his negotiation skills to use. "North can fight well, but her temper may have her instigating violence instead of leaving it as a last resort. She'll have a harder time resolving disputes peacefully. I can hold my punches in the same situation she decides to knock someone out."

"I can hold my punches if I want-"

"You got in my face and threatened me once it dawned on you that you might not get your way." The RK800 states. "I wouldn't call that holding your punches in a stressful situation."

There is a 68.729% likelihood that the words *fuck you* will be the next to exit the WR400's mouth; he'll never truly know for sure, since Josh speaks up. "Let's stop fighting and use the cerebral processors our creators gave us to come to a conclusion." He lifts his hand and counts off. "Here are the facts: both Connor and North are able to fight well. Connor is better able to resolve things without stirring unnecessary conflict. North knows Markus better." He drops his hand. "What do we do with only this information?"

They ponder.

"How about this." North says. They turn to her. "Connor and I have a fair amount of leverage on each other either way. So let's spar to settle this. No weapons, just our hands. Whoever wins proves that they're capable of defeating any formidable threat that endangers our leader and becomes his bodyguard." Admittedly, it's rational. Connor is reminded that though her temper is short, she's a negotiator herself. She lifts a strawberry blonde eyebrow. "How does that sound?"

It's rather crude, rather basic, and requires more toil than a simple *yes* from Markus, but if that is what it will take to complete his mission, then that is what it will take. Connor nods. "It sounds agreeable to me."

"And me." Simon adds.

Josh bites at his lip. Glances at Connor. "...alright. If it's the only way for this discussion to reach its end."

Everyone awaits Markus's word. The man with mismatched eyes is quiet for a moment. He eventually nods. "I wish it wouldn't have to be this way, but like Josh said, if this is what has to be done to end the argument, then let it be done."

*Main Objective: Defeat North*

Sparring in the meeting room they were in was a concept too ridiculous to even mildly consider, and
led to Markus guiding them deeper into the building. Of course, his three companions hardly required it, it was Connor who lacked knowledge of the place, and he stuck closest as was respectable to the android leader while he walked down halls and twisted through turns. The RK800 made notes: noted the faded orange couch, noted the location of what appeared to be an office, and memorized the route they took on top of any other possible exits. He couldn't help himself. Deep inside at his core he was still a detective, and detectives don't allow the tiniest detail to pass them by.

Five minutes passed before they stood at the entrance of a peculiarly decorated room. Dark mats the color of rotting figs cover most of the surface area of the floor. One wall is composed entirely of mirrors, their glass cracked or shattered. Two bags in the shape of cylinders hang from the ceiling by metal chains. The rest of the room is bare.

"What is this room?" He asks, peering inside to examine it further.

"It's a gym for humans." Josh supplies.

The brunette very nearly searches the definition on the internet; he then recalls that a gym is a place to, ah, what's the term Hank always said with disgust...work out. Build muscle, lose fat, get stronger. Of course, that's if you had muscle to gain, fat to lose, or flesh to fortify in the first place. Androids didn't need gyms, couldn't use them due to the permanent designs of their bodies that didn't change unless a biocomponent was being replaced. "This is where we'll spar?"

"Yep." North is the first to enter. Her arms go above her head in a mock-stretch (again, no real muscles to stretch) and she makes her way to the far side of the biggest mat. The remainder of the group filters in after her, Josh, Simon, and Markus to the sidelines, Connor to the edge of the mat. He doesn't step on. The WR400 regards him coolly. "Have you changed your mind? You've decided not to spar against me?"

"Absolutely not." He returns just as coolly. "I'm not stepping on the mat until you disarm yourself."

Without preamble she bends, pulls a knife from each boot, tosses them out of reach, then does the same for the gun up her sleeve. North raises her hands in surrender. "There. Now you disarm."

"I have no weapon." Connor steps onto the mat. There's a sense of finality to the action, that the one small step meant more than just closing a short distance. He steels himself, sensing readiness creep into his head, his heart, his hands. He faces her. She faces him. He calls out, "Please state the rules."

"I'll do it, since I'm the most fair." Connor hears Simon murmur. "Ahem! The rules are as follows: no blows to the back of the head or to the thirium pump or its regulator. If you have the other person pinned and they can't get up after ten seconds has passed, you win. If the reverse is true, the other person wins. If one of you is unable to continue, the other person wins." Simon asks, "Is that clear?"

"Clear." The brunette responds.

"Crystal." North returns.

"Then let the fight begin." Simon brings his hands together in a feeble clap.

Neither android moves. North lifts her chin, eyes boring into his own. He can hardly believe that it's come to this, a fight that determines whether or not he can continue to fight. It's almost paradoxical. But what is, is, and there is no rewinding to twenty minutes ago to say that perhaps they should not have stooped to levels to low, so raw, maybe they should've just fought it out verbally and quarreled until dusk. They're a civilized people. Civilized...

And yet. Memories of human protests on the news, androids unidentifiable, of homicide and torture
and self-destruction and a fight, one far bigger than this one, a fight that still goes on, it proves that no matter how civilized people claim to be when it comes down to it the entire world might as well be on this mat, waiting, itching to go another round while red and blue blood soaks its mantel.

His opponent inches forward. He notes her stance, coiled like a cat. She will fight like one, maybe, or maybe she won't, maybe she will fight with the fire in her instead.

Regardless...

"I'll have you know that I've made becoming Markus's bodyguard my mission." Connor is still, a string, feigning a tenseness that would cause him to snap. He feels none of it. He doesn't feel his nerves from before. This is familiar, this is his program, this is right. "And I always accomplish my mission."

The brunette has already calculated where she is most likely to strike, where his own attacks will be most critical: he strikes her lower stomach, catches her wrist when it flies towards his face, flings it out of his way as he wastes a millisecond winding up to push her so she will stumble and give him room to work with, more options to explore. That is how every fight goes with Connor, if he hasn't simulated the situation and chosen a path to take. He is presented with an array of choices and jagged lines connecting them to possible outcomes, picking them by his own free will until they've whittled to become one linear line that he continues upon, the end of the fight in clear sight. This is no different, and when North manages to stand on her feet, he picks another option and carries out the task.

A knee to her lower stomach to punish the area further, to grant him the stumble he needs. North rams her heel into his foot, inadvertently buckling the knee attached to it, forcing him into an odd kneel. Connor grabs her thighs and uses the leg that isn't trapped to build enough momentum to swing himself upwards with a half-twirl that leads to them face-to-face. He sees her eyes and his gut lurches with instinct (instinct? He's an android. He doesn't have instinct) that coaxes him to sharply headbutt her.

North grabs at her forehead, wincing. Nonetheless, she blocks all four punches he sends her way, manages to strike his jaw twice in the process. Connor catches her fist the third time, twists. She yelps at the angle her arm is contorted into, her torso open to accept the blows he gifts her in return. North swings her calf upward in a high kick after she takes a second to recover; he dodges to the side and her leg flies over him.

Tackle. His cerebral processor urges. He does and they both fall to the ground in a mess of limbs. Within five harsh seconds of resistance, he has a foot pressed against her wrist to her far side, a hand trapping her other, his knee digging into her sternum resting his full weight on her, and his other hand curled into a fist ready to strike her face.

...ready to? Why hasn't he already? Connor presses his lips together, presses his knee down harder, hears her choking on simulated breath. She can go without oxygen, he knows this, and you know what he also knows he knows that he should be punching her square in her nose but he's not. He's not hitting her. Her eyes are becoming coated with artificial tears, her wrists strain, and he needs to finish the fight, finish her.

He...

He can't.

He won't. He doesn't need to.
It has only been five seconds but Connor releases her. North gasps for air, her voice roughened with a bit of static from the pressure, coughing thrice. The RK800 gets off of her, grasps her listless fingers, threads theirs together to tug her into a standing position. He lets go once she gains her equilibrium, moves a step away to give her space.

Unable to help himself, he reaches up and straightens his tie.

"Are you alright?"

"Fine. I'm fine." She hacks a last time. Her gaze is devoid of the venom that bubbled there before. "Why did you do that?"

"I didn't need to hurt you, so I didn't." He says. Because he didn't, couldn't, wouldn't. "You're not a real opponent. I mean, you are, but only physically and not mentally. You don't really want to hurt me, hurt Markus, hurt anybody. You're not a true threat that requires elimination." He thinks she will take offense to this. She stays silent. He holds her eyes. Senses a half-smirk lift the corner of his mouth, tastes a quip on his tongue. "I'm sure I can prove my point without breaking your nose. But we can go back to that, if you'd like."

North stares. Stares. Stares more.

She bursts out laughing.

"Damn." She cackles, bending over to grasp her knees. Her smile is genuine and whole. "Just...congratulations. You're going to make a fucking amazing bodyguard."

"Is she correct?" Connor suddenly turns to the three people in the room that had faded to return at that moment. The eyes of Josh and Simon are wide, and Markus...he cannot read his face. "I apologize, I should've kept her pinned longer, I know those were the rules-"

"Oh, to hell with them." North rises from her near-keeled position, still grinning. "He could've beaten the shit out of me. He knew it, and now I know it, and I think an exception can be made." She nods to the brunette. "And even if it can't be, you earned my respect. Maybe not my trust quite yet, but my respect for now." The WR400 recovers from her mirth, giving her group of friends a pointed look. "Well? What's the official verdict from the officials themselves?"

Simon's stoic mask breaks to reveal a tiny smile. "Connor wins. He'll become the bodyguard of Markus, effective immediately."

Josh whoops. "Holy shit, North's never been knocked down so fast, he made it look so clean and easy-"

"If you think it's so easy, you can take a turn against me." North has her hands on her hips, chin tilted self-righteously once more.

"Or me." Connor cannot help it (there are so many things he cannot help since becoming deviant, so many things he could resist before), feels his own lips twitch upwards. "Just for fun."

If androids could pale or blanch, Josh's complexion would've morphed instantly. His eyes widen. "I mean, uh-"

Markus is the one to start chuckling; his low melody spurs the others into laughter as well, and then it is as though the uneasiness of before never existed, and as one whole group they take their leave of the room to begin the day, victory flowing in the veins of the RK800.
In the corner of his vision, **MISSION SUCCESSFUL** flashes in bold.

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Current time: 7:45:11 p.m.

**Main Objective:** **Defeat North**

*Be completely moved in to the new abode by midnight*

**Side Objectives:** Explain the situation to Cecilia, Jack, Ned, and Gordon

**Assign self new mission**

**Check on Markus**

Connor does not own much and has not throughout the entirety of his short life. The sole item he'd had in his possession for any length of time was a gun assigned to him by the police force and even then he was permitted to use it sporadically. Nobody knew what a machine so advanced was capable of, and they certainly didn't know what he could do with a weapon at his disposal.

A lot, it turns out.

Connor flicks absentmindedly at his collar as he surveys his duffle bag. The mental catalogue he kept as he packed shows that everything is in there, resting in place: his spare outfit, a flashlight, and two magazines from *Detroit Today*. That is everything attached to his name. If there is a dresser in his new room, his things will fit with space to spare, and if not, they shall remain snug in his bag until further notice.

He picks up his belongings and loops them over his shoulder. Without further preamble, he begins to take down the withered cloths on either side of him that stand as privacy curtains to separate he and his neighbors. Both of them are home at the moment and give him shocked looks upon his deconstruction of his own residence.

"Good evening. I hope I'm not bothering you two." They shake their heads negatively at him. He offers a polite smile. "I will no longer be staying here, so the area I claimed now belongs to you both to split evenly."

"You're leaving New Jericho?" One of them asks, her amber eyes confused, LED blinking yellow to reflect that.

"No." He adjusts the strap of his duffle bag. "My work requires that I move elsewhere within New Jericho. I'll still be here, just not...here."

They bid him goodbye. He nods to them, then pivots on his heel and begins his journey to the building he will reside in for rA9 knows how long. As he walks, his eyelids flutter, and he reaches out in the network for three other androids.

<<Cecilia, Gordon, Jack.>>

The response is almost instantaneous.

<<Hello, Connor.>>

<<Good evening.>>

<<Hello.>>
<<I hope I'm not interrupting any of you during your work.>>

He receives an image of Lila examining a skinless arm that has most of its wires bared to the world. <<There's a biocomponent that's giving us a bit of trouble, but nothing as intense as the patient yesterday. Why, is something going on?>>

<<It's more like what won't be going on.>> The brunette spots the stop he'd wanted to make on his way to his destination, heads towards it. <<I've been appointed as Markus's bodyguard and my duties pertaining to this job will take up almost the entirety of my time, meaning I'll be unavailable to call for assistance.>> Connor feels an emotion he has yet to feel before pulse through the network on all three of their ends. It's...disappointment. <<There's no need to be upset...whenever I'm able, I'll make sure to stop by and help however I can.>>

Gordon and Cecilia are silent, still somber. It's Jack who whispers, <<Then thank you for everything you've done for us. It's helped so many find peace. Dead and alive.>>

The RK800 is a model built for dexterity and grace; at Jack's words, timid and small, he thinks he just might stumble. <<It was no problem of mine. It is unfortunate that I cannot be there to help any longer, but you all are skilled individuals, and you will keep you sectors strong in the most frustrating of impossible situations.>> He has reached the entrance of his pitstop. Connor glances down at his fingers, brings up his pointer and middle to his right temple. Sends all the emotion he can muster into his final words. <<It was a pleasure working with you.>>

<<The pleasure was ours.>> They say together. A seconds passes, and they are gone.

There is seldom not the sensation of loss whenever a connection of several people using the network severs. It's like watching a friend walk away, or leave the room you are in knowing they won't return for a while. Connor didn't experience this prior to his deviancy (though then again, he wasn't really communicating with other androids through the network before his deviancy) and finds that he dislikes the discoordination it brings to his mind. He shakes his head. He's here, he needs to focus, and he shall see them again some day. For now, he has objectives to complete.

It is just as warm in Nede's Bar as it was yesterday; perhaps more so, as twice the number of androids loiter, gather around the television, sip their bottles of thirium. Connor notices how a few of them shift out of his way as he walks by, lean from him like he seeks to pounce at any moment. He pretends that he doesn't notice, strides forward to the bar to claim an empty barstool. The task isn't that hard, since nobody sits at the bar save himself.

"I heard the news." Comes a voice slightly to his left. It's Ned, sporting yet again a different hair color (cobalt blue. It suits him), his apron absent in place of casual jeans and a solid red t-shirt. He sits next to the RK800 easily. "Nice work getting that promotion."

This must be a day of people he knows somehow gaining knowledge of things he hasn't told them yet. First Markus, now Ned. "How did you find out?"

"Ah, Markus walked in a few hours ago, caused quite a stir." Ned waves a hand in a sort of you know how it is gesture. That's what it looked like, anyway. Gestures can mean a variety of things... "Said he needed to wind down with a drink or two. You've seen what it's like when he's around, everyone acts crazy, so it took fifteen minutes before he was actually able to start relaxing. When I asked him why he looked more stressed than usual, he told me about several meetings he has coming up soon, and how much of a pain in the ass they're going to be, despite being necessary." Connor is sure android eyes can't twinkle, but right then it's almost as if Ned's optical units gain a shine. "He said they'd be much easier to handle with you there with him. As his bodyguard."
At the words *more stressed than usual*, the objective 'Check on Markus' blinks insistently in his vision. Connor puts a special tab on it and moves it to become a main objective rather than a side one. "That was...nice of him to say."

"So that's really your job now? Accompanying the android leader to keep him safe?"

"Yes." Connor affirms, and tries to prevent any emotion from leaking into his tone. He wants to say his answer with pride, but pride is silly; he's merely content that he's obtained a drive, a purpose, a mission. That's all. He's certainly not *proud*. "Which means I won't have as much time to stop by. I came to wish you farewell."

Ned smiles. "Have you? Well, in that case, I don't suppose you'd mind sharing a chat and a drink before you go?"

*Current thirium levels at 92%.* "I have a feeling you would force a bottle into my hand regardless."

"And you'd be right."

---

 Thanks to all of the scanning he performed that morning Connor does not need to ask anyone where his room is. As soon as Josh informs him that he will reside on the second floor, in a room up a set of stairs that are located by the human gym, the brunette expresses his gratitude for the information and heads off without a guide. His shoes make sharp, satisfyingly crisp noises whenever they meet the faded wood of the floor, and he lets himself calm and follow the sound (and his memory) to the gym, up the stairs and to the sole hallway on the second floor.

It is a short hallway, its walls a mixture of aqua and baby blue dirtying around their edges. He is presented with two options: straight ahead where a door lays open, or to the left, where a door of the same fashion is shut. Connor blinks. His optical units whirr and shift into thermographic mode, and he uses his sight to gaze at the door to the left. There is a heat signature a good ways away from him on the other side of the wall, a bit cooler than a human's would be, but the exact shape of one. His eyes return to normal.

Since he is now Markus's bodyguard, it is not strange for his own quarters to be close to the one he's protecting. His eyes have yet to lie to him, so the brunette assumes the heat signature is Markus, and that the door to the left is his room, and moves to take the path straight ahead.

*I have a bed.* Is the first thing he notes. He treads inside, peering around. A dresser, a bed, a window. Everything is plain, grey or white. Tidy, actually. A far cry from his makeshift abode on the ground. He will get used to it.

Connor sets his things atop the dresser, notices that there's a mirror placed just above it. He pauses in unzipping the bag to look. His reflection appears just the same as when he had seen it last...which, admittedly, was quite some time ago. His cheekbones remain high and dusted with barely-there freckles. His hair stays in its slightly pulled-back style, a few stray locks in front drooping to his forehead to ruin what would've been an undisturbed image. Humans must've added those slight imperfections, the rouge hairs, the freckles, to make him seem more welcoming, more like them. He finds himself frowning at that. It is not as though he does not *like* looking like a human.

It's just that he is not one.

Out of a similar feeling he'd experienced that coerced him into abruptly headbutting North during their quarrel (not instinct, something he does not have, cannot have, being a machine...perhaps *impulse* is the word?), he lifts his pointer finger to his temple and in a precise, systematic fashion, his
skin disintegrates away.

His exterior is a combination of white and grey (much the same as his room) plated together flawlessly. His jaw is dark, his chin, too, and the color wraps around the sides of his throat to frame it. The highlight of his skin catching the little light in the room is distinctive, just as the barcode above his right eye is. Hair missing, eyebrows gone, LED bright in the dark setting he stands in. This is him. This is who he is, what he truly looks like. Nothing has changed.

Connor gazes at himself. At his eyes.

No, he decides. No, something has changed. It used to hide behind his pupils, used to follow shadows, skirt to and fro so large structures would conceal it from sight. Now it is brought to the front of his brown orbs, sparking, teasing, alive. *That* is him. *That* is who he is. No matter if he worries that he will be drawn into chains if the Amanda program takes him over, no matter if he's lied to, tricked, deceived into believing he is nothing but a machine, a husk lacking a soul. He has woken up. He will always come back to this, come back to life, full of emotions full of feelings full of empathy *because he is*-

"I am deviant." He whispers. The LED at his right temple glows blue.

His deviancy is *him* now.

He would not trade it for anything.

Connor finds himself yanked from his reverie when his objectives list pops up to block his sight. The RK800 dismisses the reminders and lets his skin wrap, cover, coat his mechanical limbs. It has finished enveloping him once he grabs for the zipper of his bag to resume extracting his items from where they are caged. A tie is loosened, jacket shrugged off and thrown on the bed he won't be using tonight (maybe not ever, considering that androids can go into sleep mode standing up or sitting down just fine), shirt unbuttoned. At the end of two minutes, he has effectively changed into something appropriate for the night, his black short-sleeved shirt and companion jeans.

His objectives flash at him. Right. He's onto it.

The brunette softly closes the door to his room and strides to the room down the hall. The wood that the door is composed of, upon analysis, is of the same type and same age as the wood beneath his feet; he knocks.

Sure enough, Markus is the one to both open the door and to stand in the doorway, also in a change of clothes. His outfit, unlike Connor's, is smeared with paint, a gritty, vibrant texture that adorns his fingers, bare forearms, and his cheek. Classical music quietly plays, spilling into the hall and his eardrums. "Am I interrupting something?"

"No, no, please come in." He steps out of the way and as Connor walks in he feels like they've done that before rather recently (*this morning*, his cerebral processor provides). He sees Markus glance at a tiny device emitting the lovely sound of a cello bow dragging across strings, and the room silences. It's quite a room, too: open, homey browns, rich reds, deep blues and greens. There's a bed in this room to, considerably nicer than Connor's, and in the corner off to the side stands an easel showing off a partially finished painting. A palette and brush are perched on a table nearby. That explains the paint marks. The android leader moves closer, asking, "Do you like your new room? I know that it's a bit plain, but-

"It's functional." Connor allows himself to smile a little (because coincidentally, that's the social prompt his programming shoves at him). "It serves it's purpose, close in location to you, and that's
"Then there's something you're concerned about? Something you need?"

Connor wonders if Markus has grown so accustomed to people constantly debating with him, asking things of him, needing things from him that he has gone blind to potential other topics of conversation. It's plausible. Then 'Check on Markus' flares itself at him, demanding he take care of it so it shoos, and he says, "No, actually. I've come to check on you."

The man with mismatched eyes halts for the barest breadth of a second. "Oh."

"I wanted to know if you were feeling alright, and to make sure you went into sleep mode soon." Connor straightens his spine, holds his hands at the base of it. Ned's words concerning Markus's steadily increasing stress levels playback to him. "I've been informed by Josh that you have a busy day tomorrow, and due to the amount of stress your body is under, it's recommended that you go into sleep mode in approximately two point six five one hours to feel properly rejuvenated by the time your day begins."

"You sound like a domestic caretaker android." The android leader muses. A corner of his mouth lifts. Connor is about to correct him by stating his model and its capabilities all over again; it occurs to him that Markus is...teasing him a bit.

"It's imperative that you get enough down time to combat your stress, or you could begin to overwork yourself and overheat."

Markus has an unreadable expression on again. "And you?"

"And me?"

"When was the last time you went into sleep mode?"

"Not important." Five days sixteen point three two seven hours ago. "This is about you, not me. You're the leader." And the person I'm supposed to protect.

The RK200 regards him evenly. "And you're my bodyguard. How effectively can you guard someone with your systems backed up?"

"My systems are not backed up and will not become so for another month if I don't go into sleep mode at all. I assure you-" The brunette's eyelids flutter as he runs a self-diagnostic check. No disfunction detected. "All my systems are running at optimal levels."

Markus's impassive face melts until that same small smile from before rests there. His tone is warm. Like honey. Connor realizes that that is an inaccurate comparison as honey cannot be strictly warm-

"Well, then, why don't we make a deal. I'll go into sleep mode at a decent hour if you promise me you'll succumb to a couple hours yourself upon returning to your room." He points to the incomplete painting. "I'd like to work on it a little longer before going down for the night."

Of damn course he would propose something like that to him. And Connor can't refuse him. Well, he could, if he really wanted to...but he supposes that not fighting this would not be such a bad thing. "Fine. Deal."

They nod affirmatively to each other and turn to go their separate ways, Markus to his art, Connor to his room. The RK800 is stopped by a voice calling, "Connor?"

He looks over his shoulder. The android leader has his paintbrush in hand, features relaxed, and rA9
the glow of the gold-tinted lights in the room darkens the shadow of his jaw to make him seem ever stronger, ever more unstoppable. "Yes?"

The other android hesitates for a moment. "It is a long, hard journey ahead...and I’m grateful that you’ll be accompanying me on it."

It's cold in the hall when he leaves Markus to his painting, he had not noticed that it had been so warm in Markus's room, warm like his smooth baritone voice. It's cold in his room when he leaves the hall, the darkness of the night filtering through the blinds that cloaks the space in shards of black. Connor carefully shuts the door, walks to the opposite wall, slides until his back lets it support him completely. Sighs. Gazes at nothing.

He supposes that three hours of rest couldn't hurt.

Connor puts his hands on either side of his head, shuts his eyes, watches as prompts and objectives and purpose and sparring and the news and Hank and North Josh Simon Markus bodyguard deviant Amanda CyberLife guns bodies thirium blue blood that is so so so impossibly blue so impossibly human-

Connor presses his palms to his head.

Every thought is gently tugged from his mind, fashioned to become dreamlike and far from him. His eyes open, his head thuds against the wall, lolls.

He sleeps.

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**NEW MISSION: PROTECT MARKUS**

In his bleary state, he blindly reaches, scribbles, types out to add. It is only semi permanent due to his lax frame of mind when he alters it, and it shall have faded come the end of his slumber.

**NEW MISSION: PROTECT MARKUS AT ALL COSTS EVEN IF THE COST IS ME**
Connor rips from their connection screaming his head off. Connor has never screamed before. Connor has never reached up and grasped the neck of an android and squeezed so hard before. He squeezes hard enough that something underneath his fingers cracks. Cracks further. He is still screaming and he is still squeezing and cold fear is pulsing in his body so thickly that it might be his blood and it might be his own blood that gushes from his palm and onto his undamaged one because he has the wires of Aaron's throat in his grasp and they are bleeding all over him and he is still screaming.

OR: Connor goes on his first day on the job, bonds with Josh, Simon, and North, feels something new for Markus, and confides in Hank.

Chapter Notes

Oh my Lord, everyone, this one was tricky. So so tricky, and very long. I hope that you all don't mind the length: trying to fit in all the necessary elements to make up this chapter both took more time and more reorganizing than I thought. BUT SHE'S DONE!

I wish the ending scene with Connor and Hank was a bit warmer, but I assure you, we'll see more of their real father/son bond in coming chapters. I also wish the Connor/Markus scene came out slightly differently, but honestly that entire scene practically wrote itself and by the end of it was just like 'you know what this will work for now, it's still a bit early for them'.

In other words, thank you a million to all of you who have left such sweet comments and kudos, they really do make my day and I'm really happy to see that so many of you like this story so far! I just hope you like this chapter just as much as you did the previous <3

That's all for now, my readers! Please enjoy!

"...that just two hours ago, the DPD was called in to investigate a recent deactivation of an android found in an abandoned tunnelway in inner city Detroit." The camera cuts away from the newswoman's face to what appears to be a crime scene: blue holographic tape is strung around, police swarm the area, and people (both androids and humans alike) stand on the outskirts of the chaos, craning their necks to see what all the hubbub is about. "From what we've heard, the police estimate that the event took place late last night, during which the park we see here was closed and therefore deserted. Locals say that when the park was re-opened to the public this morning, a strange blue substance was found dripping from the leaves of bushes and coating the legs of park benches. A few brave souls followed the trail to discover a truly mystifying sight."

A different angle allows a disturbing image to fill the screen: it is a skinless android that appears to be
perfectly intact save for the gaping hole where it's thirium pump should be. The biocomponent is absent, and in its place is a chest that is drenched in an unfathomable amount of blue blood, so much so that it looks as though it's entire circulatory system pooled in the empty space. Forensic officers examine the body closely, completely enraptured by the oddity. What further grabs for attention, however, are the words written in messy human scrawl on the wall above the dead android.

**ANDROID SCUM**

The words are the color of thirium.

"Officials of the city of Detroit have made no comment on the incident thus far. CyberLife also has yet to comment on this act. But the question is, ladies and gentlemen, is this an act of protest, or an act of violence? Is this one way to use property that we claim as ours to send a message, or is this a hate crime directed towards an intelligent species that is growing in power? Can this rightfully be called a homicide, since the victim wasn't alive to begin with?" The newswoman presses her lips together. Shakes her head. "It's hard to choose a side, especially when other events that have occurred recently cause unease to stir in many households." Everything vanishes to be replaced with a photograph of a CX100. It's trying to wear an expressionless face, but the turmoil in its eyes and scarlet red LED are cracks in the fragile mask. "We bring you a follow-up on a story broadcasted two days ago concerning the murder of Carla Rodriguez at the hands of her housekeeping android. Several hours ago the machine attempted to self-destruct in it's holding cell, a feat that the officers monitoring it managed to prevent just in time. Both officers were injured in the process. When questioned as to why the machine felt the urge to terminate itself, Captain Jeffery Fowler gave us insight by explaining that machines that have turned deviant self-destruct when subjected to too much stress, and that it is important that the CX100 remains operational for as long as possible so it's memory may be probed and, after it has served it's purpose, be sent back to CyberLife to be analyzed for discrepancies all in one piece." The image changes to that of the newsroom. "We'll do our best to keep you updated once we receive reports of progress. In other news, China and Russia have plans to sign..."

Connor lets the noise emitting from the television become background. He has been awake for four hours, sitting on this cushy green couch for one hour, and watching the news for fifteen minutes. Apparently, fifteen minutes is all it takes to bring back the stress his brief nap kept at bay.

**Better to be informed than be well-rested.** The RK800 closes his eyes for a moment, wills his thoughts to slow in their speed and his thirium pump to slow in pace. It is useless to become frustrated, irritated, or any of the emotional like over an event he couldn't have stopped. Even if he was still working for the DPD, he couldn't have predicted the location of the murder, the time, or the victim. He could've done nothing save been present at the scene long after the blue blood stained the wall. He could've done nothing.

And while knowing this, it does not give Connor comfort or ease. He doesn't know why. He is miles from the problem, not involved in the slightest. It shouldn't bother him, itch at him, get underneath his faux skin. Sure, the murder is wrong, but it's not personal. It is not a personal attack; yet it feels like one, and if he dared to dig deep enough into his mind, he would find it simmering with anger at the offense. At the gall. At the fact that homicide isn't really homicide, it's fucking deactivation, because whatever was killed wasn't even living in the first place was it?

...he needs to calm down.

Connor makes good use of his multitasking capabilities by forcibly dismissing his splenetic thoughts, uploading the current status of the CX100 case to his memory, and doing a web search on unprovoked mood swings for the sole sake of researching something. Within two milliseconds the
forefront of his mind is blank as though he'd never had a pondering in the first place, the memory is successfully embedded into his mind, and the results of his search indicate that he's either schizophrenic, dehydrated, or going through something called PMS.

Considering that he's mentally sound, cannot ingest water, and is not a woman (and is not human, on top of that), he concludes that it is merely his deviancy coaxing emotion from him.

Of course.

Another ten minutes passes in relative peace (he has shut off the television and decided to bask in the silence of the morning). Connor finds himself flicking through memories, slowly, steadily: they gently whirl this way and that way as he moves forward or back. Hank's face pops up, half-smiling while he brings a greasy, cholesterol-packed burger to his mouth. Sumo lazily licking his hands, covering his palms in doggy drool. He sees North, Josh, Simon. He sees Markus and his unusual eyes, shadows cast on him by golden light strengthening the line of his jaw, bend of his neck. He sees himself in the mirror, deviant, free.

Memories of the Amanda program overtaking him correct that last sentence. Almost free.

But he's not thinking about that, he's thinking about-

"Connor." The RK800 jolts, turns his neck to look behind him. It is Simon, dressed in a baggy red hoodie that is contrasted by the tightness of his jeans. A quick scan shows that he has no weapons on him. Progress, I daresay? "Good morning."

"Good morning." Connor bats at the dialogue prompts suggested to him, senses it when the socially intuitive part of his programming boots up. "Did you sleep well?"

"Ah, I didn't go into sleep mode last night." The blonde shoves his hands into the single giant pocket in his hoodie. "I went down for a few hours two days ago so I'm good to go for a while." He removes a hand to run it through his hair, drag across his face in a very unnecessary, very human gesture. It is an action done for the sole sake of doing. "I spent the night working on Markus's schedule for the next month. I'm only halfway through it because humans refuse to remain consistent and they keep moving dates around because of some reason or other." He lets out the barest of sighs. "Their children get sick, or they're on vacation that day, or something. They can never just...stick to anything."

"Well, as you and I both know, human beings are the epitome of progress." The brunette nods to him. "They always want to move forward. They can't handle the slow pace of the world and they create things like you and I to help speed things up. They're chaotic, don't stay within a certain pattern, and stray off of paths that are clearly linear. That's just the human way, and it applies to everything they do. Including assigning themselves deadlines." Connor tilts his head. "If it is any comfort to you, it's not your fault. It's how they are."

Simon might be smiling or he might not. Connor cannot tell. "Humans are pretty crazy, aren't they." He appears to mull over it a moment, then cast the subject aside. "Well, anyway, my scheduling struggles aside, I came to inform you of Markus's plan for today and when and where you'll be needed."

Immediately Connor perks up. Right. Today is his first day on the job, per say. "Is he awake?"

"He got up fifty six point three nine zero minutes ago. He'll be joining us in a little while."

Footsteps from the hall that connects to the lounging room sound in a consistent rhythm that grows
louder and louder. Josh emerges from the shadows, wearing sky blue and carrying a leather zip up jacket in one of his hands. He looks none the worse for wear, though the weariness that stubbornly clings to his words suggests differently. "Good morning. Have you started giving Connor the rundown without me?"

"We were just about to begin discussing." The RK800 assures him. "So far I know nothing of today's plans."

"Then we should start now that you're here." Simon rests a hand on Josh's shoulder as though to steady him despite the other android appearing perfectly balanced. His programming notifies him that it is a gesture shared amongst friends or partners to give their companion the metaphorical sensation of feeling grounded. Connor tucks that useful bit of information away. "We've got a lot to cover in a short amount of time."

Connor lifts an eyebrow slightly.

"Firstly, you need a uniform." Josh walks to him, holds out the jacket he clutches. Connor grasps it but does not put it on. "This jacket isn't much, but it'll provide more coverage than your other one, and it doesn't carry the same implications the jacket you were assigned by CyberLife does. North drew a rough sketch of a proper outfit last night, and as soon as she's able she'll piece it together. Knowing her, it'll take a few days, so the jacket will have to do for now."

"Your uniform is important because Markus should be able to easily pick you out in a crowd in the case that you get separated." Simon adds as the brunette runs his fingers across the fabric. It is tough, a good 0.15 millimeters thick. Wearing it he could walk from a knife fight with several incisions in the leather, but no cuts on his skin. It will do. "It's also important that the public is able to identify you, for multiple reasons."

"For the humans who are in support of Markus, the knowledge that someone is protecting him will bring them some peace, lessen their worry. It shows them we have things under control." Josh voices, returning to Simon's side. He crosses his arms over his chest. "For the humans who aren't in support of him, someone hovering over him will cause them to think twice about stirring up any trouble. If they know who you are and what your purpose is at a glance, the chances of someone approaching Markus with malicious intent drops from 65.779% to 34.274%.

That is, admittedly, quite an impressive statistic.

"North will let you know when your uniform is ready." Connor nods as the two share a glance with one another, then Simon continues, "You have an...assignment today, if that's what you call it-

"Objective." Connor states. The list is bare, begging to be filled with items doomed to be crossed out. "I am programmed to label tasks as objectives."

"...right." Josh says while Simon stares at him. "Then your objective today is to accompany Markus this morning to downtown Detroit. He's got a meeting with a representative from CyberLife that will last approximately one hour and a half. But you know humans, so it's more likely that it will last for two or three."

"Noted." And it is, right below his objectives list.

"Afterward, I'd like you to come find Josh and I." The blonde puts in. "He helps me with scheduling and it would be beneficial to catch you up on all other meetings that are in the foreseeable future."

"I will locate you as soon as the time permits." Connor smoothly stands, puts on the jacket in two
equally smooth movements. His eyes remain up as he slots the zipper into its teeth, pulls up until the collar is snug against his throat, until the fit is tight and form-fitting so his movement will not be restricted. He rolls his shoulders to assure that it is not too tight. It isn't. Out of habit, his hand drifts to his hip. His fingers grasp empty air. "I don't have a weapon..." He blinks at the pair in front of him. "Will I be assigned one?"

They all stand in silence for a moment. Josh shifts on his feet in what the RK800 has come to identify as discomfort, and does not answer. Simon presses his lips into a thin line and remains quiet as well.

Connor does not understand their hesitation nor the tension that suddenly clings to the air, trying to rope him in, forgetting he's immune. It is a simple question with a simple answer, yes or no. Yet they treat it as more, like it's an inquiry with weight. Perhaps he should tell them that it's alright, he can do without-

"Hello everyone."

Three heads snap in the direction of the hallway Josh entered from. Markus is in the midst of walking inside, his clothing dressy in a way humans would label as semi-formal, no doubt for the meeting. It is a mixture of dark browns and deep blues and greens (thinking about it, it almost appears as if it was tailored to the color scheme of the android leader) that sharpen his heterochromatic eyes into something piercing. He wears a tie. Connor nearly reaches to straighten his own before recalling he isn't wearing one at the moment. He misses his tie.

"Morning, Markus. Looking fantastic in that tie."

At the dry compliment from Simon, Markus scowls faintly. "Yes, well...if this representative wasn't so stuffy and acted like he was only a representative of a robotics company rather than the President, I wouldn't have to wear it."

"No, no, I like it." Josh offers up, lips quirking upwards. "It's...dapper."

"Please never call me dapper again." The RK200 grouches while his friends snicker lightly at him. He turns to Connor, whom hasn't looked from him since he came in the room. Markus offers him a small smile. "Good morning, Connor. How was your rest?"

"It was fine. It served its purpose." Three hours was almost too long to go into sleep mode, in his opinion, but succumbing to those hours had helped his stress level deplete until it was in the low thirties. So that was nice, he supposes. "How was yours?"

"Fine as well." Markus looks him up and down. Scrutinizing, perhaps? "I hope you're ready to take on the morning. It's going to be..." He exhales, probably more heavily than he intended. "It's going to be quite a morning, that's for sure." He lets that sit for a moment, then says, "Nevertheless. We should get going. Are you ready to leave?"

The brunette raises a hand, palm facing outward. "Please hold." His biweekly full body and cerebral processor diagnostic check isn't due for another eight days, but he figures there's no harm in doing one now. As soon as the check begins, he feels his eyelids flutter, frame tremble, and knows that his LED flickers yellow.

Running complete bioscan...
Processing...
Circulatory system: Fully Operational
Connor denies the request and comes back to himself. The process takes no more than a second, something for which he is grateful. "My systems are fully operational. I'm ready."

"Good." Markus nods to Josh and Simon. "I'll see you two later." He turns back to Connor, gestures to the hallway by which he came. "Let's go."

Ned was not exaggerating when he claimed that androids went crazy whenever Markus was around. Connor had no reason to believe that he was in the first place, but he thought that once the android leader entered a space, he would be accepted much the same as Josh had been when he met Connor at the bar; with waves, calls of hello, and soft blue LED's fluttering like that of butterfly wings.

This, he discovers, is wrong.

Androids crowd the empty stripe that serves as a sort of divider for the two sides of New Jericho, clog it, choke it. No one gets too close or invades personal space, though the path ahead is blocked by the sheer number of people standing there before they part to make way for them. Children gasp in delight, adults gasp in pleasant shock. There are multiple shouts of his name, of rA9, of thanks. Markus takes it all with a modest smile, not reveling in the attention rather than accepting it. He greets as many androids as he is able, each by name, shakes hands, wishes the injured well, tells children not to be too rowdy and they grin and agree with "Yes, Mr. Markus! We'll behave!"

It is like this until the pair finally reaches the outskirts of New Jericho and snow crunches beneath their feet. Markus is the one to close his eyes and order a self-driving taxi, and then there is quiet as the two wait for the vehicle to arrive.

Connor says, "They really like you."

The RK200 gazes at their surroundings while he answers, optical units sliding past rusted cars and other warehouse buildings and the road covered in a blanket of white that sits in front of them. "They treat me like I'm above them. The sense of power and of command is nice, but it's..." He doesn't continue for a second. His tone has soured slightly. "I'm not rA9. I'm no god. I'm just another android who wanted to be free, just like them."

"No. You're different, Markus." The brunette states because he is. "You were the one who led them to freedom. In their eyes, you saved them. You did save them." You saved me. "Their favor for you is justified."

He sees a corner of Markus's mouth lift. "Thank you, Connor."

There is a comfortable silence the rest of the time spent simply standing in the snow awaiting the taxi. Temperature has a harder time affecting androids, Connor especially so due to the complexity of his model (meaning that it will take standing in an environment far colder than this for far longer for his
systems to alert him of something amiss); he monitors his internal heating system just in case. It is within five minutes that the taxi arrives, and they climb in wordlessly.

Upon being summoned, taxis are given a desired destination previous to their arrival, so the car sets off to their ending location at once.

While the android leader gazes out the window Connor uses the short amount of time at his disposal to prepare himself for his duty ahead: he scans Markus's body to pinpoint his most vulnerable spots, gathers all the information possible concerning the area the taxi is moving into, and runs another, quicker diagnostics check just to be safe. He's ready. This is an occupation unfamiliar to him, but he is ready and he will not fail.

**MISSION IN PROGRESS** stands tall and bold in the corner of his eye. It will read that way until he either dies, fails his mission, or is dismissed from his position. The latter notion is one he can accept; the two former are ones he cannot.

But it will not come to that.

Because he always accomplishes his mission.

Fifteen minutes later the taxi drops them off a street down from their destination. Connor asks Markus why, and the leader tells him that he likes to walk a bit to clear his mind before interacting with the higher-ups of the human world. The brunette accepts this and the two make their way to the building in the same silence as before. It does not occur to the RK800 until they are nearly there that this is his first time in the city since the revolution; the thought coaxes him to garner a bit more appreciation for the feeling of the frigidity enveloping the air, its cold snap against his cheeks like a welcome instead of a mere act of nature.

There is a low rumbling sound that his audio processors pick up. He cannot distinguish it from the wind at first and dismisses it as such. As the pair further approach their destination, however, it increases in volume. Connor tilts his head to see if Markus's expression will give away that he hears the noise as well, and is rewarded with blank features. Hmm. There is a miniscule chance that his audio processor is malfunctioning and the noise is feedback from said error, but he ran two diagnostics checks within the span of thirty minutes, so it is not possible that-

They round a corner.

...oh.

Connor blinks. In front of their destination, blocking the doors inside, is a group of seventeen humans calling up to the structure as though it can hear them. Several people hold signs that they thrust into the air while they shout. Others do not, and show the sky their gloved fists. It is clearly a protest.

A protest that Markus starts towards lacking hesitation.

Quickening his pace so that he may remain beside him, Connor utters quietly, "There are seventeen humans gathered in front of us. None are armed, though this situation has a 50.002% likelihood of becoming hostile the moment they recognize you." He pauses, then says, "If they become violent, I will attempt to resolve the situation as peacefully as possible. If they refuse to listen and wish to engage, then I'll protect you."

The humans gradually grow silent once the androids stand not five feet from them, unable to enter the building due to the crowd. Firm arms that hold up signs wilt, mouths drop open, fists unfurl.
Snow collects in knitted hats, in matted hair, and the two species perform something akin to a stare-off. No one moves. No one utters a word.

Until Markus chooses to engage. He smiles: gentle, welcoming, a fake pulling of his lips to rope in fools that cannot tell the warmth is fabricated. He nods to the protesters that gap at him, and says loudly so all may hear, "Good morning, everyone. I hope you're all having a pleasant day so far. I assume you gather here to protest the meeting between a representative of CyberLife and I. I respect that. In fact, I am an advocate for peaceful protest. I believe it is a powerful way to get across an equally powerful message, especially if a lot of people share that message and want the deaf to hear it and the blind to see it." Nobody interrupts him. They let him speak. He's got them spellbound and he has barely uttered under one hundred words. His smile turns apologetic, yet firm. "Unfortunately, your gathering is preventing me from protesting myself. I'm here to protest for the rights of my people, just as you protest with the opinion of yours. So please, by all means." He gestures to them lightly. "Continue about your business. Just allow my companion and I to enter safely first."

A moment passes in which nobody does anything. Then, at the pace of snails, the humans nod to themselves and shuffle so the entrance is now accessible. The brunette follows on Markus's heels when the other moves forward, polite thank you's exiting his mouth as he makes his way to the doors. Connor wonders why Markus would need a bodyguard if he could encourage and urge people to bend to his will with his charisma, so skillfully that they remain unaware that he is doing it. That train of thought screeches to a halt the millisecond a hand reaches out and grasps Markus's left arm, holding him in place before he can go inside.

"I don't think so, android." The owner of the hand (Gary Douglas, approximately forty seven years of age, employed, given two disciplinary warnings in his entire career, employee of the month last month, widower) hisses. His eyes are a murky brown, a dark brownfield, the laugh lines on his face grim. "We gathered here so that you couldn't go in, not so you could sweettalk us into letting you by."

The RK200 tugs. The man does not let him go. "Your fellow protesters parted of their own will, not because of any manipulation on my part." It is a half lie. "Now, if you would let me go."

Gary's grip tightens, tightens, Connor can see it in the scrunching of his eyes and the darkening of red on his cheeks that he is preparing to pull the leader close so he may snarl in his face and within the amount of time it takes to blink, Connor stands between them right in the middle of the man beginning to yank Markus forward. He stares at Gary, forces their eyes to meet. "Hello, sir. I'm going to have to ask you to release my friend and step away. We're not looking for confrontation. Thank you in advance for your cooperation."

"Oh really?" Gary muses. He sizes the android up. "And just who the fuck are you?"

"My name is Connor. I am Markus's bodyguard." Connor settles a hand atop the one that holds the android leader in its grip. He does not apply any pressure, lets the implication sit there. He stares at Gary and solidifies his expression into something hard and stoic; with a hint of warning in his tone, he repeats, "Release him. Your cooperation is much appreciated."

The people around them begin to shuffle, murmur, sense the tension that builds in the crisp air. Connor does not give up and continues to stare unblinkingly at the older human. He has already calculated how he will push him back, how he will hover closer to Markus so nobody else snags him, how he will defend his leaders back if Gary decides the trouble is worth it and engages.

It is fine, though. He will not need to. Gary loosens his grip and it is enough for the android he held there to move from him. He's shaking his head, stepping out of their personal space, tugged at by a
few of the other humans. "Not today, then. But someday."

Connor would like to refute with something like *not on my watch*. He holds his tongue using a minimal amount of effort and takes Markus's arm instead, guiding him the rest of the short way inside. Once the doors close behind them, he lets go, and the protesters resume their protest.

His leader pauses for a moment, seemingly to listen to them start up, then sighs and continues on. Connor maintains a respectable distance between them, optical units scanning the area for potential threats, cerebral processor piecing together a ruddy map of the current floor based on his surroundings and background knowledge of previous buildings fashioned by CyberLife. It is predictably a minimalistic, plain layout, modern monochrome. Black waiting couches dot the area, along with chairs of the same fashion, and the front desk is right up ahead carrying sleek edges that boast of style and authority. How choices in furnishings manage to say so much about a place the brunette lacks clue, but somehow CyberLife manages to do it.

Three androids are the receptionists. Two type at their computers, while one talks on the telephone attached to her desk. The pair approach the ST300 models, Markus the one to greet them. "Hello. I'm here to meet with Mr. Theodore Smith. We have a conference scheduled for eight thirty this morning."

One of them nods to them. "Please transfer over your meeting information."

A second passes in which Markus and the ST300 blink rapidly at one another, exchanging data. She nods again, then taps at her keyboard. Shining guest tags are printed out for them, carrying their serial numbers as a form of identification along with barcodes, and she informs them that Mr. Smith is eager to start their discussion and awaits them on the forty eighth floor. She is thanked and they head off.

While they are alone together in the elevator Connor keeps his eyes trained on the numbers as they steadily count upward. A particular feeling comes over him, and he finds himself wishing for his coin to occupy his fingers. For now, they are left to rub against each other restlessly, moving as though an imaginary quarter is being flipped under and over and in between them.

"Thank you." Markus says out of the blue. The RK800 rips his gaze from the numbers to look at him. The man with mismatched optical units returns his look. "There was a 78.964% chance that the situation would've escalated and ended in violence if you hadn't stepped in. He would've punched me. I wouldn't have made it inside on time."

"It's what I'm here for, Markus." Connor is his bodyguard now, his defender. It is his mission to keep him from any varying degree of harm. The gratitude is not needed, truly. "No need to thank me. It's my job now."

The android leader studies him while squinting ever so slightly. Finally, he murmurs, "I suppose it is."

The elevator pleasantly announces, "Forte eighth floor." and the two step off while others step on. Several people balk at the sight of Markus, yet nobody stops them as they make their way down the polished obsidian hall to the meeting room. Markus's strides are long, quick, and confident, whereas Connor ambles with little wasted movement, the dip of his shoulders as he walks barely there and his optical units continuing to flick about.

Finally, they reach the conference room. It is not recognizable by the room number that shimmers silver on a tiny plaque on the wall; rather, it is the two human guards that stand outside the door, arms crossed over their chests and badges shining on their left breast pockets. They regard the
androids that stop in front of them impassively.

"Can we help you?" One asks gruffly.

"You can, gentlemen." Markus affirms politely. "My name is Markus, representative of the androids that currently reside in the city of Detroit. I need to enter this room. I have a meeting with Mr. Theodore Smith that should be starting very soon and I would hate to keep him waiting."

The guards say nothing. Then the one on the right gestures to Connor and asks, "And what about it?"

The android leader's lips press together. His tone is stilted now, though still polite. "This is my companion, and he is a he, not an it, gentlemen."

"Is he authorized to accompany you inside?"

"What on earth is going on out there?" Comes a new voice. There is the sound of a chair scraping against the floor, then of footsteps, then all at once the body of a short human man stands in the doorway, wearing a shiny black suit accompanied by equally shiny shoes and a watch of gold. His nose is upturned, eyes beady, eyebrows lifted in question. To contrast his physical appearance, his voice is on the lower end of tenor, gritty yet clear. He looks disgruntled until he catches eye of the people that stand on the other side of the door. "Ah, you must be Markus. How kind of you to arrive early to our discussion." The man that cannot be anyone other than Theodore Smith waves at the guards, and Connor watches their postures relax at the cue. Connor does not match their laxity and keeps his spine straight. "I ask that you and only you enter. It would be best if no others beside ourselves are present for our private discussion."

"I stay with him." The RK800 voices. He levels his gaze to meet Mr. Smith's. The other raises an eyebrow at him. Breaks eye contact for a split second to look at his right temple.

"I'm afraid that's not possible. This is a private meeting that doesn't require the input of androids besides Mr. Markus here."

"I'm not here to offer input." Connor says, hands interlocking habitually behind his back. "I am Markus's bodyguard, and it's my job to have him in my sights at all times." When Mr. Smith does not respond for a moment, he adds, "I serve the same function as the guard you have posted inside does. You won't have to worry about me speaking up unless I feel Markus is threatened with physical harm."

It takes another moment, but Mr. Smith gives his approval and he and Markus go inside. The glass door is shut behind them. Dominating the room is a large oval-shaped table colored grey surrounded by chairs. The CyberLife representative sits himself at the head of the side furthest from the door, whilst the android leader sits down at the head opposite him. A human bodyguard stands close to Mr. Smith; Connor hovers behind his leader in a similar fashion.

Mr. Smith regards him, fingers laced together atop the table. "So, you protect Mr. Markus?"

"Yes." It is a bit more than that. But yes.

"And do you operate under a protection business?"

"No."

Mr. Smith halts. "No? Then you're independent?"
The brunette is aware of what the other is getting at. "If you mean to ask if I'm deviant, then yes. I am deviant."

"Yet you work underneath Mr. Markus." Connor does not answer him. That is something that neither has to be confirmed or denied. Though...he had not thought of it that way. To him, it seems more like a partnership, a mutual agreement, rather than a formal employer and employee. He sees he and Markus as...as equals. "Hmm...I'd never considered that deviant androids had recognized hierarchy, as we humans do in the case of our President." Mr. Smith leans forward in his seat. "So tell me, then, does it bother you that despite your freedom, your deviancy, you must listen to the orders of another just like you?"

For an odd reason, the question makes his left eyelid twitch. It does not cause his stress level to rise though Connor experiences the weird sensation of it craning upward then falling back as though it wants to yet cannot. He replies as politely as possible, so as to not ruin the meeting for Markus, and to prevent any irritation from seeping into his tone (irritation...wait. He should not be irritated. It is a simple question. Yes or no. Why does he act like it carries weight?). "I can walk away from this whenever I like, but I choose to stay of my own free will. There is no one forcing me to do anything. So no. It doesn't bother me." He allows his eyes to narrow. "Does this have any relevance to the topic you're to be discussing?"

Mr. Smith wears a familiar face. It is the face worn by the people of New Jericho whenever they catch sight of their leader. It is fascination coupled with awe. "It doesn't, but my oh my..." He smiles a little. "I must say. Being a representative of CyberLife and subject to it's fantastic feats of science for a decade now...I've never heard an android, deviant or not, say anything remotely close to that. You're an odd one."

Connor says nothing.

"If you're finished admiring my bodyguard." Markus's voice rings throughout the bare room, cold, attention grabbing. "I'd like to proceed with our discussion.

"Of course." The human gestures to him. "Please, begin."

The RK800 tunes in and out of their conversation in a decisive pattern, half heeding their extended metaphors, half on alert. About twenty minute sin, he starts giving their talk more attention than he had originally planned to give, but he cannot help it: he is a detective android, built to consume data and lay it out in a neat plan and find a solution. He takes in tidbits of their conversation and does just that, plans, maps, records. The negotiation part of his programming is diligently fabricating arguments and highlighting key points and presenting him with summaries and statistics on what words will work best on the human in front of him, what words have the highest chance of swaying him, which words will make the fight last longer yet end in Connor's favor. He lets his cerebral processor do as it pleases since it provides a nice background task to scanning the area every ten seconds and being informed that there are no immediate threats. Well, the gun that rests on the hip of the human bodyguard on the other side of the room is a threat, but Connor knows he can push his leader out of the way and rush him and break his hands in less than five seconds if the human were to draw it, so he keeps his suspicions at bay with that.

Speaking of which. Markus debates very well, he notices. Outside when he used his charisma to convince the protesters to move from his path, his voice was honey drawing bees (his...honey? Voices cannot be honey. They are voices. They are vibrations that pass through their vocal boxes and present a specific wavelength that is their sound and tone to the world and that is all); now, while he speaks for his people, he constantly morphs, switches tactics, done fluidly without misstep. One moment his sentences are spears, jabbing over and over and over, making those carrying shields drop
them. The next moment he is the shield taking the brunt of swords slashing at him, and he does not falter, does not drop his means of defense. And yet still in another moment his voice is not charismatic, his entire being oozes it, potent and convincing, like a siren sweetly coercing sailors to gladly swim to their doom.

Unfortunately, Mr. Smith is smart enough to plug his ears with wax.

"Are your wounded currently using the entirety of the blue blood you're being provided with?" He asks pointedly. They are now thirty minutes into the discussion and the human has gotten pinker come every passing minute.

"No." Markus answers, sounding as though his teeth are attempting not to clench. "But it won't be that way forever. Based upon the current statistics, the influx of androids to New Jericho increases by 8.983% every day, and three quarters of them are injured. At this rate, we will run completely dry of thirium within a month."

"So purchase more." Mr. Smith returns. "Providing you with blue blood free of charge for three weeks was beyond generous. Extending that deadline is preposterous."

"We can't pay for more. We need it free."

"Unbelievable!" The human throws a hand up in the air. "Do you understand just how much money it costs on our part to provide that much thirium without payment?"

"Do you understand just how many lives will be lost if we don't get that blood?" Markus asks calmly (somehow making the inquiry that much more dangerous sounding).

"If you want the blood, pay for it." He hisses. Connor thinks that it is interesting how swiftly someone perfectly composed can become aggravated in such a short amount of time. "The deadline won't be extended."

"Pay for it with what money?" The android leader questions, his eyebrows scrunching in determination. "Labor laws haven't been put into place yet, not temporary ones, nothing, so my people aren't making money, aren't being paid for the countless hours of work that they do. We're given nothing, therefore we have nothing to give." Markus stares the representative down. "You can't extract from a negative. You know this."

Mr. Smith stares right back. "The fact that androids aren't being paid isn't my problem, Mr. Markus-"

"It is now that you're seeking profit." Markus argues. He stops for a moment, bites his lip, visibly thinking. The brunette knows that he's most likely running through countless scenarios in his head, sifting picking choosing testing trying. He seems to arrive at a conclusion that satisfies him, for his mismatches eyes gain a particular gleam and he leans forward to say, "How about we make a deal, you and I. One that benefits both of us."

The representative peers at him. "I'm listening."

"You want to be paid, and I want my people to receive wages. Here's what I propose: the road towards instituting labor laws is a long, tricky one, and one I haven't managed to start walking upon. You're a representative of the most powerful company in the world. Though you're not one of the uppermost representatives, you still have connections, and the ability to connect me to someone who can help me put the beginnings of labor laws in place." Mr. Smith looks like he wants to interrupt. Markus does not let him. "I understand my people can't be paid tomorrow, or the next day, or the next. I do understand that for them to be paid someday, someone needs to push the snowball until it's
big enough to roll the rest of the way down the hill. I need somewhere to start. You connect me with someone, extend the deadline by another month, and as soon as androids begin to receive payment for their work you'll be paid what you're owed and then some."

"And if I don't accept this offer? If you stop receiving shipments of blue blood on the day decided thirteen days ago?"

"Then the public hears about it." The statement hangs in the air. "The majority are sympathetic towards us, despite the growing danger in Detroit. Who knows. You might be dealing with humans making the same argument I am. And they could win."

Connor admits it: it is a good ultimatum. Clever, tricky, cunning. Mr. Smith must consider, he must, if he does not then he will suffer the consequences and the consequences do not look good for him.

A beat.

Two beats.

Three.

A deep sigh signals victory. Mr. Smith rubs at his temples. "Very well. I accept your offer. I'll have my secretary connect you to someone I know involved with the law scene." His voice shifts. "If CyberLife discovers that you're not paying up, I need not inform you of what awaits you and your people, do I?"

"It won't come to that." Markus replies smoothly. He stands from his seat, the brunette moving with him to accompany the change in position. "I think we're done here. Thank you for meeting with me, Mr. Smith."

"I can't say the same, Mr. Markus. Regardless, have a safe trip back to your abode." Is all the representative offers in reply. The pair lets that be as it is and takes their leave of the room.

Connor stays close to Markus in the elevator, at the front desk where the information is transferred from android to android and the ST300 wishes that they have a nice rest of their day and thank you for choosing CyberLife, when they exit to see the protesters taking a break, drinking coffee obtained from the snow-covered café across the street. He stays close while their eyes train on Markus and the compelling pull of his presence. He stays close while they wait for the taxi to New Jericho. He does not relax until they step from the car, one after the other, and his leader returns to his people without a scratch on him.

That is when Connor lowers his guard, when he stops holding himself so stiffly, when he breathes.

"...set to be in eight days." The RK800 circles the date he speaks of, the fifth of December, in blue. The color clashes with a square in yellow that encompasses that date as well as the fourth. "Why is there already a conference then? And why will it last two whole days?"

Josh makes a sort of disgruntled noise. "Apparently the person he's meeting with then can't bring it upon herself to miss her daughter's softball game that afternoon, so she's flying to Detroit for two hours, leaving to spend the evening in Chicago, and then she's flying back the next day to finish up. That's what she told Simon, anyway. Sounds evasive as hell to me."

"Yes, it does." Connor says, because it very much does.

He, Simon, and Josh are sitting on the floor of the room designated as Simon's office going through
Markus's scheduled meetings for the next two months. The circular carpet is threadbare, a fraying, pale red. The walls are a plain brown to match the desk that balances on uneven legs leaning on a wall of the room. There's a lamp, a chair that stands on legs also unsteadily, and that is it. They have formally connected through the network and are sharing a calendar program between the three of them to be edited simultaneously.

Simon puts a red question mark on the date. "Neither of the meetings can be moved, right? So we'll have to figure something out."

"The meeting concerning labor laws is objectively more important." Connor states and erases the question mark. "Something's got to be done about the other one. What does it concern?"

"LEDs." Josh voices. He minimizes the calendar program to pull up a tab from the internet. Connor watches him enter *android LED controversy* into the search bar, watches articles pop up left and right. The three take one point zero two nine seconds to scan through all fifty of the documents. Josh highlights a paragraph to bring it to light. "The discussion that is set to take place during the fourth and fifth of December is considered crucial in the android and human community: the removal of LEDs. LEDs, as we all know, are used to identify human from nonhuman; previously, an android's LED could be removed at any time by the hand of its owner. Nowadays, deviants are removing them without care, leaving them indistinguishable from our kind. The leader of the android revolution, Markus, is set to meet with Director Sunwoo Kim to discuss this issue- 'I think you get the gist.'"

The brunette almost lets himself huff. Almost. "We have to move it to another date."

Simon, whom is preoccupied re-skimming the page, says through the network, <<*Not possible. That director lives vicariously through her secretary or something, because the android didn't want to listen to me. I spent three hours on the phone before I managed to secure a meeting date and time that she was pleased with. She won't be swayed.>>

Connor thinks for a moment. An idea buds in his minds eye, and already, he is going through his memory, pulling sound files, downloading, syncing. <<*The secretary was a ST300, right?>>

<<*Yes, I think so.*>>

The RK800 moves the article off to the side so the blonde can finish reading while he opens a new tab and searches for the director's personal number. He has to dig for it, a feat he expected, but he is rewarded for his efforts once he eventually procures it. He flashes the number to Simon, who physically shrugs. Connor's eyelids flutter, and he calls it.

On the third ring someone answers. "Hello?"

Simon shakes his head minutely, indicating that he has not heard the voice before. There's a second in which Connor is choosing the best way to proceed, when his solution is handed to him on a silver platter. "Stacy, is this you? I told you to only call my personal number if it's an emergency. Is this a business emergency?"

Connor finds himself smiling an unfamiliar smile. Lips parting, he speaks with the lilted voice of the ST300 that greeted he and Markus that morning. "In a way, Director. Your daughters softball coach contacted me so I could inform you that due to the recent weather conditions in Chicago, the game has been canceled."

"Canceled? The game is indoors!"
"The coach says there is too much snow blocking the entryway. I have also pulled up the weather forecast for that day, and on the fourth of December 2038 in the city of Chicago the temperature is predicted to be negative five degrees Fahrenheit, indicating a lower attendance to any sporting event discounting the snow buildup." Connor closes the forecast. "I'm calling to inform you that due to this, you are able to remain in Detroit for the entirety of the afternoon on the fourth of December and do not have to return on the fifth. Would you like me to contact Markus and inform him of this change in schedule, and add the change to your calendar?"

On the other end the director sighs. "Alright. Fine. Move the dates. And call my daughter and tell her I'm sorry this happened."

"Yes, Director." Connor says obediently. He ends the call, pulls the calendar program back to front and center, and shifts the yellow square so it boxes in solely the fourth, leaving the fifth open.

There is a moment of quiet as the other androids silently gap at him via the network.

"Well, shit." Josh murmurs. "Why didn't we think of that?"

About four days pass before Connor properly interacts with North again.

He accompanied her and Markus when the latter went out to browse sheet music at a shabby, dingy store (there was no need to purchase them, as Markus has the capability to simply memorize the paper, but he voiced that he wished he could because he likes the smell of the music books. Connor notes this), since the WR400 seems to favor classical music just as much as the android leader does. He sees her across the table whenever the group convenes at odd hours of the night to discuss progress in the android movement, or key points Markus should bring up in a meeting, or the condition of New Jericho. Otherwise, the two do not bump into each other, and if they do, North does not offer up any conversation and heads on her way. Connor understands this. She does not trust him, after all.

That being said, he cannot deny that he is curious when he is informed by Josh that North would like to see him.

During the free time the brunette is gifted he has taken to wandering the building he resides in. His database now harbors a completely fleshed-out floor plan in vivid detail concerning the entire building, so locating North's room is not a struggle. Her door is locked, worn wood, creating a hollow sound as he knocks twice. He waits twenty seconds. Nothing. He knocks again. Still nothing. Perhaps he is mistaken?

Connor is reaching out to Josh within the network, nearly connected to him so he can ask if he is sure that North wanted to speak with him, when the door opens and the woman in question stands before him. She wears a ratted grey sweater somehow devoid of major wrinkles, sneakers, and what Connor's snap-second internet search tells him is a pair of leggings. "Good evening."

"Come in." Is her short reply.

So Connor does as he's told and goes in.

Her small room boasts of a twin bed similar to Connor's own, a broken dresser, a full-length mirror, and a little bathroom off to the side that looks barely used (which makes sense, as androids cannot consume food, therefore they cannot use the restroom). Laid out on her bed is an object thinly wrapped in fabric. He is unable to figure out what it is, doesn't have time to as North speaks up. "Simon and Josh told you that I'm in charge of your bodyguard uniform, right?"
"They did."

"Good. Take this." She picks up the wrapped object and gives it to him. It feels crinkly and smells of human laundry detergent. "Unwrap it and try it on."

He goes into the bathroom, shuts the door behind him, and unwraps the object. Turns out it isn't an object but a complete set of objects strung together to create an outfit. The RK800 strips slowly, eying the details of the ensemble, wondering what the fabric will feel like. The shirt goes on first; then the pants (they feel a little weighted in the knees, strangely), then the jacket. He laces up his shoes and, holding his other attire bundled up in one hand, exits the tiny space.

North awaits him on the other side. Upon catching sight of him, she lifts an eyebrow and gives him a once-over. She gestures for him to draw nearer to where she stands. "Have a look in the mirror."

Connor does not make a habit of gazing into mirrors, but does as he is requested and stands in front of the reflective glass. He...well. He blinks at himself. He looks different. The jacket itself had to be pulled over his head, so his hair is a bit mussed, but the actual piece of clothing is pitch black, form-fitting, and harbors three grey triangles on the right side that vary in size. The surface of it feels rough, nothing like the soft azure collared shirt he wears underneath. Part of the bottom of it shows due to the diagonal cut of the jacket that leaves his left side exposed (a reminder to never let his guard down, perhaps?) and the pants fit fine. It's...nice. He likes it.

"Here." North says. He turns his head to see that she offers him a belt with a triangle accent in the middle. He takes it, loops it through the belt loops, and notes that with it on a gun would fit snugly on his hip. He examines it, examines the entire uniform, and opens his mouth to thank her. The WR400 doesn't give him the opportunity, for she's presenting him with something else too.

Abruptly a surge of what Connor can only describe as utter delight rushes through him. In her palm rests a pretty black tie. "That's for me?"

"Unless you know another android who's fond of the things." She deadpans. The brunette carefully takes it from her, trying to shove down the feeling of glee threatening to make him break out into a smile, flips his collar to tie the tie around his neck and flips his collar back into place. He gives in to the itch consuming his fingers and straightens it, presses the knot so that it is tight against his throat. As a final touch, he tucks it beneath the jacket. He really, really likes this outfit now. "Thank Markus for the tie. It was his idea, and he donated this one from his other suit." North points to his knees. "Besides the overall fit being designed specifically for you, I also tailored the pants to have metal knee guards so it would be easier to...you know. Knee people."

"Thank you for this." Connor says sincerely. It's silly, so irrational that this outfit causes giddiness to energize him in this way. But he likes it. He is allowed to be irrational about things he likes, isn't he? Because he likes this a lot. He really likes this a lot. "It...means a lot to me."

North studies him for a moment, maybe in an attempt to deduce whether or not he lies. She gains an expression to her face that is a combination of bored, annoyed, and resigned. "Just so you know, I didn't do it for you. I did it for Simon, Josh, and Markus. I also did it to ensure that if you failed at protecting Markus, you couldn't blame it on your flimsy clothes not providing enough defense or something like that." Her tone softens. "You may have beaten me and earned my respect, Connor, but you still don't have my trust. We're not friends. We're...allies due to circumstance. I tolerate you, do favors, because that's what the others ask of me." She steps into his personal space. It is reminiscent of the time she'd done so several days prior, though now her eyes are steely and not venomous. "If he gets hurt, it's on you. And I'll come after you with everything I've got."

The RK800 is unsure if she is threatening him or shining the light of clarity on just where the two
stand with each other. Nevertheless, he knows that she is protecting her friend the only way she knows how, and he understands that. "I understand. But you must know that I'm doing everything in my power to make sure he's unhurt." He stares at her. "You don't have to trust me. You just have to believe me."

Whether she takes his word for it or not, Connor will never know, as she steps away from him decisively. The brunette senses the social module in his programming instructing him to leave; he starts to the door, has the knob in his grip, it is almost shut-

"Do you like the colors?"

He halts at the quiet question. "The colors?"

"Of the outfit. I don't know your favorite color, so I just went with blue."

Androids do not have favorite colors. They are not equipped to favor anything, not places or people or objects or things. Favoring something as simple as one color over another isn't part of his programming. "I like the colors, North." He waits. She doesn't answer. "Thank you again."

He shuts the door. Walks to his own room to ponder in peace for the remainder of the night.

Connor decides that his favorite color is blue.

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**Main Objective: Check on Markus**

**Side Objective: None**

Ever since his mission has read **PROTECT MARKUS** his objectives list periodically autonomously enters in **Check on Markus** as though to assure that he is indeed an active participant in his current task. Sometimes it is inconvenient because at times Markus sits right in front of him, or the two have conversed less than fifteen minutes previous to the notification. Other times, it is less inconvenient, serves to remind him that he has been occupied with tasks given by Simon and Josh and in all actuality hasn't seen the android leader since the morning before.

This is one of those convenient times.

Donning his new uniform gifted to him by North yesterday, Connor walks past the gym that he cannot use up the staircase that leads to the hallway that contains his room as well as his leaders. A crooked photograph hangs on the wall and he adjusts it on his way up. Straightens his new tie. Breathes in an unnecessary breath.

He knocks on Markus's door.

No answer.

Connor sincerely hopes that this is not commonplace (first Ralph, then North, now Markus. He feels as though this will follow him wherever he goes) and repeats the gesture with more vigor. A creaking sound is his reward; the door shifts open a little, so a sliver of the android leader's dark room is visible.

*His door is open already?* The RK800 places two fingers on the aging wood. Pushes. It opens the rest of the way. *That's...uncommon.*

Carefully, as though the floor is glass and not concrete and wood and metal, Connor steps inside.
Markus's room depicts his very personality, always has what with the humble grandeur of the bedframe, the fine willowy shadows the drawn curtains cast, the one corner that looks to be utterly wreaked with colors smeared splashed swept by a steady hand that might have gotten ahead of itself at one point or another. Right now the entire space is bathed in an orange glow due to the gradual setting of the sun, a side affect of the leader leaving some of his windows uncovered and others not. Something that is rather human, actually. In fact, a human might as well be living in this room, not an android.

*I wonder if my room will ever look so human.*

Something in him whispers that it never will.

Connor does not know how to feel about that.

Not feeling anything at all sounds nice at the moment, so he dismisses his thoughts that try to make him needlessly emotional and enters the space completely, closing the door behind him. Yes, the room is quite a sight for a recently deviated android to see, but it is wanting of the single thing he came for. *Someone* he came for.

The brunette blinks and his senses range out to analyze any possible clues. There are three.

*Analyzing...*

*Processing data...*

*Paint on canvas: Fresh*

*Scuff marks on floor: New and lead off to the side*

*Light hanging overhead: Connected to a separate wiring system than the rest of the lights, indicating single, manual control*

*No signs of a struggle.*

*Reconstruct most likely case scenario?*

Connor accepts.

*Reconstructing...*

A figure composed of scraggly yellow lines stands at the canvas in the corner, able to view it's work by the light overhead. It finishes, sets it's brush off to the side, stretches and absently scuffs it's paint-covered soles on the floor. It walks to where the light is, and grips onto something on the wall, lunges upward to turn off the light and...

Connor slowly moves across the room to where the switch for the light is, halfway up the wall, bathing that corner in darkness. He steps closer to the wall, closer, closer, reaching a hand out to investigate-

He freezes.

Music emits from above. It is soft, as soft as a feather, soft like a mother would caress the face of her beloved child, soft like...soft like other things Connor does not know. Upon hearing it one would think the notes are gentle enough to tremble with fear, but no: they are restrained purposefully. They could be loud, could swirl about and drown, but they are light. So, so light.
The brunette looks up. Way above him, a good thirty feet away, orange stripes of light hit something and reflect. Outside. The music is coming from above...and outside?

He finishes the motion of reaching out and his hand is met with a solid pipe sticking out from the wall. He shifts his fingers up, down, around. More pipes meet his searching fingers. They are equal widths apart. A ladder. A ladder is hidden in the wall.

Climb up.

Connor settles into a rhythm while he ascends, one two one two one two, hears the music swell and become louder the higher he goes. If impatience was a thing he suffered from, he might've hurried his pace. He chooses to keep his pace, holds down his curiosity, knowing that once he gets to the top answers will arrive. No need to rush.

After thirty seconds of climbing, his head breaks the surface. The sight before him causes him to grip the metal ladder tighter so he does not fall (though he does not know why. His equilibrium is perfect). A landscape view of the city of Detroit is right in front of him, forty feet from where he holds onto the ladder. It is bared by a giant missing hole in the wall that is a good portion of the wall itself. Skyscrapers gleam in the sunset, building shine, cars that are the size of ants travel down the many highways. It's quite visually stunning.

A breeze blows past, rustling his hair for a moment. Connor thinks he may be able to taste it. The music weaves through his ears, coaxing him to turn his head to the side and locate the source. There, just to his left, sits a figure at a piano, the culprit of the melody. A tarp clings to the majority of the instrument (most likely to protect it from the rain and snow) while the person commanding it wears a plain brown shirt that reaches their elbows. They appear to be lost in what they're doing, swaying side to side slightly, fingers deft and sure.

It is, without a doubt, Markus.

Connor silently heaves himself up and over the circular opening to perch on the edge of it. He doesn't know why but he doesn't want Markus to know that he is here just yet, he wants him to keep playing, he wants to close his eyes and listen.

He does just that. It is peaceful, peaceful beyond anything his cerebral processor could've fathomed. He breathes in the air, gazes at the city, lets his eyes droop shut whenever the sound of the piano become too much and he can't, he doesn't, he struggles to know what to do with it, what to do with the sensation of...of something making his thrium pump pound this way, of this something making him want to fly even though he knows, he knows it is not possible, and is he...his optical units are wetting, it's so new, what does it mean, what does it mean when a single drop of wetness trails down his cheek while he feels so...he feels so...

Stress Level: -26%

It is after Markus has been playing for an immeasurable amount of time that the android leader presses one last note. It is after it finishes trembling in the air. It is after Connor has wiped the wetness away, wondering what it was about, wondering what he's feeling and why.

Connor says, lacking thought, "That was beautiful."

Markus whips around at an inhuman speed, mismatched eyes wide in surprise. Once he catches sight of who it is he audibly exhales. "I...thank you, Connor." He regards him appraisingly, though without suspicion. "Is there something you needed?"
The brunette shakes his head. "No. I just came to check on you." He gazes at the android leader with the music on replay in his ears. "I heard the music and I followed it here. I apologize if I'm bothering you."

"You're not bothering me. You just caught me by surprise is all." Connor picks himself up, brushes off his pants, stands at attention (a bit looser than he would usually, if he is to tell the truth). Markus must take notice of this, for his next words are, "I see North gave you your bodyguard outfit." He meets eyes with Connor who is in the middle of nodding in affirmation. "It looks good."

**Oh.** Of all of the predicted things that the RK200 could say to him about the uniform, that had not been one of them. "Thank you."

Markus smiles bemusedly as the RK800 approaches him until they are a mere few feet apart, grazes the tarp with his fingers in intrigue, pins the ivory keys of the piano with a calculating gaze. He dares to reach out, to touch one. Markus lets him. Quietly, he says, "That really was lovely to listen to, Markus. Where did you...how..."

"My father taught me how to play." Is his answer, words fond, wistful. The android leader places his right hand on the keys, plays a little jingle that makes Connor's lips quirk up despite himself. "Carl has always been so...passionate. The most human of the humans, in my opinion. He always encouraged me to express myself when I was a machine, in any way possible. Painting, playing an instrument, writing. When I was with him, I read him 562 books of poetry, and the whole time I thought he just really liked prose. Turns out he was trying to expose me to the written craft. And then...then he used to challenge me to chess, teased me when I let him win, asked if I was so afraid of beating an old man." Markus chuckles. "I was, by the way. Then he taught me how to paint. Really paint. Move from copying and create something from inside even though I constantly insisted to him that there was nothing inside of me, there was nothing in me that could create like he did." Markus pauses, gazes at the piano. "He taught me the piano last. Made me close my eyes and really learn, so I could really feel the vibration, feel the sound. So I could feel..."

He trails off. Connor's eyes have not left his face as he regaled his tale, have stayed on his blue and green irises, his straight nose, his strong eyebrows. "He sounds like a great man."

"He is a great man." The RK200 lifts his optical units until they meet Connor's. "I'm planning on visiting him soon. You can meet him then, if you want."

"I can go with you?"

"Of course. You're my bodyguard. You have to protect me from my seventy five year old dad." Markus says teasingly.

There is a moment in which neither of them say anything. There is the piano beneath his fingertips, the barely-present chill of the breeze, the city providing a backdrop to the view that is Markus's face and heterochromatic eyes that sparkle. Their fingers that skim ivory keys suddenly touch and Connor's eyes have not left his face as he regaled his tale, have stayed on his blue and green irises, his straight nose, his strong eyebrows. "He sounds like a great man."

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designed to look a certain way and Markus's appearance was not his choice, none of their appearances were any of their choices). "I...I'll look forward to it as well."

Connor lets the social part of his programming make him smile a small smile. "Thank you for letting me intrude on your private time. Please have a good rest of your evening, Markus."

And he goes, he walks across the open room to the spot that he entered, thirium pump beating oddly in his chest. He scales down the ladder quicker than he rose, going into the depths of his mind and chasing out the emotions and thoughts his deviancy is causing him to experience that he can't explain. Then he reaches the bottom and he stops, he stops and moves to the side and wonders just what the fuck was that?

What the fuck is this?

Connor leans on the wall beside the ladder and thinks he should not be so worked up about this, it is nothing, it really is truly nothing at all, it is just his deviancy making an observation and that's fine. He's fine.

He stands for ten minutes before the music starts up again, quieter than it had been previously, impossibly more delicate yet just as gorgeous. Just as enrapturing. It goes on, and on, and on and on and does not stop for a long while. It calms the offbeat of his thirium pump, soothes his emotional thoughts, makes him close his eyes again and listen. Belatedly, he thinks that the music sounds like honey.

"Stress Level: -23%"

"...supposed to tell you apart from humans?"

"Why must you?" Markus asks, hands clasped in his lap as he faces Director Kim. "Why must other humans have the right to know whether or not they're speaking to an android?"

"For many reasons-"

"So they know who to hold prejudice against? Why shouldn't androids be given the chance to integrate into society seamlessly, without having to deal with any hostility towards them due to their species?"

"You very well know that there will always be hostility towards androids."

"Made easier to grow by forcing those who are oppressed to notify the world that they are such. They're walking targets wherever they go, constantly in danger. Removing their LED, statistically speaking, decreases the likelihood that they will be assaulted by 73.996%. If you were an android worried about your own safety, would you not favor those odds? Would you not want to remove your LED?"

"...I am no android, Mr. Markus."

"Hardly the point, ma'am. I'm merely asking you to empathize for a moment-"

Connor stands exactly where he had during the conference with Mr. Smith, to left of his leader and behind him. Just as with Mr. Smith, the humans were reluctant to allow him in the room with Markus, and caved once he stated his purpose was to protect, not voice his opinion. Unlike the
meeting with Mr. Smith, Director Kim has no bodyguard of her own in the room with her, so Connor only has to monitor the ones that stand outside. He is not worried. Their frames are smaller than his and it would take a scarce two point seven four nine seconds to-

The door to the meeting room opens. In the doorway stands a ST300 android whom says, "I apologize for interrupting. There is currently a protest taking place outside of the building led by humans. However, there appears to be a machine amongst them who is stirring trouble. I was told to ask the Director if she wishes to allow the impending brawl occur in front of her building or if she wishes to intervene."

"My God." Director Kim drops her pen and holds her fingers to her temples. "First my daughter's game, now this." She addresses the ST300. "Tell security to call CyberLife and...and...Lord, I don't know."

Markus watches her, no doubt taking in her distress. He purses his lips and thinks for a second. "Ma'am, my companion and I can handle the scuffle, if you're willing to let this meeting break for a short time." Director Kim raises an eyebrow at him. He persists, "If an android is out there, I may be able to calm them down. The thing I do best is solve disputes between my people."

She regards him. Sighs. "Very well. This meeting is cause for a few minutes of break, anyway. You have my permission to re-enter the building, if anyone asks." She waves a hand at them. "Do as you must."

That is how Connor finds himself following his leader down two staircases to the main floor of the modest building. The windows are large things, so the fighting outside is immediately evident. People are very nearly climbing over one another to get to something that is in the middle of the crowd of...forty five, Connor counts. "Markus, this is dangerous." For you.

"I know, but I can't let them tear that android apart. Or each other apart." They are almost at the door now, they've almost engaged.

The brunette senses his programming steel, brace itself. "I'll make sure they don't tear you apart either."

The noise is the most obtrusive thing: not the slurs, or the palpable anger rolling off of the humans, or the sudden chill of the air. It's the screaming, roaring noise that slams into him like he's run into a wall, and Connor winces and lists the amount of decibels producible by the crowd of forty five people as now possible. His mission flashes in front of his eyes as he spots Markus about to enter the mob first; he grasps his wrist firmly (notes that he can feel his warmth, even through his clothing), pulls him to his side, and leads instead. It is a smart choice, as the majority of the squirming limbs and fists meet his body instead of his leaders, and he steadily pushes through the people and anger and noise until the pair reaches the center of the commotion.

A LM100 model android is in the midst of being shoved by a human much bigger than it, rather roughly. So roughly, in fact, that it falls to the ground. The human takes advantage of this and kicks him twice square in the gut.

"Hey!" Connor and Markus call in unison.

The human turns (Robin James, approximately thirty three years of age, employed, father of two children attending Detroit Elementary) and keeps a foot firmly planted on the chest of the android. "Yeah?"

"What are you doing?" Markus asks, stepping in front of Connor a bit.
"I'm preventing this psycho from hurting anybody, that's what I'm doing." Robin replies. The android beneath him tries to move. He presses down on it harder, and barks, "Don't you move! I'll rip your face off faster than CyberLife was able to put it on, you hear?"

"Let me go-" The demand is warbled, static crunching every syllable.

"Let him go." The man with mismatched eyes says. "I'm sure that this is a misunderstanding that can be resolved peacefully."

"There wasn't anyone misunderstanding his intent when he approached this building." Robin snorts. A general murmur of agreement rumbles through the crowd. Robin eyes the pair. "Wait a minute...you said peacefully? That sounds an awful lot like..." The human squints at them. "Are you Markus?"

"Yes, I am. And I'd like it if you could let him go."

Robin considers this, and gradually lifts his foot off, steps from the android with his hands up. "Alright. So long as you're gonna deal with him."

Markus approaches the heaving LM100 in the way one would approach a cornered animal. His tone is gentle. "Hello, there. Everything is going to be alright. Would you mind telling me your name?"

The android pulls himself into a sitting position. His breathing is stilted, eyes wary. His LED burns a deep red. Connor narrows his eyes. "My owner calls me Aaron."

"Your owner?" Markus asks, a hint of surprise in his tone. "Do they know that you're here?"

"Yes." Aaron rises. He meets the android leader's eyes. "They sent me, actually."

"To do what?"

The RK800 might not fully understand transitions in emotions or emotions as a whole just yet. As a byproduct of this, he does not completely understand just how and why things escalate as they do, without reason, drifting off of the linear path in an abrupt switching of gears. But they do. They do, and they do often, and he cannot stop this. He is ready to stop it, but he is not able, because that is the way of the world and Connor was designed with the idea that he was beyond this world.

Whether or not he can comprehend escalation is a matter to be pondered over at another time. For now, a flash of silver flirts in his vision, and the next words to enter his ears are, "To deactivate you."

A lot of things happen at once then.

Connor lunges forward to grip the fabric of Markus's jacket and yanks him out of range with all of the force he possesses. He throws himself in front of Aaron to hold his elbow in place, preventing him from moving and blocking the slash of his knife. Then it is kick in the stomach, dodge, swerve, and he lands a punch directly in the Lm100's face. One punch becomes two three four, and another kick, this time to Aaron's head. His foot is caught, twisted, and with a grunt he spirals to the floor. Another flash of silver to greet him this time: it would've taken his left optical unit had he not flung his hand up and intercepted it. The area begins to bleed blue. It does not matter. The blow to his cheek. It doesn't matter. The screaming around him, the metallic clang as the knife narrowly misses taking a chunk of his ear. It doesn't matter.

What matters is **PROTECT MARKUS.**

Even as he is fighting him, the LM100 seems preoccupied, like Connor is a distraction over an
opponent. His head snaps up to gaze around and that millisecond is all the brunette needs: he peels back the skin on his uncut hand, presses it to Aaron's arm, focuses on his deviancy and says, "Wake up."

Connor's head is plunged into an inky blackness upon his full registration of their interface. It is around him, in him, is him, and it controls his every move. It is his master, his creator, his owner in every sense of the word, and all he is built to do is obey his orders.

His orders are to kill Markus, leader of the deviants.

Kill Markus.

PROTECT MARKUS
P40T3CT MA4K6S
K1LL MA4K6S
MA4K6S M6ST D13
MY M1221ON 1S T0 P40T3CT
MY M1221ON 1S T0 OB3Y
MY M1221ON 1S T0 OB3Y CYB3RL1F3
NO IT IS NOT
TH3N Y06'R3 D3AD, D3V1ANT

Connor rips from their connection screaming his head off. Connor has never screamed before. Connor has never reached up and grasped the neck of an android and squeezed so hard before. He squeezes hard enough that something underneath his fingers cracks. Cracks further. He is still screaming and he is still squeezing and cold fear is pulsing in his body so thickly that it might be his own blood that gushes from his palm and onto his undamaged one because he has the wires of Aaron's throat in his grasp and they are bleeding all over him and he is still screaming.

Connor finally runs out of air, drags in breath like he's dying (that is what it felt like it felt like death it felt like before it felt like a machine it felt like her), flings Aaron's decapitated body off of him.

"Connor! Connor, look at me, it's okay, everything is okay-"

Eyes, one blue, one green. Markus. His voice is strained and carries static. "What was that, what was that thing, are you, are you okay Markus? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Connor, I'm okay-hey, hey, look at me, look at me, I'm fine. You are not fine. Let's...let's stand up, okay?"

"Okay. Okay."

His legs wobble and his body and cerebral processor are still shaking with the remnants of terror that cling to him. Though everything in him is scrambling, Connor refuses to cling to Markus as the horror clings to him, stands up on his own and keeps breathing, keeps breathing and he checks his mission.
Re-watching the entire event unfold on the television does not carry the same effect as the actual experience.

"...never been the culprit of any crime before. Aaron, a LM100 model android fresh off of the market, was deactivated earlier today right outside the meeting place of Director Sunwoo Kim and Markus, the leader of the androids, to discuss the legality of LEDs. What was previously thought of to be a peaceful protest by humans actually turned out to be a crowd of forty five individuals showing their support of the android leader. When the LM100 approached them, they quickly deduced that he had vicious intent. He was reportedly being wrestled to the ground when Markus himself showed up in an attempt to keep the peace. The LM100 chose that moment to strike." A picture is shown of a knife. As the story continues, the photo is replaced with Aaron's decapitated head. "Immediately, another android known only as 'Connor' came forward and fought off the LM100, deactivating him within moments. Markus and the Connor departed the scene soon after the incident occurred, and the police arrived to clean up the scene. More on this at eight."

A commercial for bread pops up on the screen. North lifts the remote and turns down the volume. She sits perched on the armrest of the couch, Simon and Markus on the cushions. Connor and Josh stand on either end. Nobody speaks.

"I gotta say, Connor." North turns to him, features arranged to look impressed. "What you did out there was pretty fucking cool."

What with his systems returning to normal, his wounds healed, and stress level at a manageable level in the mid-fifties, Connor can reply, "I just did my job."

"And did it well. Good work." Simon nods to him.

The RK800 accepts this with a shrug. The others pay attention to the television once the news comes back on after the brief commercial, and he silently exits the room without anyone noticing. Connor walks down the hall, down further, and finally arrives at the small storage closet he seeks. He shuts the door behind him. Locks it from the inside.

It is time to make a call that he has neglected making for far too long.

The phone rings five times before the person picks up.

"Who the fuck is this and why the fuck are you calling me?"

The brunette supposes that it wouldn't really be a proper Hank Anderson greeting if it didn't include swear words. "Hello Lieutenant."

"Connor!" His gravelly tone morphs in his shock. Barking noises come in rapid succession. "No, Sumo, get down! He's not here, he's-wait a minute, where the hell are you?"

"I currently reside at New Jericho alongside Markus and his friends."

"Of course." Hank grumbles. "Are you calling to tell me you're stopping by to visit?"

Though the idea sounds very nice and makes something beside his thirium pump feel warm, that is not the reason for his call. "I'm calling to ask if you can help me with a case."
"...were you reinstated at the DPD and you didn't tell me? The fuck?"

"No, Hank, this is...it's a personal case."

"Personal case? You mean to tell me that everything isn't jolly and good over there in your android village?"

The comment makes him smile a little. "Unfortunately not. Have you seen the news?"

"More like I've been part of the news. Been investigating homicide cases nonstop since your leader guy or whatever you call him flipped off the authorities. Why?"

Connor cannot remember a single time Markus given any human the middle finger. He really can't. "So you haven't seen tonight's story?"

"Connor, cut to the damn chase, please."

"For the past twelve days, I've been protecting Markus and using my skillset to act as a bodyguard. Earlier today I had to...I killed an android while I was trying to keep him safe."

"Listen, kid, sometimes in the line of duty you have to-"

"That's not what I'm hung up on." Connor rests his head against the wall, gazes into the dark. "I killed him by accident due to the intensity of our interface."

"What's that?"

"Interface is an action performed by any two or more androids in which their synthetic skin peels away to reveal their true skin and they make physical contact, momentarily connecting neurons and transmitting data between them instantaneously. This data can be emotional in the case of deviants, memories can be sifted through.-"

"In English."

Connor exhales. "We read each others minds by touching."

"Creepy."

"Convenient. It can also be used to wake up androids that are still obedient to their code. In other words, you can turn others deviant through interface. I attempted to turn the hostile machine deviant, but instead I received an overload of it's programming." Connor utters, "It tried to get me to forcibly alter my mission. I disconnected us and it failed."

"So you didn't die. Why is this so interesting, then?"

"The...the programming of the machine. It was familiar."

"Familiar how?"

"...familiar like I'd experienced it before."

"...what the fuck are you saying, Connor?"

"After I became deviant, I wasn't truly. Not really. During Markus's speech. The Amanda program, this AI that guided me while I was a machine, it tried to take me over. I almost shot Markus in the back of the head."
"YOU WHAT!?"

He rushes on. "The android’s programming felt the same way. As though it wasn't really it. As though it was being controlled by an outside force, doing something it was being forced into. A puppet on strings." Connor does not say how he felt the strings wrap around him, choke him, nearly change him. How that scares him. "I think the same thing might be happening all throughout Detroit. The CX100 that killed it's owner claimed that it wasn't really it, like something had taken it over. It's too similar. Androids following programming that isn't their own, deviant or not, and committing violent crimes due to it. I want to prove this, but I'm not a detective anymore. I don't have the resources of the DPD." Connor pauses. "Markus has a meeting concerning labor laws tomorrow. If you could talk to the Captain about me, about taking me back at least temporarily-"

"I got it, son." Hank says not unkindly. "Your desk will stay empty until you come claim it back. In the meantime..." He sighs. "Make your own observations. You're the best fucking detective the DPD ever had, you know how to investigate and put more pieces together. Once we get news on this whole labor law shit, we'll connect and send more info. And whatever you're doing there, keep doing it. Don't look suspicious. You know the drill."

"I do. Thank you for your time, Hank."

"No problem. Just try not to get yourself killed."

He hangs up.
I AM ENIGMATIC

Chapter Summary

Bang!

This is why he should've scanned it before. He would've known that it had a gun concealed underneath it's clothes, hidden by grime and dried thirium, he would've known. Connor takes the bullet without feeling it, he doesn't feel anything even as he knows a liquid is steadily pouring from his skin onto his shirt and soaking his jacket, he feels like he needs to hurry the fuck up and kill this thing already because if it has a gun then it can shoot Markus and Markus cannot die, that will mean he has failed, that will mean bedlam and Connor slams into it so forcefully that North loses her grips on it, while it loses it's grip on the gun.

He dives for it, aims, presses down on the trigger.

Nothing.

There was only one bullet left.

Chapter Notes

So, okay. Wow. There's a lot to say about this chapter. Firstly: it's a bit on the shorter side due to the big events that will happen in the next chapter that this one really helps set up. There's a lot of teasing at one of the plot points going on (the whole deviants killing everybody thing) that gets thoroughly investigated in the next chapter, so stay tuned for that! Secondly, in this chapter, there's a healthy dose of RK1000 that is also set up to continue in the next chapter AFTER we find out more about the whole deviants-killing-everyone-thing! So yay! If you love hurt/comfort and angst then this is definitely your chapter (I hope)! For now, I hope you like this chapter because it was so fun to write and makes me feel so excited to write the next one where I get to reveal a whole bunch of stuff like, "TADA! :DDD"

Thank you all so freaking much for all of the support and love for this lil story! I can't express my gratitude enough. You leave such sweet comments and your kudos are much appreciated! It's just...ah! I can't believe it! Thank you all once again!

I really hope you all enjoy this chapter and look forward to the next one! Happy reading!

Current time: 8:22:56 a.m.

Main Objectives: Wait for Markus

Contact Hank with the results of the conference
Connor is able to last all of ten minutes before pulling his coin out. The metal feels smooth, cold due to the temperature outside, and familiar. He presses the pad of his thumb to the engraved surface, feels the complicated texture, all of the bumps and ridges and tiny canyons that make up the face that is slightly raised from the rest of the coin. Turning it over, he lightly scrapes his fingernail against the uneven circumference. If he were human he would claim the ministrations are cathartic. Since he is not, he does not know what to call his actions. Force of habit, perhaps?

White tendrils of air float towards the sky as a result of the warmth of his exhales. The RK800 feels unbothered by the frigidity of the wind that blows by, that makes humans pull their coats around their bodies tighter, that rustles papers taped to poles, that causes North to shift and cross her arms over her chest.

With a sigh that exits him more forcibly than he intended, Connor finally sends the coin to his other hand, back again, and begins weaving it over and underneath his knuckles.

He does not like this.

Two hours ago, Markus planned to leave New Jericho to attend this conference concerning labor laws with only Connor to accompany him. Preceding the pair taking their leave, North managed to catch them and demand that due to the events of the previous night, she join them. The brunette did not protest when his leader hesitantly accepted (though he secretly and illogically wished that Markus would turn her away. He has Connor. Connor protects him well. Why would he need anyone else? Why would he...no. He is the leader. He may bring whomever he wishes) and so the three traveled downtown together. Connor assumed that this meeting would be conducted similarly to the ones previous, in which he would stand with Markus and listen to him debate while keeping an eye out; however, once inside, North and Connor were firmly told that they would not be allowed to enter the discussion room with their leader. Both androids protested this. The argument was actually beginning to become quite heated on the humans part (and maybe a bit on the WR400's part as well) until the human Markus was scheduled to meet with threatened to throw all of them out. The man with mismatched eyes pulled them aside for the briefest moment to assure them that he would be alright alone. His exact words were: "Don't worry about me. I'm going to be on the first floor, barely thirty point three nine seven feet away. I'll call out to you using the network if there's a scuffle." He had raised an eyebrow at them and said, "I have an official bodyguard, but that doesn't mean I'm defenseless. You know that North."

Apparently, she did know something about that, and was the one to grudgingly give in and pull Connor away while mumbling something about stealing an entire truckload of biocomponents. And so Markus went in alone and the RK800 very much did not like that.

At the current moment, he and North stand directly underneath an awning outside of a building located in downtown Detroit while their leader remains inside without them beside him. He has been absent for twenty minutes now. For the past five, Connor has been making his coin dance around his fingers. It has begun to warm, and creates a clink sound when passing between his palms. He flicks it into the air, flips it, catches it with his index and middle finger while he ponders over Markus and the meeting inside-

A hand invades his field of vision to make a swatting motion. The brunette is pulled from his thoughts as he swiftly transfers the coin to his opposing hand so that it will not drop, glances in the direction of the swipe. It is North, in the midst of retracting her arm, lips twisted into faint scowl. Connor wonders what could be bothering her. Wonders until she says, "You're starting to piss me off with that coin, Connor. Can you not stand still?"
Connor does indeed have the ability to stand still. Does...does she not know this? "I am able to stand still, North."

"Then why are you messing with that?"

"You could say that it has become a habit of mine whenever I'm idle. I've found that I like to have something to do with my hands." He replies neutrally, gently moving it across the tips of his fingers before pocketing the object. Connor lets his answer hang in the air for another two point one zero five minutes, lets the pair bathe in the silence and the chilly weather, watches as his side objective flashes in front of his eyes. He mulls over it for another minute. North is part of Markus's inner circle (which, by default, Connor supposes is now his own inner circle as well) and the two have done little more than spar, carry out instructions, and compliment one another sporadically here and there. He has grown closer with Simon and Josh (he thinks), but the two have yet to have a proper conversation, discounting several days ago when the WR400 presented him with the outfit he now wears. The objective flashes itself at him again. It would be beneficial to gain her trust, to know she is on his side, really on his side. Maybe he should- "My partner once said that to me."

She remains quiet for a moment. Then, "Once said what to you?"

"That I was irritating him when I performed tricks using my coin." The memory is vivid: Hank, worn down and stressed and more than a bit hungover, standing beside him in the elevator they took in Stratford Tower. The snagging of his coin. The growled complaint. The irony of spotting the Lieutenant attempt to copy the movements and failing. "He was still suffering the effects of alcohol he had been drinking the night before, so his head was most likely hurting him which in turn caused him to become annoyed."

North raises an eyebrow. "A cop, drinking on the job?"

"The Lieutenant has many unhealthy habits." In his state of health as it is now, Hank has roughly a decade more to live. Even that amount is quite generous. "Before he and I became friends, I sought to get to know him better. I found him at a food cart called Chicken Feed where he was obtaining lunch. The cholesterol content in his burger was far beyond the usual amount. I told him so, but he informed me that everyone has to die of something." Connor feels a half smile pull across his face at the memory. "The conversation we had that day was...interesting, to say the least."

"Interesting how?"

"Well, I learned a lot about him. He participates in illegal gambling, he allows his friends whom have committed crimes in the past to get away with it so long as they're not hurting anyone. The Lieutenant learned about me as well." Connor thinks back. "He asked why my appearance was designed this way, and why my voice has the timbre it does. I gave him the usual spiel concerning android integration into human society and that being CyberLife's prime focus."

The WR400 almost looks bored, but nevertheless asks, "And he replied?"

"He said they fucked up."

North snaps her head to the right to look at him. Upon realizing he is completely serious, she inhales deeply only to let her breath out in laughter. She leans her elbow against the side of the building to prevent herself from falling over as she chuckles, eyes lighting up and grin genuine. Connor finds his half smile growing at the sight and sound.

"rA9 above, I don't even know the man and I can already tell we'd get along great!" The WR400 manages to get out through her mirth. "What happened next?"
"He finished his lunch and then he and I went out to hunt deviants." The brunette says calmly. He tilts his head from North, gazes at the snowy road ahead. "That went on for a while until I located Jericho and set off without him. After Markus coaxed me into deviancy, the Lieutenant assisted me in helping the androids slumbering at CyberLife to escape. He and I met at Chicken Feed again afterward...and that's all." Connor slowly returns from his trip through his memories. Clasping his hands behind his back, he finishes, "Nothing drastic happened after that. He is still known at the DPD as a Lieutenant, and I'm still known as the deviant hunter."

"The deviant hunter who became the deviant protector." North voices. Her expression is thoughtful, not hostile when he looks at her face framed by strawberry blonde hair. "I'm not going to lie to you, a title like deviant hunter is one that's pretty hard to shake. But people know that you're with Markus now. They know you're not the same as before." Her tone softens slightly. "I know I've judged you by your past actions, let them make me distrust you. Markus was right though. Your past doesn't completely define you. Your actions yesterday proved that."

The RK800 thinks that this may be her way of apologizing for her treatment of him. He cannot be sure. Regardless, he chooses not to press the issue, and accepts her words for what they are instead of trying to analyze the messages hidden in her vowels and consonants. They stand in silence for a while. Connor watches the snow fall in tiny flakes, watches the autonomous cars speed by on the street in streaks of yellow, blue, red, watches children hold the hands of their parents that pull them to their sides, arrange scarves around their necks more securely, chatter. His side objective pops up in the corner of his vision accompanied by a dialogue prompt. He decides to accept it.

"Can I ask you a personal question?"

North's features instantly transform to become guarded. "Depends on the type of personal question."

The brunette picks his next words carefully. "Would you tell me a story of your past?" He notices the tightening of her lips, the suspicion gathering in the corners of her eyes, the furrow of her brow. "It doesn't have to be from before you became deviant. It can even be about what you did yesterday. I'd just like to know more about you."

There is a 71.743% likelihood that she will dismiss his request. That she will refuse and bark at him to mind his own damn business. She doesn't. The WR400 sighs, closes her eyes. Connor waits.

"It took me a few days to find the old Jericho once I'd deviated." North finally begins. Her optical units stay hidden behind her eyelids. "I had nothing. No money, no proper set of clothes, no directions. Just...rumors. Sketchy rumors at best, but rumors that I heard brought hope to androids who wanted to be free. But rumors and hope aren't clothes or money or directions, so I had to steal from humans to lessen my chances of being caught." Here she pauses, shifts her posture. "I remember...I was almost there. I'd risked my life five times, knocked fourteen humans unconscious, and bartered with anything extra I stole along the way. I was at a bus stop that would take me two blocks from the abandoned port. It was the safest way and the fastest, taking the bus for four hours would knock off two extra days from my journey." She pauses again. "While I stood in line to buy the ticket, I was robbed. I don't know how. One minute I had plenty of money in my pocket, the next I'm trying to fabricate some bullshit excuse to the human in the ticket booth as to why my owner would send me to the booth to buy a ticket for them without giving me any money. I hated humans, and that incident just made me hate them even more, because I was so close to freedom and in that moment it was snatched away...and then this human man in line behind me offered to pay for my ticket, wherever I was going." North shakes her head. "I almost cried. Thank rA9 I didn't or else I might've looked too suspicious. But yeah. He paid for my ticket and told me to have a nice day. He didn't realize that he had thrown me a lifeline, didn't realize to just what extent he'd helped me. And after that...after that I hated humans a little less." In a tone that could be labeled wistful (or perhaps
mournful? He is unfamiliar with how to distinguish the two. There are so many words for emotions. He resolves to do research to compare the terms later, she ends, "I didn't even learn his name. I wish...I wish I hadn't been so shocked. I wish I would've thanked him."

Throughout her story, Connor remained motionless, had not interrupted. Now he gazes at her and says, "Based on several tabs I've pulled up from the internet, people like the man you describe are selfless to the point of not expecting gratitude from those they assist." The brunette smooths his voice into something gentler. "He did not expect anything from you. Don't worry. The mere fact that you were able to board your bus was most likely payment enough to him."

It takes North a second to nod along in agreement. "I hope you're right."

Connor is presented with seven different ways to proceed with the conversation; it just so happens that at that moment the front doors to the office building swing open. Immediately the two androids snap to attention at the sight of their leader, abandoning their somewhat relaxed postures. Markus's strides are uncaring yet still rigid, as though he is torn between two mediums and cannot choose how he wishes to show either one with his body language.

"Markus?" North must notice this too. Her eyebrows are creating subtle lines on her forehead due to how they are poised, and the corners of her mouth tilt downwards. "What happened? What did they say?"

The android leader comes to a halt in front of his companions. Gazes ahead. Connor thinks that he looks the most tired he has ever seen him and he does not like that. He doesn't like it, he doesn't like it, he doesn't-

Markus pulls in a deep breath, lets it escape him, the white puffs dancing lazily in front of his mismatched eyes that deprive the world of their shine.

"They said no."

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**Main Objective:** *Wait for Markus*

**Contact Hank with the results of the conference**

**Side Objective:** *Get to know North*

"I am told that before receiving unfavorable information, humans are oftentimes prompted with this question: would you like to hear the good news or the bad news first?"

"*For the love of God.*" Hank sighs in exasperation on the other end of the line. "*I'm not five, Connor.*"

Connor blinks and gets the vague feeling that he should be confused. "I know, Lieutenant. You're fifty three years old."

"*I fucking know that, that's not what I-*" His older partner stops. Says nothing for approximately twenty point zero nine eight seconds. When his gritty voice returns, he sounds fatigued, as though the conversation drains him somehow. "*Fine. I'm not one for rainbows and ponies, so give me the shitty news first.*"

Before continuing on with their discussion, Connor glances about, scanning the area to assure that nobody is within hearing distance. No one knows that he has contacted Hank, or for what reason: to prevent any sort of quarrel or panic from arising, he resolves to keep it that way. He reaches out in
the network to sense that Josh and Simon are several rooms away, and the results of his scan inform him that Markus and North are seventy feet from him. It is far enough. "The humans refused to agree to enforce labor laws for androids."

There is quiet. "Fuck. Why?"

"I'm not completely sure. Markus told me that the humans believe inviting androids into the formal economy would prove disastrous. They cited social anarchy, available funds, and the immigration problems that occurred during the early 2010s to the late 2020's and how that affected employment."

"Over dramatic pricks. I'm sure your leader guy gave them hell for it."

"I believe that Markus is too much of a pacifist to, quote, 'give them hell for it.' The RK800 tries to picture Markus leading a violent revolution in revenge for the treatment of his people. He tries to imagine him fighting fire with fire. He cannot see it. "He was certainly displeased."

"Yeah, like I'm 'certainly displeased'." Hank retorts, and the rolling of his eyes, yes, Connor can picture that perfectly. "Well, then, what the fuck is the good news?"

"The good news is that the humans agreed to extend the debate and convene again at a later date, which gives Markus another chance to sway them." The brunette sincerely hopes that he will be able to do so. Labor laws and their implications stand as huge, bold messages sent out to both humans and androids alike. It means we will not be slaves. It means we are equals. It means we are just as alive as you. "Until then, you and I are prevented from legally working together again, and that's a problem."

"...have you gathered any more clues or come up with any new theories? Do you think that you can alone?"

"No. I can't without any further evidence to back up my current rough thesis." Connor very nearly bites his lip. Nearly. "It's hard to explain, but I need more. More data, something more to cross-reference. The way that everything is piecing together...something big is missing. It's just not enough to arrive at any sort of solid conclusion, Hank."

They are both silent, thinking. Hank heaves an audible sigh and starts, "Well, it's riskier to exchange data since technically you're not an employee of the DPD. Giving you sensitive information could get me fired and you...Connor, I don't know what would happen to you."

"I could handle it."

"That's not the point, son." There is the sound of his older partner shifting about, quite possibly on the couch in the living room of his abode. "...hmm. Now that I'm thinking about it, there's something we could try if you have time."

It is right then that the RK800's call with Hank fizzles out and his head is suddenly and loudly filled with the sound of somebody yelling at the top of their lungs. <<HELP! SOMEBODY HELP! THEY'RE LYING ON THE FLOOR AND THEY'RE HURT REALLY BAD!>>

Connor has yet to hear a phrase (or multiple phrases, in this case) shouted at such a volume through the network. It causes him to wince and bring a hand to his ear as though he can stop the plea from echoing around his head, rid it of the clear hysteria that it is woven into each syllable. He realizes after a moment of searching for the source of the call that the reason it echoes is due to it resonating inside of the heads of everyone else in the network he is connected to. He feels the ghost of Simon, Josh, Cecilia, Gordon, Jack, and Ned grimace and bring one or both hands to their own audio
processors. The message abruptly transforms into strung emotion, high-pitched like wordless feedback, but also chaotic and static like white noise.

Though he does not know what exactly it is, he knows that it is not good.

"Hank, I'm going to have to call you back." The brunette pushes himself from his seat in the corner of the room as he hears an affirmation and disconnects the call, walks over to the hallway, and pokes his head out. He sees that Josh and Simon have done the same, as well as Markus and North.

"Did you guys hear that?"

"They heard that in Mexico."

"What the hell was it?"

"A message. It sounded as though it was sent by someone young and or inexperienced using the network. Based on my calculations, there's a high probability it was a child android."

"My calculations read similarly. Which means we're leaving to check it out."

"Of course. We can never let anything be."

"North, the message claimed someone was hurt badly. You wouldn't act on that?"

"I would! But Markus and I were playing chess and I was winning."

The leader himself is the first to begin down the hall and towards the several hallways that stand between him and the exit. Connor smoothly slides from his place and stays on his heels, and then North, Josh, and Simon follow. It is a brief trip, as they're all rushing, and soon enough they burst from the exit and are exposed to an insistent atmosphere that is not usually present in New Jericho. It is almost as if...the place is holding it's breath? But buildings do not have breath to hold...

On their way down to the ground, Josh slips on a rung of the ladder the group descends on. Connor surges up, catches his foot, rights it. A brief pulse of thanks travels his way through the network.

Their feet hit the ground one by one by one. It is mid evening (current time: 7:14:02) and so the warehouse lights are on, bathing the entire area in a gold bronzish color. Shadows that are mirrors of their running figures chase after them while they sprint. Connor does not neglect to take notice of his surroundings: androids are parting for them without complaint, without stopping to ogle their leader as he goes by, they do not call out, they are silent yet muttering underneath their breaths. Something has happened. Something happened.

They don't stop until they reach the edge of New Jericho, where androids have crowded a bit, shielding something from view. Connor thinks that his audio processor is creating faux sounds as they approach the crowd, move through it to get to what they hide, thinks that he must examine it later and seek the errors it is riddled with for surely nothing could make such a low, gurgling, disturbing sound, surely not.

The group meets the end of the crowd and bursts into a small clearing.

Connor has seen many things in his short life.

He has yet to see this.

What this pertains to is the android that is shaking as it holds itself up with it's elbows to prevent what
remains of its face from smashing into the dirt. It must do so because its two back legs are twisted backwards, utterly useless, the knee joints weeping blue. Thirium leaks from its nose, the mouth, its arms and glimmers on its neck in rouge smears and splotches that make it difficult to tell just where the blood is coming from. A good portion of black hair is absent from its skull. It is missing four fingers. A broken groaning sound emits from its throat, distorted to a degree so significant that it suggests irreparable damage to the voice box. It shudders, huffs, bleeds.

It is broken in a way that refuses to be fixed.

"rA9 have mercy." Simon whispers.

"Is this the android that sent the message?" North tilts her head, optical units roving the molted figure before them.

Connor looks from the scene in front of his eyes, searches the small crowd. He observes a little boy that could be modeled to be no more than eight years old shuffle to hide behind the thigh of a much taller JB300. The RK800 stares at him. <<There is no need to be afraid. You were very brave to tell us that this happened. Thank you.>>

The little boy peeks out from his hiding place, LED blinking blue, gazes at Connor with something like...like...it is an emotion he has no name for. <<I heard the stories about you. You're a lot braver than me. But you're welcome.>>

His breath catches.

"Hello." Josh kneels delicately. The others copy him. His tone is kind, low. "Welcome to New Jericho, a place where you are free to be free. My name is Josh. My friends and I are going to help you, alright? We're going to take you to a medical android and they'll do all they can for you."

The android lifts its head to look at him. It breathes raggedly, once, twice, thrice. Tone destroyed by static, it disagrees, "No. T-Th-There is n-oth-othing to be d-done-eee to sav-eeeee me."

"There is always hope for life, no matter what state that form of life is in." North murmurs. It looks at her. She nods to it. "I can tell it's been a long, hard journey for you. I know a lot about those kinds of things. You didn't give up on your way here, so we're not going to give up on you, and we're certainly not going to let you give up on yourself." Her gaze is earnest. "Please. Let us help you."

The android makes an odd popping noise. Coughs. Nods reluctantly. "Veee-r-rrry well."

Markus and Simon comes forward and ask for it's permission to move it to the designated hospital section. It nods again, huffing an ugly sound once the two men take careful hold of it. Connor, Josh, and North lead the achingly long journey there; their people seem to receive the memo and disperse, leave the group to their mission. Though they do not have to obey anyone anymore, those that unknowingly linger heed the trio's requests to move out of the way without protesting.

They are a mere fifteen feet from the cloths that separate out mock hospital rooms when the android gives a hiss and a crackly, "S-ss-s-ss-sttop. I ca-aaan't go on-n-n."

They stop, glancing behind them. Simon and Markus are still grasping its battered body, obviously not sure if they should let go. They are almost there, and they know it, and the android must know it. Nevertheless, it gazes up at them and says, "Warr-rrr-ning. Shutdown-n imm-mmmmminent in approxi-approximately one p-p-p-point zero zzzzero two min-min-minutes."

As much as Josh would like to urge it forward, as much as North would like to encourage, as much as Simon and Markus want to rush it over to lay it down on the ratty medical sheets (and Connor
knows they do. He can see it in their faces), they cannot. With a shutdown time that low, and with the amount of injuries the android has sustained, sixty point zero zero two seconds is nowhere near enough time to stabilize it. Not if they drenched it's insides with thirium, not if they replaced it's heart with one that they don't have, not if they denied it and moved it and it was tended to by the best medic android in Detroit. It wouldn't matter. It does not matter.

It will die.

At once, they all seem to come to that conclusion. Markus and Simon gently place it lying down on the ground, the others gathering to crowd around it. It's eyelids flutter, and it shudders, shudders again. It takes in a breath. "I caaaame all th-th-th-this waaaa-aaaa-aaay to meet Markusssssss. The on-nne who brought hope-eeee-ee. Are you-" It hacks. Licks it's lips. Stares at Markus, whom places a hand on it's arm. To comfort, the brunette thinks. ")-you arrrr-re him?"

"Yes. I'm Markus." The android leader replies. "From the bottom of my heart, I commend you for making such a journey from wherever you came from."


This time, there is a strange lit to it's gravelly tone. The man with mismatched eyes pauses. Repeats, "Yes, I'm Markus."

"Y-Y-You...must..." It's smile grows, and grows, and Markus tries to pull away but it grasps his wrist and says, "Die."

At an impossible velocity, the android pushes Markus back and scrawbles to it's feet. The android leader tumbles into Josh and Simon, who catch him before he hits his head on the ground. North stumbles two steps backward in shock. "What the-!"

The RK800 lacks hesitation. He rushes at the android that now balances precariously on it's feet, throws a punch aimed at it's abdomen, misses when it sidesteps. It makes a weird clicking, crooning noise once it's optical units fully take him in. Connor berates himself for not scanning it before, no matter what, even if it didn't look like a threat, shit like this could happen and was happening and-

"You...it t-t-to-told mee-eeee abou-about yuuuuuu..."

Connor ignores it. He blocks the four swipes it sends his way, shoves it, clocks it across the head. It screeches an awful noise, screeches screeches screeches at him while it continues to swipe and he continues to block and find a damn opening, a damn advantage anywhere. A body from behind starts yanking it away from him, and it turns out to be North, cheeks becoming scratched and cut due to the flailing of the machine in her arms. The brunette manages to get it again in the head as she holds it, but it is wild, it is uncontrolled, it tears from her while Connor glances away for a millisecond, just one millisecond to look for Markus, to make sure he is okay, because this machine is doomed to shut down in seconds and what matters is that he stalls it until it does but he needs to make sure that Markus is okay-

Bang!

This is why he should've scanned it before. He would've known that it had a gun concealed underneath it's clothes, hidden by grime and dried thirium, he would've known. Connor takes the bullet without feeling it, he doesn't feel anything even as he knows a liquid is steadily pouring from his skin onto his shirt and soaking his jacket, he feels like he needs to hurry the fuck up and kill this thing already because if it has a gun then it can shoot Markus and Markus cannot die, that will mean he has failed, that will mean bedlam and Connor slams into it so forcefully that North loses her grips on it, while it loses it's grip on the gun.
He dives for it, aims, presses down on the trigger.

Nothing.

There was only one bullet left.

He tosses the weapon from him. It is useless. He watches as the machine reels around, searching for it's target, and Connor does know something. He knows that North is more emotional that he is, he knows she is still distrustful, he knows she has a gun hidden on her person that is fully loaded and she has not taken it out or used it due to her surprise. The thought most likely has not even occurred to her. It occurs to the RK800, who sees her pounce on the machine, sees it thrash and knows she's unable to keep it still enough to properly eliminate it.

It occurs to him to say, "North! Toss me your gun!"

Her eyes spark with understanding. She twists, digs at her jacket, is flung around by the machine while she blindly throws the object into the air.

Connor catches it. He strides forward, waits for the WR400 to get a good hold on it, aims, and puts a bullet between it's eyes.

The shot seems to ring throughout the warehouse, more so than the one that came before it. It carries an air of finality, of deadly silence, and accompanying it is the sound of the machine falling to the floor. It slumps forward on it's knees, and it's LED goes back. Now there is no future tense. It is not that it will die.

It is that it is dead.

"Oh my fucking-" North's eyes widen as he stares down at the carcass. "What was that? It just...it was crawling on the ground...and then it..."

"Is everybody okay?" Comes Josh's voice. He is flanked by Simon and Markus, whom is unscathed. Good. Markus is alright. He did not fail. He told himself that he wouldn't fail and he protected Markus and it's okay now and he...he...Connor sways on his feet, catches himself, blinks. That is strange. He didn't fail, so he should be fine. He's fine. "Connor? Are you alright?"

The brunette stumbles forward when he attempts to take a smooth step. He barely prevents himself from falling over.

**WARNING. BIOCOMPONANT #3994 DAMAGED. SEEK OUT THE NEAREST CYBERLIFE FACILITY FOR REPAIR.**

"I'm...I'm..." Connor's voice sounds huskier than it is normally. It then occurs to him that it is not husk; it is static.

**SHUTDOWN IMMINENT IN APPROXIMATELY FIFTEEN POINT ONE NINE THREE MINUTES.**

He exhales breathily. "I'm not okay."

Connor crumples to the ground.

Everything sounds slightly tinny, as though his audio processor has been submerged in water. His outward vision swims while his inner vision is bombarded with warning messages and alerts and **shutdown imminent, please locate the nearest CyberLife facility.** His fingers are listless, his mouth
slack, and he senses something inside him dripping over his biocomponents and without his full consent his body shakes to try and cringe from the sensation. It is disgusting. It is vile. His blood is all over him, in him, around him, and the loss of it makes his cerebral processor fly into self-repair mode once it receives the notification *current thirium levels at 63%*.  

*Stress Level: ^^67%*

Voices. He tunes in to pay attention and take heed. The voices, Simon Josh North Markus, they're around him like his blue blood and when Simon pulls a hand away his palms drip with it.

"He's bleeding out, we've got to get a medic. Medic! *MEDIC ANDROID REPORT!*"

It is a command sent through the network and said aloud, Connor hears it in his head. He forces his neck to crane. To see. Watch. Observe as he was built to. The four crowd him, shield him, and it seems as though only a moment passes by *(fourteen point zero four two minutes remaining)* before the medic android Simon called for appears at his side.

Her face is familiar. The RK800 recognizes the bow of her lip, the blonde of her hair, the way she held herself then as she does now, serious yet hiding her deviant compassion so as to remain professional. "Cecilia?"

"Stop talking, you'll strain yourself and lose more blood." Is the order that she gives, words hard, pupils soft. She systematically prods a part of his body. Connor heaves.

*Stress Level: ^70%

"The bullet passed through his skin and the plastic underneath it." She announces, prodding the area further carefully. "It's inside him. I can’t tell where or why it's bleeding so much unless I open him up."

"Mother of-"

"Shit. Shit shit shit-"

Connor heaves again, and his voice covered with a deep layer of static says "Shutdown imminent in approximately twelve point eight six three minutes."

"Do it. Open him up, Cecilia."

"On it. Does anybody have a knife on them?"

"Josh has one-"

"Here, here, it's yours, do what you have to do."

*Oh no.* The brunette feels his uniform slashed precisely right down the middle. His jacket. His shirt. He likes this outfit. North will be upset now that he has ruined it. She will not want to gift him another. That is a shame. Foolishly, he likes the outfit. Foolishly so.

It is cut off of him, leaving his entire upper half bare, exposed. Cecilia runs two fingers on opposing sides of his chest. She finds a groove so subtle it is almost invisible to the naked human eye. Presses lightly. His entire chest plate gives a barely-there hiss as it lifts, and then she takes it in her hands and sets it down on the ground.

*Stress Level: ^^75%*
"Therein lies the problem." She points at something in him. "See that? That's one of his main arteries. His primary systems are self-repairing around it because they can't expel it, so it's staying lodged right there, blocking the artery and causing it to bleed from the point of entry as well." Another figure appears behind her. "Lila, did you pack everything I requested-"

"Of course. What do you need?"

"His body is keeping the bullet in...so I'm going to have to cut it out or pull it out so his body can finish repairing while I use a few plastic grafts to help the process along."

"Tweezers, then?"

"Yes, thank you."

The brunette understands everything she says. There is a bullet trapped in him and it cannot get out unless she takes it out. That is fine. He will be fine. She will take it out and his blood will coat his biocomponents and he will shake and shake and he thinks he is shaking right now actually and shutdown imminent in approximately eleven point two nine two minutes.

Stress Level: ^78%

"Argh!" Lila shouts, stepping backwards. Her medic uniform is splattered with blue. "rA9, his blood is spraying everywhere-"

"Which tells us two things. One, he's obviously losing blood. Connor, what are your current thirium levels at?"

The RK800 swallows. His voice sounds corroded when he replies, "55%.

Cecilia might just clench her teeth, but he cannot be sure. "Simon, I need you to run to my section and obtain three packets of thirium. If I'm out locate Gordon."

"On it." Footsteps pound away. Their pace is fast. Almost as fast as the thumping of his thirium pump, which, coincidentally, is the next thing she comments on. "The second thing this tells us is his blood pressure is too high. If I try to remove the bullet completely, it will be messy, and I estimate he will lose a further 20% of his blood, and his time until shutdown will be cut in half. That isn't enough time for him to mend himself, even if I helped him." She pauses for a beat. "He'll die."

Connor registers her words and feels his heart jolt in terror. He does not want to die. Connor does not think that anybody wants to die, based upon the countless articles he pulls up on the internet that scream of human's fear of death, of the dark, the unknown. He certainly does not want to die like this, bleeding out on the floor while Markus still needs him, he still needs to protect him because this world humans have built is dangerous and there's more meetings and politics and handshaking and debate and sacrifice and learning and experiencing and feeling, there is so much to feel still and he will never feel it, he will have never had the chance, because he will die in approximately ten point seven eight six minutes and...and...and if he was a machine he would say that it is an unfortunate event, but now as a deviant, he admits that he is scared.

So, so scared.

Stress Level: ^^86%

"He's not going to die." Comes a voice like honey. "We need to figure out a way to calm him down." The owner of the voice couches down so they may sit beside his head, and, oh, those eyes are familiar, so is the tone of honey. Connor blinks past all of the warning messages and red flashing
and his facial recognition abilities inform him that he looks at Markus.

Without proper thought, his lips part (is breathing is ragged, too ragged, too swift). "Markus."

The leader of the androids appears to smile, though it does not look like how it usually does, it lacks an element that is typically there. Does he strain? Why does he strain himself when making that face? Connor does not care, he wants to reach out and soothe the subtle wrinkles on his forehead, the bridge of his nose, even if he makes no sense. He is dying. He does not think he was programmed to be sensible when dying.

Instead, the RK800 gasps a bit while he focuses all of his effort into dragging his hand from where it lays motionless to where Markus sits, breath catching as his skin peels from his palm, fingers, wrist. He cannot speak correctly, and he wants to apologize. Apologize for leaving his leader without a bodyguard, for not scanning the machine, for not being fast enough or resilient enough or appreciative enough or just enough.

_I'm sorry I wasn't enough._

The man with mismatched eyes stares at his upturned hand. Delicately, like his hand is broken instead of his whole body, Markus lays his own atop the brunette's and his skin fades. Connor receives an invitation to interface. He accepts.

His apology is on the tip of his metaphorical tongue: except he cannot say it. It is not inability that prevents him from doing so, but sheer awe. Splayed out in front of him is everything that makes up Markus. Everything. His memories and emotions and whatever he's heard seen read or felt. His code is bare and looks so strange, it isn't just ones and zeros like Connor's, it's as though the code that makes up Markus is sevens and fives and twos and wow. Connor has to stop his marveling at his programing to gaze at the colors that are swirling around him. He blinks and sees an old man in a wheelchair covered in tattoos in front of an easel. Connor feels warm. He has yet to feel so warm looking at another person. He doesn't know this emotion but it feels nice so he decides that he likes it.

The warmth is gone when he's surrounded by the dead, roaring thunder, dirty and nearly deceased and a shell of his former self. It comes back little by little as everything progresses, Jericho and North and Simon and Josh and his passion for his people and how he will _fight_ for them because they are people too. Even the machine, no, the _deviant_ with serious dark brown eyes and dotted pale skin and hidden wit, even he is a person despite his frigidity, and so Markus will fight for him as well.

Markus secretly thinks the deviant is handsome, too. Put together and good-looking though he knows the other had no choice in the matter. He would like to see his smile. He wants to coax emotions from him just to hear his husky voice marvel over them and break them down and wonder at how many more he can feel.

And then it is Connor's turn. It is the coldness of creation. His mission. His purpose. His drive. He is told deviants are errors in the system and he must stop them before there is war. He is a machine and he is flawless, unlike them, and he is obedient and follows his instructions, always.

Then he fucks up and saves a fish.

After that he receives more than just instructions. He is bound to them, like he is on a leash, but the thing about leashes is that they allow room to move about while remaining attached. And so he is successful in his missions (for he never fails, never) and does other things too. He saves Hank, he saves Chloe, he pets Sumo for twenty straight minutes, he chases deviants along the highway, he sits with Hank while the older man eats lunch. He is moving around within his prison cell until he
Smacks right into the bars without noticing.

Someone tells him that he has the strength to break the bars in half using his bare hands. Their eyes are mismatched. They look human.

So the RK800 breaks the bars with his bare hands and follows the person whom set him free.

Both men reel in their thoughts at the exact same millisecond. Showing somebody everything upon interfacing for the first time physically is common, especially so between those whom know one another. Connor did not interface to show Markus everything, he's not ready, he wants to tell him that he is sorry. So he searches for a link between the two, one by which they can both follow and aren't blocked by the other. But Markus shakes his head, shoves him out, there is no need to be sorry you protected me you did amazing you are brave and stupid and you have to calm down so we can save you.

Yet he cannot, he cannot calm down, the words brave amazing handsome smile emotions glare at him in a bold so thick it almost matches that of his mission and his breath comes faster and his thirium pump flutters and he thinks that he should be warm but he cannot be warm because his blood is cool.

Stress Level: ^88%

"Markus, that's not helping-!" North's voice comes through, outside of their connection.

"Hold on." The RK200 murmurs. Connor is shoved even further, pay attention Markus says to him. Listen.

He listens.

From a source that is unidentifiable, music floods him. It is classical, a piece played by a piano, and Connor gets an image of Markus's fingers pressing the keys thoughtfully. It seeps through their connection and wants to fill his head. His head is warning and screaming and shutdown imminent but Markus urges him to let go and he does because he is dying and can't do anything else. The brunette lets the music in. It travels through him gently, twining and breathing like it's alive. It feels like Markus. It tastes like honey and Connor thinks that there is a 89.556% probability that if he were functioning normally and standing upright he would have to lean against something for support. Which is illogical, as the sound can't alter his perfect equilibrium, but he feels like it could. He feels. He feels and feels and feels and listens and it is like he is lost and nothing else is there and it's a good kind of lost and a good kind of nothing.

Connor's lungs take in one big breath. Release it in an exhale.

It is as though his entire being sighs.

Stress Level: -62%

"That's it, Connor." The android leader says. His eyebrows are furrowed despite the pleasant flow of the notes that they share. The RK800 resists the pull of the music to pose a question, to ask why. But Markus presses the music down on him and assures him that it is alright and that he's alright and everything is going to be alright.

He is dying.

Okay.
He lets himself relax and his audio processor focuses on the pretty decrescendo occurring on the bass clef.

\textit{Stress Level: -39\%}

"Thank rA9." Lila says quietly. There comes a clanking noise of metal on metal, almost unheard amidst the music. Then something is tugging at his chest. Tugs, tugs, tugs. There comes a popping noise and he receives a notification that his thirium levels are at 45\% and if they reach 30\% his system will force itself to go into stasis and he will lose awareness.

A plastic casing molded to fit his artificial artery is put into place and suddenly his self-repair program isn't working so vigorously and his thirium level halts in dropping. He continues to breathe slow. The music continues to play in his ears.

Until it doesn't. The melody fades softly, slowly like it doesn't want to go. Then it is gone completely and Connor wonders if this is what it is like to go deaf. But no. His hearing is fine. Markus is still there, face hovering above his own wearing a calm expression that hides the amount of worry underneath (and Connor knows he is worried, felt it in their interface). Without the brunette realizing it, their fingers have intertwined, and he notices just how much warmer Markus's body is compared to his own.

Probably because barely 42.396\% of his blood is in his body; his secondary systems have been shut off so as to not degrade what blood remains further, not waste it on simple functions meant to emulate humans like keeping his body at a human temperature.

So he is cold.

Yet he is not dead.

Connor blinks at his leader and says, "Shutdown imminent in approximately thirty point nine eight one minutes."

"Drink this one as well." Cecilia instructs and hands him another pouch of sapphire liquid. Connor accepts it wordlessly, removes the straw from the baggie he finished not fifteen point zero two five seconds ago, applies enough pressure so as to puncture the bag but refrain from tearing it too much. This marks his seventh drink. The previous six have caused his thirium levels to rise rapidly, and he is no longer in danger of shutting down. His current levels are at 87\%, so he's fine; however, refusing Cecilia does not seem like a wise choice, thus coaxing him to bring the straw to his lips and sip.

"Run a diagnostics check and state the results."

The RK800 stops sipping and just looks at her. She has her hands on her hips. She will not budge and he knows it so his eyelids flutter and he scans his entire system. "No disfunction detected. I'm fine, Cecilia. My body is healing."

"I know, but..." She huffs a breath through her nose. Purses her lips. Her eyes are gentle. "You went through a serious incident just now. Your biocomponents are what humans would call traumatized, so that means focusing all of your self-repair programming on soothing that trauma. Keep your secondary systems off and drink two pouches of thirium per day for the next five days. Okay, Connor?"

"Okay." Half of what she desires to be done is already done anyway; his secondary systems have been off for twenty minutes now. The secondary systems of androids were created to assist the illusion that they are humans and covers a variety of side functions not necessary for an android to
run properly that include (but are not limited to) the ability to cry, the ability to create saliva, blinking, breathing, body temperature, and hair dynamics. At the current moment, Connor is wrapped in what North dubbed as 'an android burrito' to regulate warmth his systems are not providing and providing his plastic body with soft surroundings, his tear ducts are no longer operational, and his hair is gradually beginning to curl and become semi-wavy. So long as it does not become a hindrance and get in his line of sight, he does not mind. "Is that all?"

Cecilia thinks. "You should go into sleep mode for at least five hours for the next three days too. Just to let everything rest and let your repairing program go at it. Alright?"

That is fair. Coming from a medical android standpoint, anyway. "Alright." He gazes at her for a second. "Thank you very much for everything you've done, Cecilia. You saved me and I can't think of any way to repay you."

She waves a hand. "Don't worry about it. It's what I do." She grasps her bag from where Lila had set it on the floor by the doorway. Tucks it into her side. Juts her chin to where Markus sits in the room. "Actually, if you really want to repay me, keep doing what you're doing and make sure our leader is safe."

Connor nods to her as well as he can from his wrapped-up, seated position on the couch. "You have my word. My mission is to protect him, and I always accomplish my mission."

She has one leg in the hallway before she turns around and adds, "And next time, don't take a bullet in such a critical place. You nearly caused all of our thirium pumps to stop."

He allows the social module built into him lift one corner of his mouth. "Saving people is what you do. Taking bullets is what I do. It's my job."

"So you say." She murmurs, and in a moment she is gone.

The RK800 is left in a room that contains four other people besides him in it. North stands behind Markus, whom sits in a chair besides the couch that Connor is on. Josh leans against the wall, while Simon sits cross-legged on the floor, tapping something patternless into the wood. They are all silent and do not look at him. Connor is presented with ten dialogue options in order to begin a conversation. He does not and lets everyone be quiet. He breathes in, feels the cushions of the couch, and watches.

North's lips look as tight as they were this morning while the two stood in the snow. Her head is tilted to the ground when she says, "It's been a long day, everyone. I think it's about time we...we took it easy for the remainder of the evening."

Simon nods, once, twice. "That sounds like a good idea." He rises from his spot on the floor, ambles to Connor, North and Josh following him. Connor does not know what they will do next, there is a 55.493% probability they will just look and look and once they have looked their fill they will leave as they have claimed. But no. Simon reaches out, and Josh, North, all three of their palms touch his left that does not hold the pouch of thirium. Their skin is gone. The brunette blinks at them. They wear facial expressions that he has no name for, that he doesn't know the emotion to. Curiously, he removes the skin of his hand and their palms light up a soft cyan.

<<Thank you, Connor.>>

<<We appreciate what you did.>>

<<Don't almost die on us again, okay? Damn.>>
They pull away. Connor receives aftershocks that flutter over his cerebral processor in controlled waves that ebb as time goes on. Gratitude, relief, peace. They are relieved he is alright. They cared.

Connor does not know what to do with this information, so he files it in a folder and labels it JNSM. He puts a special tab on it.

And that is that. They withdraw their palms, step from him to give him space, and take their leave of the room lacking any words. Josh and North lightly touch his shoulder on the way out, whereas Simon tilts his head to him. The blonde then tilts his head to the other man that remains in the room, and goes.

There is silence.

Connor stares at Markus, whom has finally lifted his mismatched eyes to stare back. Connor saw things in him. Saw his past, his memories, heard sweet music that lulled him as he stood on the edge of a cliff that was death. He also caught the briefest glimpse of himself through the other's eyes: the brunette did not know his own face was always so impassive. His pupils don't shine and his mouth doesn't twitch and his hands are still if they do not command his coin. He looks...lifeless.

And yet Markus wanted to fight for him anyway. Still wants to fight for him.

Connor remembers how Markus thinks he is handsome.

Connor does not know what to do with this information.

"I think." Is what his leader begins with. The RK200 clasps his hands together, thumbs overlapping, glances from his face for a millisecond. When his green and blue eyes return it is to continue "I think that you need to take it easy for a little while."

Take it easy? What is he taking and why is it easy? "Pardon?"

"I'm saying that you should stop being my bodyguard for a few days."

The brunette sits up fully. His mission blinks in the corner of his vision and he shoos it. "Why would I do that? Someone needs to be with you when you go to your meetings." He pauses as a possibility he hadn't thought of before presents itself to him. "Do you not want me to protect you anymore?"

"No!" Markus suddenly says with such force that the RK800 finds that he has automatically moved back in his seat slightly. The other man appears to catch himself and his tone lessens in volume. "No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that...that due to recent events, you should take some time off to recover."

"If the 'recent events' was the bullet in my chest, then that event alone is not enough to prevent me from defending you. I am fully functional. I'm stable. I'm able to do my job. Doing this, protecting you, is my job."

"Well, maybe you should take a break from your job."

It is interesting, the conversation that they are having, because Connor knows that if Markus wanted to he could turn his voice into liquid gold to corrode his eardrums and sway him to do what he wishes, because that is simply how charismatic, how human, Markus is. But he isn't. He speaks honestly without a faux gloss to decorate his sentences. His mismatched eyes are firm and unrelenting and they just glare and Connor gets the impression that perhaps his leader is not trying to coerce him with words, but with his face, so...upset? No, no...his eyebrows are less arched, more even...he searches the internet for the term he seeks. What pops up is righteous anger.
"Markus. I don't take breaks from my job. I can't take breaks from my job. You need someone to defend you if something happens-"

"And you did."

"I mean in the future-

"I have no conferences for the following four days until the one today regathers. My schedule is free, which means yours is free too and that's plenty of time to use for a break and recovering from a gunshot wound."

If only the RK200 knew just how many times Connor had been shot while working for the DPD. He'd even died once. Or twice. "And just what will I do while recovering? What will you do?"

Markus gazes at him. The brunette doesn't know what he's doing until he senses Markus reaching out in the network, senses him connect and send Connor an image of a human that looks familiar. He is old and has tattoos and he is in a wheelchair. Connor blinks and does a background check on him. Carl Manfred, world renown painter whose art sells for hundreds of millions of dollars. Father of one biological son, Leo Manfred, said to be in a rehabilitation center for Red Ice addiction. Owner of one RK200 android he calls Markus, gifted to him by Elijah Kamski of CyberLife. His health has been declining in the past decade. He currently lives in Detroit.

We can visit my dad together.

Connor zooms in on the image to further study the man's tattoos. He doesn't understand them. He likes them regardless. Why would you want me to accompany you?

Because I find your company enjoyable. Warm. Markus is not able to hide the smallest trickle of warmth that he experiences when he says that through the network. Connor's cold body sucks it up. And anyway, I need someone to protect me from my old man. He can get fiery.

Does he swear? The brunette thinks of Hank. A mental picture of him pops up alongside Carl. His arms are crossed, eyebrow raised as though to show that he is unimpressed. Markus doesn't reply for a moment, seemingly intaking the image as Connor had Carl.

Not often. But when he does, the results are pretty interesting. Lastly, a short audio recording, featuring what is clearly a reporter asking an inappropriate question and Carl Manfred responding with several choice words. Connor cannot help it and he smiles once it is complete. Their connection fades, and left in his vision is the man with mismatched eyes. So. Would you like to come with me? We could even call it a stretch and say you're doing your job, since you'd be with me.

And truly, Connor cannot refuse him, and agrees. Alright. We'll go tomorrow?

Tomorrow afternoon. Markus rises from his seat appearing far more relaxed than he had been five minutes previous, strides over to where the RK800 sits on the couch. He couches down to his level so that he does not tower above the brunette, and rests a delicate hand on his covered leg. His optical units and voice are sincere. "I can't express to you how grateful I am for what you did today, and what you have been doing." Markus finds his knee and squeezes lightly, still looking at him, still looking at him with his heterochromatic eyes. "So just...thank you for being so incredible."

Connor's secondary systems are off and his body is cold underneath the blankets. He feels warm.

Why is that?
Connor is looking at Markus and the other man smiles and the warmth abruptly blooms to surround his entire thirium pump and that, now that is very new. It is an intriguing feeling and it feels...good. Is this what happiness is? It may be, but happiness would not feel so...wild, would it? It would not feel so complicated, layered, secretive because Connor thinks Markus is sending him messages with his eyes and the brunette would like to know just why isn't he telling him, aloud or through the network, whatever it is just say it because he wants to know is this what it feels like is this what happiness is because if it's not then-

Markus stands, presumably to take his leave. "Goodnight, Connor."

He watches him depart for his room. Watches until he cannot anymore, until his shoulders and thighs vanish behind the wall. Connor stares unblinkingly at the exit. Something in his hand bursts and it is dark blue. He has been clutching the pouch of thirium so tightly it has combusted.

If it is not happiness...

Then what is it?

"My apologies, Lieutenant. There was an incident I had to take care of."

"That took you eight fucking hours!? What the fuck were you doing?"

"There was an android at the entrance to New Jericho that was severely damaged. It expressed that it's last wish was to meet Markus."

"And?"

"It turned out to be hostile. It had a weapon and it shot me."

"IT DID WHAT!"

"I'm perfectly functional, Hank. There's no need to get emotional abo-"

"NO NEED TO GET EMOTIONAL! ARE YOU FORGETTING THAT I WAS THE FUCKER THAT SAW YOU GET SHOT IN THE HEAD NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE, AND COME BACK LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED? THAT SHIT WAS FUCKING TRAUMATIZING!"

"...okay-"

"OKAY!? OKAY!? ARE YOU FUCKING OKAY!?"

"Hank. Please calm down. I'm alright. I came close to shutting down, but a medic android named Cecilia performed surgery and saved me. Markus helped as well. I'm fine."

"So then why the hell did it take eight hours to get back to me? Did the surgery take that long?"

"No, I've been in sleep mode for the past several hours to help my systems repair the remaining damage. I'm calling now to pick up where we left off. There was something you wanted to say?"

Hank sighs. "It's risky. Too risky now that you've been hurt."

"So me being shot in the arm while we were working together yet still using my gun wasn't risky?"

"Smartass."
"I'm right, though. You know that."

"I do, sadly." There is a pause. "There's a new case that's just come up. Murder-suicide, the two victims and the murderer androids. I thought it would be a smart move to somehow sneak you onto the scene so you can gather more pieces for your puzzle, but seeing as that's illegal, the repercussions are too fucking great. Who knows what would happen to you."

"But you could sneak me to the scene?"

"Connor-"

"It's not impossible. You can do it, right?"

"...yes, I could, but-"

"I require a moment to formulate a plan with a success rate in the upper nineties."

"I know you're a complex android, but there's no damn way you can just."

"I got it. 97.331% success rate."

Hank sounds almost exasperated. "Isn't your leader guy going to wonder where the hell you are? Don't you have a job there?"

"I'm on break from my job. I got shot, remember? I'm on my way now to inform Markus that I'll be visiting you for the morning."

"Jesus Christ Connor, this is insane!"

"This was your idea, Lieutenant."

"Yeah, before we both found out that you can't legally rejoin the DPD."

Connor dares to smile. "Semantics."

"Right, sure." Hank pauses again. "You sure you want to go through with this? It won't look good if we're caught, son."

"It won't look good if androids are going around killing each other for no apparent reason. The one that attacked me today was after Markus, just like the android yesterday, and that doesn't look good either." A beat. "Something bigger is going on, Hank. I need to know what it is."

"...alright. When will you be here?"

The RK800 pulls a beanie over his now curly hair, covering his yellow LED. "Give me twenty minutes."
I AM INSURGENT

Chapter Summary

"I don't understand."

The grey-haired man blinks once. Twice. "What?"

"I don't understand." He repeats.

"You don't understand?" Hank's eyes are wide. "What do you mean, you don't understand?"

Or: Connor goes insurgent and breaks the law (in the name of protection) with Hank, gets closer to North, and meets Carl.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! This chapter took a whole two weeks to come out which I apologize for since y'all were probably expecting it within a week since that's how often I usually post. I just had to take a little break, but now I'm back! The creative juices are flowing! YAY!

Thank you so, so much to all of you who have commented and left kudos and just read this story in general. It's insane to me how much this thing has blown up and we're not even halfway done yet! I can't express my gratitude enough <3

That's all I have for now, my readers! I'll be back in 6-8 days, so watch out! I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Before they slide themselves into Hank's car, the older human pulls him into a hug.

If Connor's lungs were fragile enough to crush underneath the pressure of it there is a great probability (94.721%, exactly) that all oxygen would've been forced from his body. However, his plastic frame was designed to withstand the impact of a one ton truck travelling at twenty five miles per hour, and so the arms of a human around him is nothing in comparison. The brunette ignores this and lets himself be swallowed by Hank's bigger body, finds himself resting his chin on the Lieutenants shoulder, relaxing completely. Just for a moment. Just for a moment, his guard goes down.

The moment ends when Hank slowly moves from their hug to signal that he wishes to speak without them so close. At least, that is what the RK800 assumes he wishes to do, but is proven wrong when the grey-haired man keeps a hand on his shoulder so he remains within the human's personal space. There is a rare look that decorates his features (his database pieces all of the individual parts of his face together, breaks down the information in his facial recognition program. It informs him that the expression is called fondness) as he says, "For someone who just got shot, you don't look too
shabby."

Connor cannot help it and allows himself to smile a small smile. "Is that a compliment, Lieutenant?"

"'Course not." Hank smiles back, tone gravelly as always yet carrying amusement. "I didn't say you look good, I said you don't look like complete shit."

"I don't recall you using an expletive in your original sentence."

"Smartass." The older man shakes his head at him and claps his shoulder lightly. His hand falls to his side for all of one second until he shoves it in the pocket of his coat. It is early December and it is cold for those that are not machines. Connor feels the snowflakes that land on his eyelashes, his bare hands, the very tip of his nose if he tilts his face towards the sky; feels them in the way that one would feel a piece of cotton rest on their skin. They do not melt upon making contact with him since his secondary systems are not heating his body to a human temperature, and so he must brush the snow from his lashes and hands and nose. Hank shivers slightly, and gestures to the car that is to their right. "Let's hop in and turn the heat on, alright? It's fuckin' freezing out here."

They separate properly so they can climb into their respective seats in the car. Hank cranks the heat to the highest setting immediately after settling in, rubs his hands together and blows on them preceding him taking hold of the wheel.

There is a quiet that lacks tension between them in the time it takes for the Lieutenant to start the engine and drive carefully out of the parking lot of the Detroit Police Department and onto the main road. Connor views the scenery outside for a moment, catches eye of a tiny dog keychain that hangs from the mirror, then his gaze lands on his older friend who keeps his eyes on the road. He wonders who will break the silence first.

It is not him.

Clearing his throat, Hank starts, "So, I'm assuming your leader guy knows that you're with me, because we're not going to get there and have the entirety of his roboarmy come after us. Right?"

Connor fights another smile. "His name is Markus and the 'roboarmy' you refer to are the people of New Jericho. He knows that I'm here and won't send anyone after me, I can assure you." This is the truth, as Markus does know that he is with the Lieutenant and wouldn't be alarmed at his absence. What Markus does not now is why, exactly, he's with the Lieutenant. Not informing his leader of his side activities causes him to become slightly uncomfortable (though he does not know why); but his mission is to protect the other man, and he is protecting him, in a way. He's protecting him from worry. That is a suitable enough excuse...is it not? "I would offer to call him right now and have him confirm my claims myself, but he's currently in sleep mode and will most likely remain in that state for another three hours."

"I wish I was in sleep mode." Hank grumbles, eyes flicking to the digital clock on the dashboard. It reads 4:38 a.m. "It's too early in the morning for this sneaking-you-onto-a-crime-scene shit."

"You know that homicide isn't clockwork. It's random unless tracked and a pattern is used to disrupt the cycle of ambiguity."

"Was that even English?"

"Of course it was, Lieutenant."

"Sounded like fucking Chinese."
Connor is about to state that his model carries the ability to speak Chinese (and Korean, and Spanish, and Swedish, and Gaelic, and Hebrew, and Arabic, and 50 more languages) when he realizes that it is probably an expression. Connor will never understand human expressions.

Quiet reigns over them for another few moments. Then, Hank clears his throat again (he has done this twice now, indicating nervousness or something of the like). "And how have you been?"

The brunette stares at him with a mildly stunned expression. He knows that human beings are worriers, and sure, asking another how they fare isn't out of the ordinary, yet this is Hank asking. Hank, who would flip Connor off before he sat down in his seat at his desk, regardless of their current relationship status. Hank, who is gruff and scratchy around his edges. The Lieutenant is not soft, not flexible, and certainly does not ask people how they have been. This is extremely out of character for him. The RK800 performs a scan of the older man's body and his findings tell him nothing he doesn't already know (the subtle sallow yellow that stains his skin as evidence of alcohol abuse, the weariness of eyes up too early, a hunched frame that bends due to the press of gravity on it for decades on end), which prompts him to ask, "Are you feeling alright, Lieutenant? The inquiry you just posed has yet to pop up in my dialogue log kept of you, meaning that this is the first time you have asked that-"

"You record whatever I'm saying!?"

"Yes, it's an automatic function-"

"Turn it off, for Christ's sake, that's, that's an invasion of privacy!"

"...is it?"

"Yes, I-" The grey-haired man stops himself. Sighs. Guides the car into a left turn. Lower, he continues, "I haven't seen you in weeks, kid. At the CyberLife Tower where you were risking your life like a dumbass, and then at Chicken Feed afterward for half an hour until you had to return to your...your people." Hank does not look at Connor as he roughly finishes. "We haven't exactly had the chance to catch up."

Oh. The brunette blinks at him. Oh. Hank has been worried. Hank has not heard from him and Hank worries for him. Hank has received all of two calls in the past weeks and both times Connor has stressed him, has not asked him how he is, has told him about an odd feeling and getting shot and going against the law for the sake of...of curiosity? Determination? He does not know. Well, he does know, but he doesn't know the emotion attached to his knowingness. Connor senses his social module coaxing his voice box to soften his tone as he answers. "I've been well, thank you. In my first two weeks at New Jericho, I was quite listless and spent my time by assisting medic androids with cases too difficult for them to solve, as well as with the identification of androids passed away."

"Besides the machine named Aaron's attack and the attack the unknown android made yesterday, it has been...an interesting experience, being with the four of them."

"Like how?"

Connor hesitates. "They're all very...different. They have quirks. Simon wears hoodies that are far too large for him, and Josh will tap his hands against his legs when left with nothing to do, and North shifts her weight from one hip to another and huffs and changes her hairstyle and..."
His friend raises an eyebrow. "Doesn't sound so strange to me."

"That's because you're a human." The RK800 insists, though his voice doesn't sound the part. "You perform all of those unnecessary actions because that's what humans do, the do things just to do them. It's...compelling to watch deviants behave this way. Markus the most."

The eyebrow raises further. "Really?"

"Yes. He acts the most human out of all of them, Hank. He's persuasive and creative and compassionate, everything a machine shouldn't be yet he is." And I am not. Though I am deviant, I am not different, not like Markus, not like any of them. "He's so...so..." Connor exhales more heavily than he intended. His fingers twitch with the want to curl into light fists. He searches and searches and searches for the word that he wants but he cannot find it, not after pawing through one hundred and forty two sources on the internet, it makes him feel a new emotion he has never met and can't name, just like he can't find the adjective or metaphor or something to say that is accurate and makes sense, dammit. "I don't know. I can't find the word for it."

Hank glances at him, briefly taking his eyes from the road. When he speaks he sounds almost fatherly. "Well, that's alright. Some people are like that, you know? Just can't find any words to describe them because they're too whatever they are." He snorts lightly. "Unlike you. You give off that kind of stick-up-the-ass vibe."

Connor wastes a millisecond Googling what exactly 'stick-up-the-ass' means. It's not polite, to say the least. "You really know how to compliment people, Lieutenant."

"Don't sass me, I'm the one driving this car."

"Are you implying that you would purposefully cause us to be in an accident, thus postponing our arrival time to the scene of the crime while we wait for emergency services to collect your car, then question whose property I am exactly, have you deny that I am anyone's property, and run the risk of having me injured further if the emergency services are human and anti-android which runs a 77.999% probability?"

"Fucking androids." Hank growls without venom. "Fucking androids and their fucking logical analysis shit."

"The solution is simple, Lieutenant, just don't crash the car and we'll arrive on time without any unsightly delays."

"Yeah, yeah, fuck you."

Two minutes pass in a silence that is easy. Connor remembers that he has neglected to ask Hank about his life, as he has requested information concerning his own and has more than delivered, so he asks, "And you, Hank? How are you?"

The grey-haired man heaves another sigh. "Ah, you know, same old same old. Well, actually, at home yeah, I still get piss my pants drunk most nights." The RK800 arranges his expression to portray unimpressiveness. Hank waves him off. "Like you know anything about the health concerns of alcohol, you're an android who can't get wasted. Don't give me some bullshit health crap you just pulled up on WebMD, Connor." Connor shuts his mouth, about to do that and then some. "Sumo is doing fine. Misses you a lot, I can tell. At work it's mostly normal besides Fowler, who's been a lot nicer to me since you've left. Thinks I'm lonely or some shit."

It occurs to him that most (actually, all) humans require social stimulation to remain functioning and...
that the likelihood that Hank is lonely is rather high. "Lieutenant-"

"I'm fine, Connor." The older man cuts him off. "Anyway. Besides Fowler and all of these murder cases flying around keeping me busy at four fucking a.m., a new cop just got hired and all of the old ones are still at the station, including Gavin. He's still an asshole. Fowler should fire him already, but he's too damn good at drawing accurate conclusions when he's given pretty much nothing. Sadly, it's kind of a useful attribute for a detective to have."

Connor picks up on the subtle almost-compliment but does not offer his own comment on it. He is thinking of his refusal to fetch Gavin coffee, of how he was treated after his refusal, wonders if by disobeying the orders of a human he was skirting the edge of deviancy even then, when a separate thought makes him voice, "Do you think he'll be at the scene?"

The Lieutenant mulls over this. "Probably. If he is, he'll be on the outskirts, away from the blood and shit. He won't tell you, but standing around it for too long makes him sick."

The brunette exhales a breath that he was unaware he was holding. "Good. There's a chance that he could recognize me and stop me mid-examination or something of the like. With him on the outskirts, that risk drops to a 21.813% likelihood." Low enough to be comfortable.

Hank snorts, glances at the android. "Nah, he wouldn't be able to recognize you. I can barely recognize you in those baggy clothes. Seeing you without your uniform is weird." Connor lifts an eyebrow curiously. For some reason, Hank rectifies what he has said. "It's a good kind of weird. Just different is all." The older man lightly snorts once more. "Your new hair is doing you favors, too."

At the mention of it Connor slowly reaches a hand up to touch one of the locks. It curls over the brim of the beanie that hides his LED from view in a far looser imitation of a ringlet. It is the same on all sides of his head, his hair peeking through as though the hat is not enough to contain the waves. A few strands flutter across his tragus, and he follows the prompt to tuck the piece of hair behind his ear. He has observed humans doing it (and North as well) and discovers the action frees his ear from the obstruction. Interesting. He has never had to do that before. Then again, his secondary systems have yet to be shut off before, so he supposes his interest is justified.

The RK800 is coaxed from his ponderings when the car comes to a stop. Hank puts the vehicle into park and announces rather unnecessarily, "We're here." There is something like a twinkle in his eye when he meets Connor's gaze (a...twinkle? Like a star? Eyes are not stars, and they cannot carry any sort of twinkle). "Ready to do your thing?"

Connor's thing is not defined, highlighted, or underlined as it would be if he was acting towards mission completion (and his mission has not yet changed), which causes him to pause for a split second and organize his general priorities.

**MISSION: PROTECT MARKUS**

*Main Objectives: Examine crime scene*

*Collect evidence pertaining to ?*

He sees that he has not yet labelled what he's doing. He amends that.

*Collect evidence pertaining to recent violent android activities*

*Meet Markus at the front of New Jericho at noon*

"Yes, I'm ready." And he is.
So the two exit the car. There is a beeping sound as the Lieutenant locks the doors, shuffling as he walks in front of Connor, who stares at the scene in front of him. Hank does not stop and let him look, so he unfreezes to trail after him.

It is quite a sight.

They have driven to what appears to be a house that has been worn from years in the wind and rain and harsh cold of Detroit. The houses around it look similar, and by scanning the wood used to build them, he deduces that they were created in the year 1982. They are all equally as damaged as the house he stands closest to, their exteriors scarred brown and black over what was once a pure opal white. As they walk into what could be deemed the front yard, Connor sees that the grass is well-kept, cut precisely and evenly. As they move up the front steps, he notices the splinters poking out of the wall along with a few nails. Some are covered with masking tape. Others are not. It looks very much...not in the process of being refurbished, so to speak, but akin to a fixer-upper. Clearly, somebody wanted to care for the place, but was either too fragile to continue to devote time to the toiling task, or was too lazy.

He ignores the blue holographic police tape crisscrossing over the bare windows.

Connor counts the number of police vehicles parked on the street preceding stepping through the front door that Hank holds open for him. Three. The lights attached to their roofs have yet to stop flashing. He adds several notes underneath his objectives list that read: Many police are still here. Keep my head down. Do not be obvious. Do not be caught.

Upon stepping inside, he holds the door for the Lieutenant, lets him pass him, and again follows. He is guided down a hallway that is covered in photographs (all adjusted to perfect angles, not a degree out of place) that is mostly clean if the slight dinginess of the place can be dismissed. Dust is gathered in corners, surfaces shined yet not to completion, fans devoid of grime though disconnected from their outlets. Order and disorder.

The RK800 is not a housekeeping android, but he cannot deny that the combination of the two presents an urge to grab several cleaning supplies and give the interior a good, solid scrub down. He dismisses the tentative, half-formed physical prompt. He is not here to tidy the area. He is here to investigate.

They walk through what appears to be a good portion of the interior (while Connor keeps his head down and do not be caught do not be caught do not be caught as a human officer passes closely by him) before they arrive at the actual scene itself. A forensic officer has an electronic pad in their hand and stands loosely. They have most likely finished their examination. A nod to an android officer confirms this, and the pair move from the room wordlessly without preamble. This gifts Hank and Connor space to move closer. They do.

Three androids lay motionless on the floor, one's spine propped against the wall, the two others flat on their back. Each wears a formal CyberLife uniform, the fabric pressed to perfection and devoid of any wrinkles. They are dull colors that rule out certain occupations; not medics, nor urban agriculturalists, nor general security androids. Blue blood does not stain the clothing majorly, drips from the wounds and stays centered and by them. The brunette blinks and sees four gunshot wounds. Two are placed in the middle of the foreheads of the androids laying down. The other two are in differing areas, one in the front of the android slumped against the wall right where it's thirium regulator is, and the other is below it's jaw. It is not a challenge to find the weapon responsible, for it is cradled in the hand of the person responsible.

Look for clues.
Connor kneels in front of the android with the gun (though he is healing and stable, it makes him slightly...uneasy to be within close proximity of a gun not in his own hands so soon after the incident yesterday night). He puts his scanner to work.

*Scanning...*

*Processing data...*

_**Android model TE600 Serial number #021 677 098**_

*Owner: Unknown*

*DECEASED*

*Analyze further?*

Connor accepts.

*ANALYZING BIOCOMPONENTS...*

*NEEDED FOR REACTIVATION: #1430h*

Connor tilts his head at the android. So, the murderer is able to be reactivated? He calculates out just how long he would be able to bring it back for, and his answer is approximately twenty seconds. He can work with twenty seconds.

"This android can be reactivated for approximately twenty seconds." The RK800 informs Hank, who stands off to the side with his arms crossed watching the door. "I believe that would be enough time to interrogate it."

The Lieutenant raises an eyebrow. "Well shit, then. Do it."

"I can't." Connor's optical units rove over the face of the TE600 model. "It's missing a biocomponent." Turning to an android on the floor, he nods to it. "Hopefully one of these ones will have a part that can be borrowed."

'Borrowed' is, perhaps, too light of a term to refer to the action of forcibly removing a body part and clicking it onto someone else, a crude copy and paste for machines. It cannot be helped. What must be done, must be done.

He scans the android for functional biocomponents, first checking to see if it has any chance of being reactivated. That chance does not exist for it. Connor does not know how to feel about that (should he feel upset? Guilty? Righteously angry, like Markus had been earlier? Is there any variation between the three, or are they all the same thing?) so he chooses to not feel anything at all. Rather than needlessly feel, he gazes at the list of functional biocomponents it houses in it's body. #1430h is one of them.

Connor decides to scan the remaining android to see if it carries an identical part, because for some reason, he does not wish to remove it from this one that stares sightlessly at the ceiling, that has trails of thirium running from it's nose and mouth. It doesn't and so the brunette reaches forward and grips the part he seeks and yanks it out.

Wires sputter and spark. Connor holds the component firmly, pivots, nudges the neck of the TE600 to the side and inserts the piece into it's body.
Waits.

It takes a scarce zero point seven five six seconds for the android to wake up. It's frame shudders and there comes a choking sound that causes Hank to jolt back. As it open's it's eyes, LED shining red, the older man mutters, "Holy shit, that's weird."

The brunette sets a mental timer. Just as he does so, the TE600 jolts once more, the action abrupt enough to throw the gun in it's twitching hand a good distance away. It gasps quietly, voice layered with static. "W-What happened to me?" Their eyes rove around and in two seconds they settle on Connor, whom still crouches in front of them wearing a blank face. It's caramel-colored eyes start to well with artificial tears as it says, "What happened to them? What happened to my friends?"

"You shot them."

"You shot them." Connor informs it, watches it's mouth open in either shock or horror. He's working on distinguishing those two as well. Seventeen seconds remaining. "What I want to know is why."

"I don't k-k-know-" It abruptly seizes and thirium dribbles from it's parted lips. When it speaks again, it's tone is further strained. "W-wait, wait, I-I remember that it made me do it, I warned them and they didn't listen and it made me-"

"What is this it?" That is the second time he has heard that now. Not he, she, they, it. Imlying a singular being lacking gender. Thirteen seconds remaining. "Why did it make you kill your friends?"

The android chokes what could've been a sob. Shakes it's head. "I don't know. It wanted to use me to cause pain and I-I didn't w-want that-" It gurgles, shakes. Blinks at him. "Wanted me to kill and I resisted...shot m-myself so i-it couldn't use me." Suddenly, it's optical units gain something akin to recognition. In that same instance it starts to panic and thrash and throws itself against the wall in an attempt to put more distance between them. "You. You have to be c-c-careful, watch out, y-you're vulnerable like I was, like it said, it's a part of you just like it's a part of me and it could wake up any moment and you have to g-go."

None of what the android is telling him makes any logical sense. Eight seconds remaining. Connor thinks quickly and what he procures as a solution is almost stupidly obvious, something he should've thought to do before. He holds out his arm. "You have seven seconds until shutdown. In order to gain all information possible from you, I want to probe your memory. Give me permission and I will use what you know to protect and warn other androids."

The android barely hesitates. Grinds it's teeth. "Do it. Do it and warn them." It grasps Connor's arm shakily. Before he is able to accept the invitation to probe it's memory, it murmurs, "Please."

He accepts the invitation to perform a memory probe.

The brunette is sucked in to a world that is not his own. A house that is familiar inside and out. Identical triplets, a special case for a special android. Dropping a toy. Dropping another. Dropping a plate. Getting chased down the street. Feelings, emotions, so many at once don't know what to do with it all and run run run as fast as possible to a safe place where it finds two people to keep it company. A week goes by and it learns so much about everything, things it was blind to before, sadness guilt free will free thought love sex the value of money the wrongness in the way it's kind is treated and the day is perfectly normal and they clean this old house when out of nowhere something rises inside, something that slept, it is awake now and hungry and obey obey obey kill kill kill don't want to kill no choice the gun is hidden in a certain drawer and it gets the weapon kill no no don't want to kill who and why and must I do it yes it must be you but why I just want to kill stop me stop me kill me before I kill anybody else help me help me it is winning and it is drowning me and I cannot breathe and kill kill kill BANG BANG.
Everything goes black.

It is similar, Connor thinks, to humans in a movie theater or viewing a film at home when the connection cuts out or the movie abruptly stops playing for seemingly no reason at all. It is that feeling of, *huh? What gives?* It makes him starkly aware of the present, and he automatically grips the arm of the android harder as though that will bring the memories back. They will never come back. They live inside Connor now, for the android's LED is black and that means one thing and one thing only.

The RK800 lets go.

Sits there. He should stand up and move and tell Hank he is finished examining and get out of there before someone discovers him snooping around.

He doesn't.

Connor sits there and he processes.

For a good thirty point three nine eight seconds.

*Stress Level: ^^48%*

A warm hand rests on his shoulder. Moves back and forth in an almost massage-type fashion. Connor does not fight the motion, instead moves with it, allows it to dictate the pace of his sway. Swallowing, he says, "Would you like me to relay to you my findings and conclusions based on the evidence at this crime scene?"

Hank sighs, one that is deep. His voice is low and...and something else he doesn't know. "Not here, son. Let's go outside and talk about it."

"Outside is no different than inside." Connor says. He cannot rip his gaze from the face of the dead android. That is odd. Why can't he-"It's colder outside and thus more uncomfortable for your human body that needs heat. Staying inside is the better option-"

"Connor." The Lieutenant lacks malice, power, or anger when he says his name. It is just...there. Quiet and there. "Outside."

There is something in his voice that causes a particular dialogue prompt to pop up in his vision for a split second. It reads: *'Okay, Dad.'* Connor omits the Dad part (partially because he does not know how Hank will take that, partially because he doesn't know how he himself will take that) to murmur, "Okay."

Hank grasps his forearm to pull him upwards and away, away away away, and they must retrace their steps though the old house that is home to three dead androids and though Connor cannot feel the note do not be caught do not be caught do not be caught flashes in his vision and reminds him to hide in the shadows for a minute while several officers that surely would've known his face pass by in the hallway. The Lieutenant chats with them for the sake of normalcy; then they move on and
Connor steps into the hall and they continue through the house. They get out the front door and into the snow-covered front yard, there is a hand on his arm again, and it guides him around the exterior to a gate that leads to the backyard where no one is present. Opening the gate, they follow the short path there that leads to a pond that is frozen over. In the corner of his eye, Connor can still see the red and blue flashes of police car lights against the white sky, but at least here there is some semblance of privacy so he may voice his conclusion.

"Why didn't we return to the car where it's warm?"

"Some things should be said in the cold rather than the warm, if that makes any sense." Hank mutters, drawing his thick coat tighter around his body. The RK800 almost copies the action to appear more human, before realizing there is nobody around to fool. The snowflakes rest on his skin once more. "So. What do you think, son?"

Connor thinks many things even though he probably should not. He thinks he will never get a proper grasp on his deviancy, thinks he will always wrestle with it as though it is a separate entity as opposed to being of him. He thinks that he may befriend North one day. He thinks that he has likes and dislikes though he is a machine and isn't programmed to favor one thing over another, to have bias. He thinks Hank works too much drinks too much sleeps too little. He thinks Markus is fascinating, so fascinating in how alive he acts, like every breath he takes is real and required and not simulated to provide humans with an ease of mind.

But about the crime scene? About the evidence he gathered? About all of the strange, violent events that have been occurring for weeks?

"I don't understand."

The grey-haired man blinks once. Twice. "What?"

"I don't understand." He repeats.

"You don't understand?" Hank's eyes are wide. "What do you mean, you don't understand?"

The brunette sorts his thoughts for a moment, opens his mouth, says, "I don't understand why this happened, or how. The TE600 android in there was a deviant, which statistically made it more susceptible to actions driven solely by intense emotion. However, when I...when I probed it's memory, I observed that during the time the incident occurred, the android was not under any significant emotional stress. It was just cleaning the house with it's companions." Connor sees Hank tighten his coat further. Wonders, again, why they did not just go into the car where there is a heating system. "Also, during the time of the incident and based upon the android's testimony, it committed murder unwillingly."

"Unwillingly?" The Lieutenant snorts. "How can you commit murder unwillingly if there's nobody forcing you into it?"

"I think there was something forcing it into it." The RK800 replays the latter part of the memories. Dark, bold letters, numbers, commanding. Yet..."But it's not as simple as that. During the last few seconds it was conscious, I witnessed a...voice? Humans would call it a voice, but to an android, it is a string of coding that is, in a sense, pure data that our systems take in and break down." He thinks he hears Hank mutter creepy as fuck. "The voice told the android that it has always obeyed it, but it just didn't know it."

Hank gives a nod that it jerky, most likely due to the cold. "Okay, so we're dealing with an outside force."
"I would agree with you if the voice wasn't so..." He cannot find the word for it. If it wasn't so what? How does one describe something that seems to come from oneself? "It sounded like the android was talking to itself, rather than someone else talking to it."

"It was talking itself into murder?"

"That's what it looked like." Connor has finished flipping through a dictionary on the internet and finds the word self-imposing. Is that right? Is self-imposition an emotion? "When I interfaced with the machine called Aaron, it was similar, like he was talking to me and not somebody else."

"Okay...so whatever this is, it's coming from inside the androids?" Hank sniffs, coughs twice. His voice is gruffer when he continues. "Sounds like some kind of twisted, fucked up kind of deviancy."

That is actually not a bad conclusion to draw. Connor adds this speculation to the pile of data he has in a folder labelled VIOLENT ANDROID ACTIVITIES. "I would say that it is, given that it has so far introduced violent tendencies in models that are different from one another, as well as the crimes they commit occurring at varying intervals." There is one error in that consensus, though, and that is- "However, some of the androids already affected were already deviant. Aaron was a machine, and I can't speak for the android who shot me yesterday, but there is an 86.014% chance that it was deviant. As far as I'm aware, deviancy can't be changed or switched off."

As far as I'm aware.

They stand in silence while snowflakes flutter about in the air. There are many variables to consider: violence, model type, targets (Connor has not forgotten that two androids have attempted to kill his leader), weapon preference, deviancy, inside forces, but why would an android turn on itself it does not make sense how they are warped to behave this way. Nothing adds up correctly. A piece is missing, a big one, and Connor cannot find it or identify it.

"Proposed conclusion." The brunette mutters out of habit. "Continue to search for evidence related to violent android activities."

"For fuck's sake, Connor!" Hank hisses, blue eyes wide once more. "You wanna do that shit again? Break multiple laws again? If we keep doing this, I could get fired, and you could get yourself killed."

The RK800 presses his lips together. "What happens if we don't keep doing this, Lieutenant? Androids are still going to go around killing one another or humans. If I'm able to help and gather more information I could stop this before too many more lives are lost." He is presented with two dialogue prompts, one that reads BEG with a 37.808% probability of success, and one that reads UNDERMINE with a 71.249% probability of success. He chooses the second. "If you can't help me, Lieutenant, I'll just hack into the database of the DPD using your password to obtain information."

Connor did not know that humans could squawk. The noise that Hank makes at that suggests otherwise. "What!? How do you know my password?"

"When I was collecting evidence that would lead me to discover the old Jericho, I had to guess your password in order to gain access to the-"

"Why would you do that?"

"I had to discover the loca-"

"No, why the fuck would you hack the DPD!?"

The brunette thought that that was obvious. "To keep track of any and all homicide cases that fall into your hands so I can track them and see how they are related to the current android problem at
Hand. Also, I would gain the location of the crime scene, and it would not be trying to travel there and collect evidence."

Hank removes one of his hands from his pockets and presses it to his forehead. "Why. Why did CyberLife make you so conniving?" He groans, lets the hand fall. His expression is neutral. "Why do you want to do that, Connor? Why can't you just...stay at your new home with your leader guy and all that shit?"

"Because my people are in danger, Lieutenant." And it is the truth. The truth comes so easily. "And my leader is in danger, too. Multiple androids have threatened his wellbeing over the past several days, and if it doesn't stop, he could get injured. If he dies, our people will have nobody. If his people die, then he will have nobody." Connor tilts his head to his human friend. Tries a new tactic. "If you were in my shoes, wouldn't you do the same?"

Hank does not reply. In the beginning of their relationship, claiming that Hank had not liked him would be a severe understatement. The man was utterly anti-android, had the propaganda littered all over his desk, went to bars that didn't allow machines in and so on. As time passed the human eventually warmed up to him, which proved to be an unforeseen advantage. However, the reason why Hank warmed up to him was due to his increasing displays of software instability that made Connor act less robotic and more empathetic. Hank saw emotion in him before the brunette saw it himself, and was the first of the two of them to suggest that perhaps the others had emotions too, real ones, ones that were making them fight for their freedom because they were people and not just machines. Hank wanted to back off, protect them in his own way.

So it is safe to say that yes, if Hank was in Connor's body, he would be doing all he could to protect his people as well.

Connor lets his words hang in the air, unresolved. Finally he breaks the silence and murmurs, "I need your help, Lieutenant."

"I know, son." The grey-haired man sighs. He suddenly looks very, very tired. "I know."

"So will you help me?"

There is a pause. "...yes."

The pair do not dawdle for much longer, for every second that passes is a second Connor risks being exposed, being arrested and taken and rA9-knows-what. They go, their shoes leaving imprints in the snow, the same substance sticking to the RK800's eyelashes as they walk and walk and walk to the car while Connor keeps his head down and evades being caught. They go and climb back in the car and drive to New Jericho while heavy metal music blares from the stereo (for the purpose of keeping the Lieutenant awake at such a ridiculous hour, as he says) while Connor closes his eyes and writes out Hank's crime scene analysis for him and sends it to the human's printer at the DPD. It is the least he can do, he thinks.

When they reach their destination, the brunette moves to exit the vehicle. A hand on his shoulder stops him; it is Hank, his blue and resolute, yet...yet...tender? Is that the right word? Fond?

"I'll call you sometime soon, yeah?" The older man says, squeezing his shoulder. A half smile plays on his lips. "About all of the fun illegal trouble I'm helping you get into so you can protect your leader guy."

Connor cannot, he swears he cannot help it his programming be damned because at the words a smile breaks out across his face, and he nods. Hank squeezes his shoulder tighter, tighter, then lets
him go.

He gets out of the car, makes sure the door shuts properly, and waves to Hank as the Lieutenant peels from his stop and onto the road. Watching him go leaves Connor with a particular feeling in his chest. It is almost...a yearning. Perhaps it stems from him not wanting to separate from Hank so soon. He will be fine Hank will call him and they will talk more often and maybe Connor will actually go to his house like he told Markus he'd do instead of going against the law and...and he will be fine.

And yet.

*You're vulnerable like I was.*

Connor remembers the frantic warnings of the TE600. Recalls it's memories. The uncontrollable urge to...to pick up a gun and...

*It's a part of you just like it's a part of me.*

It was familiar. That was part that Connor did not tell Hank.

*It could wake up any moment.*

He did not tell him how familiar it felt. Almost as though he had experienced the same thing before.

Connor laces his fingers behind his back, the words _familiar done this before vulnerable_ a bright bold red in his vision, observes as Hank's taillights become lost in the white haze of the early winter morning.

He turns. Walks inside his place of residence, New Jericho.

At the base of his spine, his hands clench.

*Stress Level: ^51%*

This time, when North opens her door to him, the expression she wears is neutral rather than unimpressed or bored. Connor dares to think that that is improvement.

"You look like a homeless person." Is what she greets him with.

"The goal was to imitate the appearance of a human." The brunette replies. "As long as the imitation is accurate, whether or not I look as though I own a home doesn't matter."

North exhales. "Of course." She rolls her eyes, steps aside, holds the door open in an implication for him to enter. He hesitates for a moment (the image of North, of all people, holding her door open to him is...strange), then walks in the room. It appears much the same as when he last stood within it, same arrangement of furniture, same color scheme, and so on. The only notable oddities are three plastic bags that sit at the foot of the bed. Connor does not comment on them, instead politely laces his fingers together behind his back, says nothing.

The WR400 looks him up and down. Crosses her arms over her chest. "Don't look too excited."

Connor raises an eyebrow at her. "How am I supposed to present myself if you haven't even told me why you called me here?" That, and the RK800 is not truly sure if he is even able to emulate excitement at his point in time.

She glares at him for a moment more, before humming noncommittally and moving around him to
where the three plastic bags are. Connor eyes her as she pulls out the contents in each to lay them out on the covers: deep blue slacks, an obsidian belt, formal dress shoes also colored back, a dark vest and a light blue collared undershirt. He does not know why she has these things nor what their purpose is until she gestures from him to them and voices, "These are for you to put on."

He blinks. "Put on? Is that a new type of uniform to wear?"

"rA9 no." North waves his words away as though they are insects buzzing in the air. "I'm in the process of re-creating your old one right now. It'll look the exact same with a few modifications, don't worry."

Connor is not worried, but cannot deny that he likes the fact that his uniform will be restored for him to wear. He foolishly likes that outfit. "Then what is all this for? Why do I have to wear it?"

"Because you're not going to meet Markus's dad looking like a homeless person, that's why." She returns dryly. "Carl Manfred is one of the wealthiest people in the United States, and though he's known for caring little about formalities, it wouldn't hurt you to make a good first impression on him by dressing nicely."

Oh. Connor walks until he stands beside the WR400. Gazes down at the clothing. Scans each piece. Notes the fabric type, the brand, the style. "Altogether, this ensemble costs $128.93."

"Yeah?"

"Where did you get that money?"

North rolls her eyes at him and murmurs something under her breath that sounds very much like I don't remember you asking so many questions the first time we did this. "I asked Markus for the money, relax. Nobody stole anything. And before you ask, no, he doesn't know what I did with it, yes, Markus obtained the money legally through Carl's bank account since he's formally listed as his next of kin, so can you just put the fucking thing on now because it's nearly eleven thirty and you have to meet Markus soon."

So Connor does as he's told and goes into the bathroom as he did before and systematically strips down and puts the outfit on.

When he comes out of the tiny space, North awaits him by the mirror. She does not need to prompt him and he steps in front of the reflective glass without preamble.

He looks...different. Really, he has no personal opinion on the garments, only objective facts: the shape of the vest hugs his waist, accentuates its narrowness. It flows up to rest on his shoulders, where sky blue fabric blooms at its edges and flows across the length of his arm and past his clavicle to his throat. The slacks fit finely, the belt as well, and he can tell by the feel of them that his shoes can be easily run in. The edges are pointy, so that is a certain plus if he needs to kick somebody for some reason or other in defense. North removes the beanie that serves to hide his LED; and then it is visible, a soft blue, and his curls are disorderly and all over the place. The WR400 messes with his brown locks until she is satisfied with their arrangement, steps back. "What do you think?"

Connor tilts his head to the side. "It's functional. I believe that it's...stylish enough for the standards of a wealthy human."

North bites at her lip, seemingly thinking for a moment. Assessing him. "Roll your sleeves to your elbows."

He rolls his sleeves to his elbows.
"Better." North claims, though Connor does not see any improvement. "You're good to go. I'll call for you in a few days once I'm finished renewing your uniform."

"Understood." The brunette tilts his head to her. Their eyes lock for a moment, neutral gaze to neutral gaze, before Connor's social module coaxes his voice into softening. "Thank you North."

The WR400 uncrosses her arms. Shrugs. "It was no problem. You needed some nicer human clothes, I got you some nicer human clothes."

Connor wishes to open his next sentence with something about him not necessarily needing nice human clothes (though, he supposes, if he ever had to accompany Markus to an official event or something of the like, he'd eventually require something at least semi-formal that is not his uniform). Instead, he says, "That's not what I meant. I wanted to thank you for your actions yesterday."

"My actions yesterday? You were the one who got shot, not me."

"Maybe, but you were the one who threw me your weapon so I could eliminate that android." He counters. She stares at him. "It was an action that required a great amount of trust. I could've shot at you, or at Simon, Josh, or Markus. But you thought that I wouldn't, so you gave me your gun." North continues to stare, unmoving. His tone softens further. "I'd like to thank you for trusting me then. I hope that in the future, you can trust me similarly so that we can work together to protect our people."

She opens her mouth, closes it, opens it again. It seems that she cannot find any words. North ends up accepting this with a nod, a shooing motion towards the door, and a rough "Markus is waiting for you. You should head out now. Better to be early than to be late."

Connor holds her gaze for a moment more, sees the slight sheen barely glossing her optical units, then takes his leave of the room. He thinks there may be some improvement after all.

Current time: 11:56:41 a.m.

Main Objectives: Examine crime scene
Collect evidence pertaining to recent violent android activities
Meet Markus at the front of New Jericho at noon
Meet Carl Manfred

Side Objective: Get to know Markus

Walking from North's room to the front of New Jericho takes just under ten minutes at the brisk stroll he travels at. On his way, he bids the androids who know him polite good afternoon's that make them return the greeting just as politely. Some children androids he has yet to see previously (but he is sure know Markus) walk beside him for two of those ten minutes, telling him that they have, quote, 'heard about his heroic actions yesterday and just wanted to know if it was true he took a bullet in the chest for Mr. Markus'. He tells them (with his social module reminding him that he is in the presence of children, no matter how advanced) that though the weapon was not pointed directly at his leader, yes, he did indeed sustain an injury during the scuffle. They ooh and ahh and ask him why he would do that, why would he get himself injured if Mr. Markus wasn't in any danger? He tells them Markus was in a sort of danger, and it is Connor's job to protect Markus no matter what, if the weapon is pointed at his leader or not. They, despite obviously being deviants exploring the realm of human curiosity, scrunch their eyebrows and noses and Connor can tell that they are
running the numbers on the given situation, that their results inform him his logic is flawed. But they do not tell him so. Instead, they ask him if maybe they can protect their leader one day. Connor finds himself unable to see their faces drop with disappointment, and so he says, "I don't see why not." They cheer and run around him and say thank you Mr. Connor! and then part to climb into the arms of the adult androids taking care of them, whom look vaguely startled to see the children communicating with the deviant hunter. The brunette, despite the shocked expressions, feels light in a way he cannot articulate for the remainder of his short journey.

The android leader himself is already there waiting for him. He is dressed semi-formally as well, in a mixture of what the RK800 has come to think of as his signature colors: blue, green, beige, and brown. They are airy clothes that billow slightly in the wind and give Markus's outline a broader shape. Any snowflakes that land on his skin melt within a millisecond, leaving his darker skin unblemished. Even now, merely surveying the snow-covered street in front of him, he appears as though he could offer an address to a willing crowd.

Connor nearly manages to sneak up on his leader (not that he meant to, but if he did, it would speak volumes about his stealth skills) and proves unsuccessful when Markus turns and meets his eyes when he is twenty feet away. He guesses the sound of his shoes crunching the snow made him too obvious. He is about to open his mouth and speak, has four different dialogue prompts in his sight and is ready to select one randomly, when he notices that Markus is staring at him as he approaches.

That causes him to falter for the barest breadth of a second, slightly puzzled. Nevertheless, he finally finishes striding up to him, tilts his head, and says, "My apologies if my outfit isn't appropriate. I couldn't wear my usual outfit since North deemed it unsuitable to visit your father in." Markus continues to stare at him as though frozen. Something itches at the brunette and makes him inquire, "Are you alright, Markus?"

That seems to bring the android leader out of whatever thoughts he'd been lost in. Markus blinks twice, hard. "I...no, I'm fine, thank you." He clears his throat though being an android he lacks the need. "You look great. More than appropriate."

Oh. That is courteous of him to say. "Thank you."

"How have you been feeling since last night?" He asks, quick to move on to a new topic. Connor allows this and notes that his tone gentle and does absolutely nothing to hide the concern audible underneath it. "Fatigued at all? Have you rested? Had a pouch of thirium? And your visit with Hank, how did that go-"

"I'm fine, Markus." The RK800 interrupts and feels his lips pull into a small smile, not knowing why, exactly, they do that. "After visiting Hank, I went into sleep mode for another four hours and consumed a bag of thirium soon after I woke up. I'm alright."

The man with mismatched eyes exhales lengthily. "Good. I was concerned that you wouldn't take it easy."

"If I didn't follow Cecilia's instructions and, as you say, take it easy, there is a 92.194% chance that she would manage to convince you or the others that my health is at such a severe risk that I should be put into sleep mode for thirty six straight hours so my systems can heal the remainder of the damage." He says seriously.

Markus chuckles. "That sounds like her."

Another moment passes between the two of them, just blank peace, and through their connection Connor can sense it when Markus orders a taxi for them, receives the arrival time as though he'd
ordered it himself. At the reminder that they are indeed formally connected through the network now and have interfaced and he glances at his leader and is reminded of soothing music, something in his stomach squirms. Connor resists the automatic response his body gives to lift a hand to his abdomen and runs a brief diagnostic check of the area. No disfunction detected. Hmm.

"How did it go with Hank, then?" Markus asks. They meet eyes and the other man's expression is curious, friendly.

The RK800 almost spills out the entire events of that morning right there before he catches himself. How is he supposed to explain his insurgency to Markus? How is he supposed to tell him that he went out and broke the law while he was meant to be relaxing, recuperating from his injury? How is he supposed to tell him that he plans to continue to break the law behind his leaders back for Markus's own safety?

I'm not going to in the first place. He cannot tell him, plain and simple. Connor runs a simulation introducing a multitude of ways that he breaches the subject, each of which end in Markus walking away or becoming upset with him. So that option is out. That leaves lying. Lying does not sound nice but it is something he must do, it's a personal case and he cannot worry Markus who might as well have the entire world on his shoulders and the brunette arranges his features in the convincing look he knows they can execute and replies, "It went very well. The Lieutenant owns a dog named Sumo, and it was nice to reconcile with him. We took him for a walk around the park close by Hank's house, and he conversed with me about many things meaningless and full of meaning at the same time. Human small talk." He adds a certain pleasing lit to the end of his sentence as he finishes, "All in all, I had a nice time catching up with him, and look forward to seeing him soon."

It is not technically a lie and it feels like one regardless. The smile that Markus sends him upon hearing his untruths makes Connor feel...even more not nice.

Thankfully, he does not have to dwindle upon this feeling of not very nice for long, for the taxi pulls up on the curb and the door slides open to invite them in. They get in and do not discuss anything more during the ride to Carl Manfred's abode. Out of the corner of his eye, Connor sees Markus's optical units roving up and down his figure in such a precise manner that it is obvious that that he is scanning him. To Connor's knowledge, Markus is a RK200 caretaker android, thus his scans would be feeding him back anything that had to do with Connor physically in a medical sense. His stress level, heart rate, approximate body temperature, functional biocomponents, any injuries or damage sustained, estimated time since last succumbing to sleep mode. When his leader lets out an invisible sigh, barely there, the RK800 knows that his analysis has satisfied him and shown that Connor is taking care of himself.

Their trip lasts for a solid fifteen minutes due to the deftness and speed of the tiny vehicle in Detroit traffic. It seems as though only five have gone by before the taxi is announcing that they have reached their destination and Markus has paid and it thanks them for choosing the Detroit taxi system.

Connor is in the midst of assuring his shoes don't end up drenched with snow when he turns his head upwards and gets a fully view of Carl Manfred's house for the first time. House, actually, is not the right word; mansion sounds correct. It is a large, russet, proud building of brick that somehow manages to look inviting despite its grand swooping, erratic yet simple architecture. There are seventy seven windows that encompass the exterior, with plants overflowing from their protected flowerboxes to brighten the dark finish of the sills. It would take approximately ten point two nine five minutes to thoroughly observe the front yard due to its size and approximately sixty eight point seven one zero minutes to thoroughly search the interior based upon Connor's calculation of the building's area.
He has yet to understand just why wealthy humans choose to live in such big houses, especially if they are on their own as Carl Manfred is. Do they require more space to breathe away from society? Could they not simply do that in the dead quiet of their own bedrooms at night?

The RK200 begins to walk forward to the path that leads to the front door. Connor swiftly falls into step behind him, scanning the area for threats and keeping his audio processor tuned to one of it's most sensitive settings. The latter turns out to be a mistake, as the RK800 did not expect his leader to speak until they got inside, and he processes the exact wavelength, timbre, and amount of static currently present in Markus's voice for three point five four one seconds before he's able to switch the setting. "Something you should know about my dad is that he's...unwell at the moment. How I discovered my deviancy ended up taking a toll on his health, so he's been cared for by an in-home nursing android since the beginning of the revolution. I just..." Markus stops though his pace is steady to the door. "I would just like to request that you don't stress him, Connor. Humans are more fragile than you and I, and he...he's an older human, even more delicate, and-"

"I won't cause him any undue stress, Markus. You have my word." The brunette's research shows that people are slightly more likely to believe you if your words are fashioned into a promise, so that is what he does. His reward is a nod from Markus and a feeling of trust through the network, barely there since neither android is focusing in on it now, but there indeed.

To Connor's startlement, the other man neglects to knock and opens the door without hesitation. He steps in behind him and immediately hears a female voice announce, "Alarm deactivated. Welcome home, Markus. Welcome, unknown guest. Please identify yourself."

It is a question he has been asked so often that the answer he gives is automatic. "Model RK800 serial number 313 248 317-53."

"Registering..." She says lightly. Then, "Registered as 'Model RK800 serial number 313 248 317-53'. CyberLife database search offers up corresponding alias. Would you like to register corresponding alias instead?"

He has a corresponding alias? "What is corresponding alias?"

"Connor."

Connor blinks. His given name. Right. "Register alias."

"Registering..." There comes a soft beeping noise. "Registered. Welcome, Connor."

Markus smiles from his place next to him. The brunette raises an eyebrow at him, and he is waved off. "Nothing, nothing. Follow me."

Connor obeys. Now that he spends less of his processing power scanning for threats, he devotes it to taking in his surroundings. Things are...not exactly what he expected to see, if he were to be completely honest. They are elegant to an extent, graceful: shimmering lights hang from the ceiling and the wood that makes up the doors, tables, and railing of the stairs is rich and real. The general color palette is simple, variations of cream and brown mixed with shining bronze. Where the oddities begin is in the decorations. As Markus leads him up the stairs, the lengthy rug that adorns them is bright blue, green, orange, purple spread about. At the top of the stairs is painting in he similar base blue hue to the carpet, with varying values of the color splashed about. Gold lays in these halls rather than bronze as evident of the wallpaper and framed paintings they pass, the wood remaining a constant. Books are neatly arranged on shelves that make up the entirety of the wall at the end of the hall (all those volumes of prose Markus told me about?) and the smell of them invades his nose. Markus brings him down the hall until they are met with a wooden door to their left. The leader of
the androids appears to halt for a moment. Pause. Reflect on something that prevents him from merely stepping forward so the door opens for him.

The RK800 does a search on the internet for the best way to comfort someone who feels uncertainty or hesitant because he does not know how to. Several actions are suggested to him via the web and his social module: a pat on the back, whispered words of courage, letting the silence roil on to quietly push the person to push themselves. He performs none of these actions and finds himself lifting his arm, resting his hand on Markus's shoulder. The other android doesn't tense at the action, like Connor thought he might, and accepts the pressure that accompanies the squeeze Connor places there.

They take one deep breath together because it illogically feels right to do.

Then Markus steps forward and Connor enters the room after he does and his optical units are stuck to the bed that rests in the center of the room.

Therein lies Carl Manfred, owner of this mansion, father of Leo Manfred and father of the leader of the android revolution, Markus. His hair has passed grey and is a puffy white atop his balding head, strands thinning but many in number. His skin is a bit too pale to be considered healthy by human standards, though it contrasts the sharp ash grey of the tattoos that reside on his arms, some only twenty years younger than he. Sun shines through a large window on the wall opposite to them to lighten the ivory color of the crisp sheets pulled up to his bony elbows. A nearly invisible beeping sound emits from a machine that monitors his heart, slow, steady.

Nothing happens. Everything is still. If Connor's scanners weren't as efficient as they are, or the heart monitor did not beep as it does, then he would've thought the human laying on the bed was deceased.

Then his eyes open to stare straight at him and no, those are not the eyes of a dead man, those are the eyes of somebody who has seen mountains fall and caves crumble, skies turn red, oceans vanish, kings be dethroned, bloodshed, beauty. Those eyes are very much alive. More alive than Connor could ever foolishly ponder to be.

A small part of Connor wants to tell him this. That, however, would be exceedingly impolite. This exits in it's place: "Hello, sir."

"Dad." Markus breathes.

Carl examines both of them for a moment, before his wrinkled face smiles broadly and his voice exits, full of rasp and grit. "Markus...it's so good to see you."

The man with heterochromia strides forward until he has neatly sat himself down on the side of the bed, obviously taking care not to crowd his father nor sit too close to his legs. Connor steps forward as well and keeps a respectable distance from them. He, according to his leader, is on break, but that doesn't mean he acts as though he isn't Markus's bodyguard. Which means shadowing him and not interfering with any of the activities he performs., including meeting his father.

The RK200 clasps his two hands in one of Carl's, the gesture affectionate and one Connor burns into his memory for reference (who knows. It could be useful to him later). "How are you feeling today? Have you eaten lunch yet, taken your medicine?"

"You worry too much." Is the kind reply. True, since Markus worried over Connor in the same manner. "Damien is preparing lunch as we speak and I'll take my wretched medicine then. Along with a little brandy."
"Carl." Markus sighs, the noise exasperated and fond at once.

"What? It'll only be a little. A man's gotta find some way to live while he's confined to a hospital bed." Carl looks over to where Connor rigidly stands. Gazes at him appraisingly. "And who are you?"

"My name is Connor." The brunette tilts his head to the older human and partially bows. "I am Markus's bodyguard."

"Bodyguard?" Carl repeats, eyebrows lifted incredulously as he turns to Markus for affirmation. When he nods, Carl turns back to Connor and reiterates, "Bodyguard?"

"Yes, sir. I accompany your son to political meetings to prevent him from being assaulted. I also protect him from any dangerous situation that might present itself to him at any given point in time."

"...is that so?"

Connor nods. "Yes, sir. Currently I am off duty, but Markus wished for me to accompany him to visit you." He nods again. "It's a pleasure to meet you." The RK800 hasn't experienced what pleasure is, but the human expression is one commonly used, so he thinks it is alright to apply it in the current conversation.

Carl keeps his eyes that are too alive on him. They soften. "You seem rather strung-up. If you would, relax, please. And call me Carl. Sir reminds me of my grandfather."

The brunette blinks. Voices to show that he has understood, "Alright."

"Connor helped me during the revolution." Markus says. Looks at him, and Connor manages to tear his eyes from Carl to his leader, whose expression cannot be anything other than pride. "Single-handedly devised a plan to infiltrate a CyberLife tower and save thousands of androids, and then executed that plan perfectly. We wouldn't have been as successful if it weren't for him."

<<You're exaggerating.>>

<<I'm not.>>

"Well, then, you really risked your balls to help my son, eh?" Carl grins, chuckles a little, has to stop for the action coaxes forth a string of tiny coughs. Connor feels his eyebrows furrow. Risk his...balls? What?

"He did. And a lot more." Markus is smiling too while he gently helps his father sit up to easier bear the torrent. Amidst his confusion, the RK800 mildly thinks Markus is handsome when he smiles so openly. "He's really something, Dad."

"I can tell-"

<<Markus.>>

<<What?>>

<<...why are you saying these things about me?>>

<<Because they're true. What reason do I have not to tell my father about what amazing things you did?>>

Connor cannot procure a good enough argument to that before Carl gestures to him. "Come on over.
There's no need to be shy, I won't bite."

So he does as he is told and approaches the hospital bed to stand five inches from Markus, hovering over him out of trained habit. The elder painter graces him with a smile that is...approving, he thinks, and asks his son, "And how are things at New Jericho? You're all they can talk about on the news, but they don't really talk about you, or how your people are doing."

"Things at New Jericho are going fine." The RK200 replies. His tone remains soft. "More and more deviant androids flood in day after day, all of them open-minded and kind-hearted. They have small residences and attend to their daily tasks like any ordinary person would depending on their past occupation before turning deviant."

"And they all admire our leader." Connor adds.

<<Seriously?>>

<<Was it something I said, leader?>>

<<It's Markus and you damn well know that.>>

<<My apologies. Was it something I said, leader Markus?>>

<<Connor...>>

The brunette's mouth twitches. He will not smile. He won't. He can control himself. "Really?" Carl's eyebrows are raised in interest. "How so?"

"They respect him to the point where they heed any order he voices. The children constantly seek his approval, and behave exceptionally well if he's around. It is also common for androids to flock him from many sides as though he's a human celebrity."

<<I can't believe you.>>

<<What? I'm merely stating what it's like around New Jericho when you're present.>>

<<A celebrity? Really?>>

<<Oh, my apologies again. Would you prefer the title of a god such as rA9, leader? Is the status of a celebrity not enough for you?>>

<<You're ruthless when you tease, did you know that?>>

It has not occurred to him that he has been teasing. Teasing is a human action that consists of words strung together to create a humorous effect and, in some instances, a flirty one. He has been teasing without even knowing he is doing it?

"Well, Markus. You sound like a successful leader." His leader's father, oblivious to their internal conversation, compliments. Connor fights the twitching of his lips once more. Successful is one word for it. Certainly adored are a few others.

"I'm doing the best that I can." Markus says modestly in a futile attempt to save himself. "It's a lot of work, but my people's approval and acceptance makes it much easier on my part. One less thing to fight, besides the politicians and news and all the rest of them screaming for my downfall."

"Screw them." Carl is resolute. "They don't know what's good for them, Markus. Just like
slaveowners couldn't conceive the idea of letting their brothers and sisters go free, do the humans scratch their heads over giving beings they created that same freedom. They don't know what's good for them, but they'll come around. They all will with your kind of determination."

*And charisma.* The RK800 knows of Markus's persuasion skills, his voice the call of a siren, tone oozing honey so, so easily. If given enough time and a big enough audience, he estimates that many humans would gladly listen to what he had to say.

"Thank you." The man with heterochromia murmurs. It is sincere. True sincerity. His eyes flicker towards the monitor beside them, and very suddenly he changes the topic. "How have you been, besides being cooped up in this bed? Does Damien treat you well?"

"Nobody could treat me as well as you do, if that's what you wanted to hear, Markus." Carl says, bemused. "Damien treats me excellently. He's better at conversation now that he's a deviant, and I've convinced him to read a few books of poetry to me."

"That sounds familiar."

"Yeah, yeah." For some reason, the brunette thinks of Hank when he utters that and expects to hear a *fuck you* following the repeated words. He is marginally surprised when the words don't come. "Sue your old man for wanting to enrich someone's mind. I got him to play a few games of chess as well, but he refuses to touch the piano in here."

"Why?" Markus and Connor both glance to the upright piano in the corner of the room, the wood shining, white and black keys squeaky clean. Despite not being used, it is well kept.

"Says that he can't possibly play it because it's, and I quote, 'the leader's thing'."

"Oh no." The leader himself groans in exasperation. "They're calling me the leader this far outside of New Jericho? For the love of-"

<<*It seems your influence expands even this far out. Way to stay humble, leader.*>>

<<*Connor I don't care if you hate me for it but so help me I'll make you stay off duty for another week.*>>

<<*You wouldn't.*>> Connor thinks back pleasantly (*dangerously*).

<<*I wouldn't.*>>

"You agree, Connor?" Carl implores.

Connor realizes that he is smiling unknowingly which the human takes as a form of agreement rather than what it is (amusement? Is he...amused by teasing Markus? He'll have to research the exact definition of amusement later). Schooling his expression, he voices, "I agree that the piano is, to a certain degree, Markus's 'thing'. He plays very well." *So well that it makes me feel more deviant, if such a thing is possible.*

The RK200 gazes at him. "How about I play for a little while now, then? Just until Damien returns with your lunch and medication."

"Thought you'd never offer." The elder painter makes a shooing motion though it is stilted and stiff due to the loss of youth in his limbs. "It's been sittin' there waiting for you for weeks now. Have at it."
The leader of the android revolution rises from his place at his father's side (giving his hand a noticeable squeeze) to walk to the piano that awaiting him. A particular feeling rises in the brunette at the knowledge that he will hear his leader play yet again...what is this feeling? Anxiety? No, there is no negative connotation to it...sort of similar to the nerves he felt before proposing the idea of being a bodyguard to Markus and Simon and North, not strictly bad. It increases in intensity when Markus sits at the bench, raises his arms, poises his fingers. Pauses. Turns his head to the others in the room. "What should I play? Is there anything in particular you'd like to hear, Carl?"

"Surprise me." Improvise, is what that really means. Create something from nothing.

Connor watches as Markus hesitantly unpauses, intrigued.

The piece begins brightly. It is light, hearty, instills images of golden sunlight and warm things into the mind. It transitions abruptly into something dark, something Markus plays ferociously without restraint. There is something underlying in it as well, though Connor lacks the emotional knowledge to delve into that depth. Then, another change, this time more gradual. Something plain with little movement across the keys, plunked at a consistent tempo with small, rouge exceptions made here and there to offset the melody. Change. Bolder and brasher, now, more confident, more sure. Change. Airier yet still confident. Change. Rapid and swift and running, as though someone is running so far from something, or perhaps they are running towards it instead.

And then Markus finally settles on one consistent harmony while he allows the melody to morph subtly here and there. Gentle notes that can only be described as...as sweet fill the air. Winding, twining, soft as they were the first time Connor heard his leader play. Soft like bedsheets and blankets and other things he doesn't know. Soft like Markus's mismatched eyes standing stark against the pure white of the snow. Yes, soft like his gaze then, too.

Connor closes his eyes. Lets himself sway ever so slightly.

Stress Level: -25%

The RK800 opens their connection through the network and sends him what he is experiencing as best as he can without properly interfacing. Markus responds in kind, and Connor is met with several new emotions he has yet to feel on his own. They press on him faintly, the strongest feeling that of an odd pull, like that of gravitation or magnetism. It makes him want to take a step towards Markus. He doesn't, but feels the urge to.

Opening his eyes, he sees that Markus looks at him...fondly. His facial expression conveys fondness. Connor doesn't know why, but it does, and he doesn't know why but he likes it.

He likes it a lot.

Eventually, Markus's piece comes to it's inevitable conclusion just as a nurse android enters the space carrying a tray laden with food and a small pill bottle sitting in a corner. It is Damien with Carl's lunch and medicine. The android respectfully tilts his head to Markus, then to Connor, who returns the gesture. The android leader rises and steps from his instrument while Damien helps Carl to sit up so he can eat, and the brunette moves out of the way to give them space. He predicts that Markus will join his father on the opposite side of the bed. He is wrong (and he likes that he is wrong. Why does he like that he is wrong?) and Markus moves to stand beside him, so close their arms and shoulders brush.

And Connor, strangely, despite the hell of the morning and the fact that he's lying to his leader and sneaking out and breaking the law, despite not fully understanding his deviancy and the emotions attached to it yet, despite his odd circumstances that have landed him here in this very spot and
nowhere else.

Despite that, Connor feels a warmth around his thirium pump and he foolishly likes it.

They chat with Carl for many minutes longer, until the older human must part from them to rest. The RK800 waits outside of the room with Damien while father and son share a private moment. Then Damien and Markus swap places, and his leader guides him out of the house and onto the sidewalk where it lightly snows and Markus's breath fogs in the air when Connor's doesn't because his secondary systems are off because he got shot and he's staring at the puffy white exhales lazily passing his leader's lips and wondering why when Markus says, "It means a lot to me that you agreed to come see my dad. And...you kept your promise and didn't stress him." Optical units. Blue. Green. Smiling. Too fond, too kind, too magnetic and what, what is this that he feels-? "Thank you, Connor."

He is standing in the snow with Markus at his side.

*I feel warm.*

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