Summary

Post Canon Pacifist Route.

Long winded post-revolution get together fic that has no real direction. Have at it!

Eventual Connor/Markus
“You are alive…”

The coin paused over the middle knuckle for barely a second, nearly rolling backward before he lifted a finger to continue the cycle.

The tiny grooves of the quarter ridged its way across smooth skin, tumbling and losing its grip as easily as it was found. Only the coin and the fingers of that one hand moved. The rest of him was still, a place of refuge for the mounds of snow that coated slim shoulders. Had one not known any better, the man sitting on the wooden bench with elbows braced across the back was just a machine, partially made with moving parts, there for visual amusement. He didn’t blink. His fingers never missed a rotation. His chest neither rose nor fell to draw air.

He didn’t need to.

The night ambled on as he sat in the shadows, out of the way.

Watching.

The rest of the androids in the dilapidated warehouse actively brushed the snow off their bodies, preferring the white substance to not melt into their clothes.

*Clink.*

His wrist flicked up and twisted to capture the tossed coin. Not one flake was dislodged from his person.

No movement wasted.

He thumbed the coin up and onto the backs of his knuckles.

Calibration of the hand-eye coordination, he’d said. If the hud behind his eyes stated that his reflexes fell below the ninety-five percent mark, recommended employment of the coin was always plastered across his optical receptors. Recently, status reports have never fallen below even ninety-eight, due to the increasing frequency of his unique calibration technique. By human standards, it became a habit—a familiar, idle activity done while no missions were available for completion. When standby was not entirely necessary. When he had…

Energy left to burn, as the Lieutenant said once.

“…alive.”

Connor would argue that it kept him aware, on his toes and ready for action at any time. It grounded him in the present, on higher alert.

He flipped the coin.

*Clink.*
Metal against metal, but only one ran on Thirium.

Only one had life.

_Clink._

_“You—.”_ 

Both an android and an engine are machines. Thirium kept androids functional. Engines ‘roared to life,’ right? And oil, like Thirium, made it run. Engines weren’t sentient but they were…functional.

Alive?

_“…are—.”_ 

_Clink._

No.

What made them different? They all lived off cues and functions offset by another force. Another stimulus. Another person.

_Clink._

_“It feels so good to be alive.”_

A newly awakened android, Connor absently surmised. He turned the voice over in his head studying the inflections. The speed. The sound.

Alive, she said.

_Clink._

And it felt good.

_Clink._

These feelings, Connor knew, were stockpiled under an umbrella he filed away as Emotions, a sub-folder of the Deviancy log.

In less than the time it took him to register the words the first time, before—.

Emotions were a fickle thing. They couldn’t be predicted. And yet still they could be anticipated. Manipulated. But emotions weren’t mechanical; they didn’t have oil nor Thirium. But it seemed to course through a being like blood; it was a distinct sign of life. It was defined by desire and not necessity; and If one had the capacity to experience and exude emotions…one was considered alive.

Right?

_Clink._

Maybe.

_“It does, doesn’t it? Makes you want to do so much more. Be so much more.”_

Connor blinked.
It made you…

“…What do you really—.”

Want?

The coin faltered and a small piece of snow was jostled. No one would notice the waver; he was speaking.

_Clink._

Markus.

_Clink._

The voice of a people awakened to emotions…

_Clink._

Who made them raw to the new sensation of feeling by a mere touch.

_Clink._

To a new world of experiences.

_Clink._

Awakened to life.

_Clink._

To wanting.

_Clink._

The one to knock on the transparent door that separated Connor from the rest of the world.

The one that told him:

_Clink._

“You are—.”

_Clink._

Alive.

_Thwap._

The coin lay flat in his now open palm. Connor finally shifted after hours of inactivity, save for the calibration process. Hours of running in place, away from standby—suggested by his systems due to the lack of pending activities. Hours of think—processing information, trivial as it were. He had been still for so long, hardly anyone registered his presence, dislodging the mounds of snow from his shoulders.

The ex-deviant hunter pocketed the coin and brushed the rest of the snow off his standard issue slacks, straightened his tie and he quietly vacated the area, searching for another more secluded one
on the inside. Blue lines of code ran across the hud, and he ignored them. He could take an educated
guess as to what they were. Status reports and rudimentary maintenance routines were something that
let him know he was still functioning. They were…signs of life, he supposed.

He was…aware.

Thirium ran freely through his systems. So, in this case, he could say he had life.

He was made raw, though not by the touch of his leader. Not like everyone else. He was scraped
bare and hollowed out by a choice he made under pressure. The pressure of uncertainty. There was
no touch apart from the pat on the shoulder when he offered his life to help the revolution. There was
no ‘standard intimacy’ offered from Jericho’s leader. it was just as well. Connor took lives that could
have been under this man’s protection, only to shed the skin of familiar directives given and be left…

Yes. Raw.

Raw and exposed to nothing but the sensations of only knowing. Remembering.

*Regretting.*

Was he really, truly, alive?

Connor made an abortive move to reach for the coin again; the need to process—to think—trying to
override his primary functions.

He was… aware of the world around him, yes. He had the capacity to emulate the emotions of
humans, and experience them through other androids via interface protocols. But naturally exuding
them?

His fingers twitched.

There was only one other he’d exuded these…emotions to. She had deemed him worthy of nothing
but a series of ones and zeros. A machine only able to follow instructions. He requested—no,
begged, for another chance…promised her success and she—.

He was given his own head on a platter. He just wanted—.

There was no warmth after voluntarily stepping out of the shroud of mindless obedience. When…
when he passed through the red wall. There was no touch to be a balm over a hemorrhaging wound
lost to the naked eye. Only a choice.

And another choice.

Then another.

*Another.*

A world of choices laid before him, vast and endless.

He was just aware. Thirium and code cycled through him, laden with a never-ending flood of feeling
without meaning—no purpose to them. They couldn’t be categorized and filed away like he did
everything else. They were just errant lines of code, wasting space in his memory banks.

He was—.

He felt…
Empty.

Clink.

Of everything but that unyielding desire. That want.

Clink…

“You…”

The want to be…

“…are—.”

Clink.

Alive.

Thwap.

And the wanting alone was killing him.

So he did the only thing he could; face the world with squared shoulders and eyes forward. The decisive thought alone made Connor absently straighten himself as he rounded the corner to enter the warehouse.

Without the military breathing down their necks, Jericho had time to spread out and find shelter for the countless androids under its wings. Those freed from the CyberLife sub levels blended in fairly quickly. Clothes were taken from the homeless shelters; there was barely a human around to really protest the use of clothing no one really wanted. And looting from department stores was frowned upon by their leader.

Connor watched them work, taking in the injured and the not so damaged newcomers, their gentle murmuring echoing off the tin walls. The sub level androids were the ones who usually acknowledged his presence more often than not. It was a given, considering he was their unofficial leader before making it to the Square that fateful night. It was…awkward…being on the receiving ends of both extremes; those who were brought from Cyber Life at the height of the standoff saw him as a guide and someone to adhere to. Others regarded him with righteous disdain, knowing of his history as the Deviant Hunter.

But after mere weeks of observing human behavior and somewhat familiar with their need to feel useful, he’d learned to just go with regurgitating the instructions he’d heard the four leaders tell everyone else. It worked for the most part, keeping his statistical analyses to himself. He didn’t want to impose his thoughts on anything set by the authorities here, much less provoke the ire of North any more than he already had with his mere presence. There was one such instance, a delicate one when one of the said models approached him in her presence. The rate at which he was going to be at the receiving end of her hostility was rising at an alarming rate.

He fought to keep his stress levels down, nervousness nearly forcing him to reach for his coin. He could only endeavor to keep a steady yellow LED. Thankfully, whatever flames lit her tongue had been extinguished by the grace of Markus’ appearance and the android’s automatic deference to the Jericho leader. Connor had never before devised an escape route so quickly in all his days of functioning.

Since then, he’d kept to the shadows; a still figure become one with the environment.
The warehouse he hung around had been sectioned off into almost cubicles to offer some kind of personalization option...he supposed. They were padded with old carpet pieces, washed and dried as best as possible to counter the cold that seeped through the warehouse’s thin structure. The former engineers and electricians found ways to wire the otherwise dead warehouse to siphon power from the poles and transformers on the main roads. Not that they needed the light, but it gave them a sense of normalcy, he heard one of them say.

A sense of individuality.

Connor didn’t have his own little nook, per se. He did find an outlet that was usually free during the wee hours of the morning that he would use should he absolutely need to. More often than not, he would leave altogether and find an unoccupied apartment building to power down. Somewhere he didn’t have to constantly keep an ear out.

Somewhere he felt safe.

It was different being the hunted. Even after they’d more or less won their battle and Markus insisted that he was part of Jericho thereafter, Connor still felt the need to look over his shoulder. His place in the resistance was not a solid one, despite what Markus may have thought. It would never be altogether welcomed, but it was far too unsure at the moment for comfort. Gaining the trust of the other androids would be most likely seen as manipulation, considering his...methods of operation. He wasn’t sure he had the time to devise new, equally as effective ways to get his foot in the door. If the events during the victory speech that night was anything to go by, Cyber Life was far from giving up.

They needed to be ready.

He wanted to warn Markus; the rebel leader valued the opinion of his people above all else. Especially those of his closest friends. If Connor was truly part of that, he would be in the clear. However, despite North’s violent disposition, she had a sharp eye for danger. If Connor was honest with himself, he couldn’t see either of them trusting him as far as they could throw him. After Amanda, he wouldn’t trust himself either.

Help had to come from elsewhere, but, he couldn’t contact Hank during such a dire time. He’d already been suspended due to the past events at the abandoned Cyber Life tower. Any further involvement would be detrimental to the older man’s reinstatement. So it fell to the RK800 to take matters into his own hands. He was back to square one. Only this time, his mission was different.

Of course, it had always been to keep an eye out for danger, but the stakes were more than just civil now. It had become political. Markus was more or less a politician in advocacy for the androids. Humans were still against them in large numbers and Cyber Life worked closely with the government. The momentary ceasefire was not a time to relax.

It was a time for the other side to deliberate and strategize.

It was a time for the government to regain its bearings and cultivate a systematic approach to bringing down the resistance. To killing them.

And a sure-fire way to kill a people, Connor knew, was to kill its voice.

To kill Markus.

**New Mission Parameters: Protect Markus.**

He had a plan.
Markus knew he was unique. He was the only RK200 model in existence; he was a caretaker android gifted to Carl Manfred, an ailing and aging painter—a personal gift from Elijah Kamski himself. He was golden skinned with striking green eyes. He was more than an android; he was the old man’s son. And he was wrenched away from his home by a bullet to his now blue eye, forced to crawl out of his own grave and be reborn as the leader of Jericho. All because Carl’s biological son Leo felt like he didn’t need to respect his father by first respecting himself.

Carl often spoke about how unfair life was. When Markus came home disheveled but none the worse for wear, the artist would go on a short spiel about the way the world shouldn’t work. Markus had never seen it as a big deal until in that one moment where, with just a flick of the wrist and a nod of his head, Leo had him trashed and left for dead.

Markus had a good home. A good owner—no, he’d had a father. And just because of one petty grievance, he was made a criminal, wronged and torn apart. And if it happened to him, what about the others? The ones in torn homes, abused and killed? What happened to the androids that infested the junkyard, dead, dying, and wandering aimlessly until they eventually shut down? Those who never experienced the care, love and compassion...where was their Carl?

“Don’t let anyone tell you who you should be.”

But they were told that they were slaves. They weren’t living beings with minds of their own.

That they were nothing.

Markus couldn’t stand by and watch them suffer. Not after he saw the poor definition of freedom Jericho upheld when he’d first joined.

And now here they were, acknowledged as another form of intelligence, on par with the humans. They may not be well liked by the vast majority, but mankind was slowly rounding to their side. And it was all thanks to another, very special make and model.

Connor.

That was a great day in the history of androids that the infamous Deviant Hunter chose to give his allegiance to the righteous cause. It was nothing short of amazing to see what it looked like from the other side; to see someone deviate from their original code and function for themselves. But he also knew that it wasn’t the most ideal situation to get past that red wall.

“He’s leaving,” Simon’s voice cut through his thoughts. Markus looked up from where he knelt beside a few YK500s, helping them build their first snowman. Indeed, the familiar glow of the Cyber Life jacket was headed toward the street.

Speak of the devil.

“Didn’t know he was here,” Markus mused. He was certain he’d left the former detective at the church before they began their rounds to the various shelters claimed for their people.

“That’s unsettling,” his blond friend intoned. “You should really keep an eye on the sleeper agent, you know.”

Markus stood, snow crunching underfoot as he moved to stand with Simon. “He’s not a sleeper
agent, Simon. He’s one of us.”

The PL600 folded his arms, working his jaw. “You heard what happened in the square. North saw it with her own eyes.”

“But did he shoot?”

Simon finally looked his way, tired-looking blue eyes searching his own. “You can’t keep gambling with your life like this, Markus. We all depend on you to lead us. A dead Markus marks a dead people.”

The Jericho leader stifled a sigh and retuned his attention to the retreating back. Connor was almost out of sight.

Simon doesn’t spare a breath. “Think he’s in cahoots with the humans?”

“There aren’t any military men within fifty miles of this place,” Markus reminds him. “And the Detroit Police don’t particularly have a soft spot for him.”

“What about that detective?”

“Suspended and of no use to Connor.”

Simon tilted his head, tugging his leader’s gaze away from the hunter. “How do you know this?”

“I followed him.”

“You were never alone for more than a minute after the standoff,” the PL600’s brows furrowed.

“Remember the dead drone we walked by the next day?”

“When did you find time to re-purpose a drone?”

“Where do you find time to construct ways that Connor could betray us when he has no reason to?”

The PL600 was silent.

He gave Simon a gentle pat to the shoulder and started to usher the children in side. It was late and the cold was going to bite harder soon.

He understood those concerns. And his people were entitled to their opinions. He wasn’t there to lord over them; but he did expect them to respect his own views on the same token.

Markus watched the children scatter to their own places once inside, absently throwing an arm across North’s shoulder when she approached him. The blond WR400 relaxed against his side, her own arm slung around his waist. It was something a lot of the androids tended to do—relax around him. It was a good thing, to be able to find peace around someone. He just hoped they would learn to achieve the same with each other instead of seeking him out whenever he was around.

Guilt bit at his heel and he beat it down. He had the right to be a little selfish with his own space. Carl had taught him that.

“Everything is in order here,” North straightened and moved away. “I designated a WR600 and a WB200 to look things over and report to me at the end of the day. There are three MP800s available for medical services at this refuge.”

“Flattery gets you nowhere, Markus,” she winked before grabbing his wrist to lead him outside, but not before he could bid his people good night.

“It got us to be left alone for a while as a people to regroup and find a place for ourselves.”

“That’s diplomacy,” North’s nose wrinkled.

“Semantics.”

Simon slid into the back of the vehicle waiting for them near the sidewalk. “Is he trying to sweet talk you into letting him slack off again?”

“Always,” the former Eden android rolled her eyes.

“Because I’m the villain,” Markus snorted.

“To the humans, yes,” Simon hummed, capturing his leader’s eye in the rear-view mirror.

“It’s been quiet, though.” Mismatched eyes broke the contact and kept an eye on the roads surrounding the automatic cab. “I’m not entirely sure what to do about that.”

“Shouldn’t let your guard down.” North reached over and clasped Markus’ hand in hers. “Keep an eye out for threats right under your noses.”

“North—.”

“No, Markus,” she balked. “He’s a danger to all of us and we need to get rid of him. Keeping his distance isn’t enough. He has to go.”

We need to kill him, she doesn’t say.

He glanced her way, but was met with the back of her head as she watched the snowfall. His attention reverted to his own window.

It was like they kept forgetting that Connor was the one who turned the tide in the fight in Hart Plaza. He was the one who chose not to shoot when Cyber Life resumed control over his systems in order to assassinate Markus. They refused to look past the title of Deviant Hunter.

North surprised him; no one wanted to escape their past more than she did. Surely she could see the same in Connor. And yet she refused to let him. Oh, he saw the stares. He heard the whispers. Heard them from his friends—from everyone. There was constant debate over the safety of their people. The doubt had even trickled down to the masses led to the battleground by Connor himself.

But he could never seem to catch the ex-detective alone for more than a second; someone always showed up and Connor skittered away like a frightened mouse before they could talk. One hell of a far cry from the lethal killer they all associated with the negotiator.

Unfortunately, time was getting shorter, leaving little left to dwell on the lost and ruined opportunities. Moves needed to be made, and fast. They were far from any sort of peace. Deep down, he felt that this was only the calm before the storm. Jericho needed all the strength they could get to sway the human government to see things their way. They couldn’t afford anymore bloodshed; they only had so many supply warehouses within the safety of the wide breadth given to them by law enforcement.
Markus ran a hand over his face and sighed.

Simon’s gaze caught his in the window’s reflection but he ignored it, and cut himself off from the network before any questions could come through.

He wanted to be alone in his thoughts for a while. Just this once. Only for a little while. Tonight seemed good as any other to pick up his smock.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys so much for reading, commenting, leaving kudos, bookmarking, subscribing...

EVERYTHING.

You have no idea how much it means to me that you like this enough to do either of those things.

Did a summary revamp because the first one was just...eh. Do enjoy this much shorter installment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Markus stared into the darkness, the heat from North’s systems bleeding onto his skin. It was a comfort, the warmth; he’d heightened the sensitivity of his sensors where she lay against him as if to lend himself as fodder to a tiny furnace—to feed the yearning for the warmth he’d long since lost the night he was torn away from his home. He wanted to go back; to feel the security within those walls on Lafayette Avenue. He wanted to get up in the mornings and take are of his father. He wanted to look outside in the mornings and take the days one hour at a time. He wanted to explore the world from the safety of familiarity…not stick his head into the maw of the beast of this reality. He wanted…home. A home. And here he was, clinging to the home he’d made in her— North. A reminder that everything that happened was real. That they’d made it out.

That they were alive.

And that he wasn’t alone. Through it all he’d had friends behind him. Friends who had been through worse than he had, but still pulled themselves together to fight for the cause with him—behind him, pushing him forward. And the woman that held his ideals and his heart dear to her own.

She believed in him when it counted. She kept him grounded in reality when his pacifism cast a shadow over the reality of human nature. She was the one who truly saw in him what he couldn’t see in himself.

Their little ragtag band came so far in so little time. Before he knew it, he had a little family of his own. It still blew his mind how cohesive they’d become. Simon was the friend he’d, in an ideal world, would have connected to in college and never truly separate. He had a keen eye for details, and excelled at diffusing escalating tensions. Josh was the brother Markus never had. His loyalty to the cause never wavered, no matter if they took a path that wasn’t as peaceful as they’d liked.

“We go together like steak and fries.”

Markus huffed a quiet laugh at Josh’s words, stilling when the body in his arms stirred, but did not wake.

Even with their continued faith in his abilities, Markus knew he was far from being the perfect one to lead Jericho. He was simply the one who took up the mantle to show them all what it was like to be
free, and to fight for it. They couldn’t very well just lay around in damp darkness waiting for their bodies to shut down on them. They couldn’t be alive and not truly live. Freedom was never hiding in the dark and waiting for the end. Freedom was being out in the open and taking advantage of everything the world had to offer.

It was a shame. A damn shame the humans took that dream and turned it into a twisted caricature of terrorism and a threat to their safety.

The RK200 swallowed a sigh.

He understood where their fear came from. So soon after an android had held a little girl hostage and threatened to end both their lives in a free fall off a building nearly a mile high. And to see androids show up demanding that they be respected as living individuals that were to be treated with respect and equally to any other human being…

He understood the circumstance.

He understood their position.

He understood the difficulty of what they were up against.

But the humans? They didn’t understand his people. They weren’t trying to. Instead androids were gunned down in the name of ‘national security,’ and slaughtered for believing they could coexist peacefully with the people who had given them life. All they asked for was true autonomy.

The humans were too wrapped around the pinky finger of power and felt a call to arms when their dominance was threatened.

“Markus?”

Mismatched eyes flickered down to North, whose gaze was focused on the hand locked around her bicep. The android leader recoiled if burned, mumbling apologies and dotting the WR400’s face with butterfly kisses of contrition.

“It’s okay,” North murmured, shifting into the embrace. “You didn’t hurt me.” She took the retreating hand and guided it to curl around her own, redirecting Markus’ kisses to her lips.

They pulled apart moments later, eyes bright in the dark of the trailer they were holed up in for the night.

“What are you thinking about?” Her voice was rough, like gravel over pavement, yet smooth like silk. It may have been the perfect tool of seduction for the masses, it was a source of comfort for Markus. He lets her voice wash over him for a moment, just to pretend that she didn’t ask him a loaded a question. That maybe he could just say he’s thinking about what to play next, or if he wanted to paint her like one of his French girls.

That he didn’t have to worry about an entire population of a slowly dying people.

“I’m thinking,” he replied, shifting to hover over his lover. He hooked a finger under her chin. “About how I’m the luckiest man in the world.”

North raised a delicate brow. “Or new and improved ways to bullshit North?”

Markus mimicked her expression. “Are you calling me unlucky?”
“I’m calling you out.”

The WR400 maneuvered them both until she was straddling the Jericho leader. “You’re practically the leader of a nation, babe, there’s bound to be something on your mind other than the love of your life.”

“But who better to occupy the thoughts of this leader than the woman who holds his heart, hm?” Marks took her hand and kissed the back of her knuckles.

North feigned a groan, unable to stifle the chuckle that escaped. “Oh my god, we follow a shameless sap.”

She yelped at the sudden reversal, halfheartedly glaring at the man above her.

“But I’m your shameless sap,” Markus rumbled, swooping in to steal a kiss. His hand sought hers, skin receding.

Even if he couldn’t escape his fate, he could still hide from it. Distract himself with something else. Something just as important. Someone just as important. For a little while.

Just…

Clink.

A little…

Clink.

While…

Clink…

Thwap.

Connor sat, cross-legged and skinless, on dirty bathroom tiles in a condemned apartment building. It was a hideout for red ice addicts once upon a time, deserted after the emergency evacuation. Most of the addicts were either incarcerated for assault or moved to rehabilitation centers across the state.

The ex hunter was plugged into the only functional, but low-voltage outlet on the entire fourth floor. Energy levels were low, and so he forewent his skin and other secondary functions so that he could continue his research. He went through news bulletins, reports and blogs to keep up with what was going on around them.

“…Detroit city proper is declared a no-human zone and citizens have been evacuated, though a few refuse to leave—”

Switch.

“…speculations that the androids have scattered and began a systematic takeover of the city…”

Switch.

"Cyber Life's reign in the stock market takes a devastating blow following—."
“Cyberlife is in talks about recalling androids by type in order to reset them.”

Connor’s head tilted to the side, LED a strong yellow.

“Those who cannot find the means to send the androids back may be advised to contact the nearest Cyberlife outlet to send maintenance employees to get the job done.”

Switch.

“There aren’t as many outside of Detroit so control can be better assumed if they can work from the outside in—.”

Switch.

“The federal government has yet to give any remarks in the aftermath of the android revolution—.”

Connor shut off the feed and pocketed his coin.

As it stood, it would not be long before security at the Cyber Life tower would be reinforced. He needed to get in and get out as fast as possible with as much as he could carry.

The ex-detective paused for a moment, then probed the radio frequencies of the state department. He might not be able to contact Hank directly, but he could still keep an eye on law enforcement this way. At least, before they decide to employ a stricter firewall for their equipment. After all, as of a fortnight, androids were considered sentient and their abilities were not to be taken lightly.

There was nothing of note taking to the airwaves from the Detroit Police Department in the area. Just the usual looting and vandalism by the few humans who chose not to leave, or could not. But even then, those few were kept outside of what was now known as Ground Zero: a fifty mile breadth of air for androids to populate and work with.

Touching those stores was out of the question if he wanted to stay under the radar. He would have to either find something within the district or resign himself to a little road trip.

Connor exited the stream and sat in silent contemplation, chassis fans a whisper in the emptiness of the complex. His new mission wasn’t an easy one, and he didn’t expect it to be. The steps he chose to take posed the most risk, but the rewards were far higher than the alternatives.

And those steps required contingencies to a plan that was doomed to fail in so many aspects; he was but one android. His only human help was more or less out of reach—a boundary he chose to respect because Hank didn’t deserve the chaos it would bring back into his life if he were to contact him now. And help from Jericho outside of Markus himself was nigh impossible; one had to get to Markus first.

Through North.

It was improbable and wasted valuable time that they did not have.

**Mission Parameter: Protect Markus.**

**Secondary Mission: Watch Cyber Life.**

**Task:** *Understand the current situation.*
Task: Anticipate Jericho's next move.

Connor unfurled his legs and leaned against the grimey white wall, powering down and setting his wake-up timer for dawn.

There was work to be done.

Chapter End Notes

Blindsided by the Norkus, I know, but it's a necessary 'evil' as it were. It will make sense later. It's a slow start, yeah, but things will pick up soon. Please, let me know what you think!
Chapter 3

For the first time in a long time, Markus smiled.

It felt like an age since he’d last painted, but only a short time had passed in reality. Mere days, upwards of just a month since Carl afforded him the chance to get his idea of the world on canvas—to explore the world in his own mind. The opportunity to let go and just be.

The revolution was one of the most startling successes he’d had as a free man. But there was hardly any time to explore himself as a living being. He knew he had balls—taking on an entire country and its military with a band of brothers newly awakened to the possibilities and no true physical prowess was more than proof enough. And even then, it took more courage than he was programmed with.

If Carl himself told him he was going to be figurehead of the literal Rise of the Machines 2038 Edition, he’d have just humored the old man and continued on with his daily duties.

But look at him: infamous guerrilla leader squatting in an abandoned building draped in a smock and playing in colorful chemicals.

Fucking incredible.

And incredible still, was the trump card they never knew they had.

His smile turned into a proud smirk as he mixed the colors on the palette.

*Clink.*

The android leader glanced in the direction of the sound, hardly pausing in his task. The church may have been quiet around him, but it was far from empty.

He continued to paint.

Gentle snowfall gathered on the floor of the ruined church from on high, covering the pews and dotting the ground in small white islands. Sleet congregated on the shoulders of the refugees who stuck with him through the thickest of it all.

Yet of the many eyes he knew riveted equal parts between him and to what he was painting, he still felt the tell-tale chill at the base of his spine—the feeling of being watched.

*Clink.*

Markus’ attention flickered toward the sound when it persisted, and he spotted the ex-hunter settled in the shadows across the stage. He was out of immediate sight, blending into the shadows in the beanie and parka he’d worn the night they first met.

A simple coin, he noted, was the only other deliberate source of sound in the immediate area. Or, rather, as close as its owner dared to situate himself.

Markus watched the quarter tumble across the other man’s fingers before it was flicked into the other waiting hand then tossed into the air. It was a short routine, constant and rhythmic.
Clink.

Blue and green met brown.

Clink.

Markus kept painting.

Clink.

Colors crawled up the artist’s forearms and leaped onto the already spattered smock he wore to protect his shirt.

A feeble defense against the acrylic arts, at best.

Clink.

Connor finally shifted in his seat after being spotted. He didn’t intend to truly hide; he simply opted to remain unobtrusive. He couldn’t very well leave the android leader to his privacy—there was none to be had in the abandoned church in the first place.

The ex-hunter couldn’t see what was being painted—not that it really mattered. He settled in his small space, watching the android leader.

Clink.

It was a strange, cold thing to realize he was made to be a murderer. To know he was assembled and programmed to take down the very man who stood before him, painting, open and unguarded. Designed to know within the first thirty seconds of situating himself, that there was a total of forty-two unique ways to capture, disable, and even neutralize Jericho’s leader.

Clink.

To bring him in.

Clink.

To end the war.

But Cyberlife’s hold on him was broken. He fought for the choice not to follow his hard-wired directive. Or, more specifically, his mind palace had been divided into two partitions, the smaller of which was no longer functional—the one he could no longer access after using the so-called ‘back door’ provided by Kamski himself.

The red flag, however, was that Amanda had still been able to get to him despite making it past the red wall. Surely there should have been something stopping her from reaching him after he’d deviated. He couldn’t have been the only one outfitted with a sovereign AI who piloted him like the mindless puppet he was…

Clink.

Could still be.

Clink.

Didn’t matter.
Movement, swift and purposeful, caught his peripheral and he settled for rolling the coin along his knuckles only.

>> Subdirective: Anticipate Jericho’s next move.
>> Display Commands? Y/N _
<< N

Brown eyes flickered toward the entrance to see two familiar androids making their way toward their occupied leader. His scanner automatically roved over the first face he saw.

Processing… _

…

Complete. _

WR400 #641 790 831 “Traci”

Known as North.

He knew from initial scanning pre-deviancy, she was a rogue android who disappeared from the Eden club not long after he was deployed. She took to changing her appearance from that of the standard issue Traci and she styled her hair to hide her LED if she hadn’t outright removed it already.

Markus glanced behind him and put down the palette, hoisting the smock up and over his head. Not a moment later, North reached for the leader’s hand, both their synthetic skins receding for interface. Markus leaned down and captured the WR400’s—North’s—lips wit his own.

Further inspection revealed that she was armed; there was a concealed firearm at her back if he were to judge the slight bulge behind her just above the waist.

“There are three warehouses in the area.”

Both men's attention snapped to the other arrival. Connor's scanner did its work.

Processing… _

…

Complete.

PJ500 #242 801 694

This one was Josh, if memory served him correctly. He was another of Jericho’s leaders. He didn’t speak much—at least, not with Connor as witness. He was, however, unarmed.
The ex-detective quietly flipped the coin to spin on his fingertip.

He watched as Markus tucked his lover under his arm, moving to sit on the crate nearby and drawing her into his lap.

Connor looked back to Josh.

“There’s one not too far from here,” the dark skinned android continued on, “One near the wharf to the south, and the last one ten miles out.”

“They’re virtually untouched,” North spoke up. “If we can get our hands on a trailer, we can bring back the mother-load.”

The ex-hunter let the coin roll to another fingertip with a little less care. Neither of them noticed the extra pair of ears listening in. And while it should not affect his new directive, it did produce unfortunate statistics in the event of—.


Opportune, mostly.

With more androids coming out of the woodwork and seeking refuge in the rebuilding Jericho, supplies were on the way to becoming scarce at an increased rate. There were more than a few hundred to care for, unlike in Old Jericho.

“So,” North fairly sprang to her feet, looking down at Markus expectantly. “Do we ship out tonight?”

Markus seemed to think it over.

“If we move now, we may just be able to blindside the guards and get a fair amount of supplies for the different safe-houses,” she continued doggedly.

“The drones, North,” Josh warned.

“We can sneak past them,” she waved a hand dismissively.

“It’s not that easy.”

“Markus destroyed one before,” the WR400 argued. “Who says we can’t?”

“Be reasonable, North.”

“I am,” she challenged. “I’m asking the relevant question in order to understand your, obviously, absurd views on the matter.”

“Don’t mock him, North,” Markus tutted.

“I just want to know.”

“You’re not able to pre-construct the actions needed to take down a specialized Cyberlife drone,” Connor finally spoke up from his little nook in the shadows.

Josh started and North fell back into a defensive crouch.

Connor raised a brow and Markus’ shoulders hitched briefly.
Irrelevant. No injuries detected.

“Your specs,” he continued, assuming the stunned silence for misunderstanding. “They don’t allow for—.”

“What the hell is he doing here?” North rounded on the deviant leader with a scowl, eyes trained the former detective.

“North—,” the seated leader tried.

“What if we were giving you sensitive information?”

Josh also seemed…reproachful, but said nothing.

“Then you’d use our shared link,” Markus replied smoothly. “He’s not a danger here.”

“Out,” North glared at Connor.

The ex-hunter flipped the coin one last time before pocketing the small item. Connor reached down beside him—.

The click of a gun’s safety halted his movement.

“Hands where I can see them, bastard.”

By that time, everyone present in the old church had stopped what they were doing and stared. Those with LEDs displayed a steady yellow, and those who removed theirs looked wary.

Connor kept his gaze locked with North’s, free hand raised as he brought the other one into view. Clutched in it was just a small sketchbook, one of many that were stacked in the corner where he sat. He cast a furtive glance to the rebel leader and back to North, carefully holding the book with both hands. He made to open the harmless object.


Connor opened his mouth to point out the glaring paradox but Markus was on his feet by then, trying to coax the weapon out of the Traci’s hands.

He wisely refrained from response, then, and focused on what woudl be the cause of his potential death.

Processing…

Scan Complete.

.35 Pistol.

Capacity: 6/15

“Come on, North, he’s not going to do anything,” the head of Jericho pressed gently but firmly down on the barrel.

“You don’t know that,” she seethed.
He remained still, hands raised and clutching the sketchbook as an unintentional shield, however useless, against the potential bullet aimed for his head.

“Give me gun, North.”

“Tell him to leave first.”

“He doesn’t have to, so just—.”

“Markus, listen to me for once, please, and—.”

Markus gripped the barrel of the gun and fixed the angry android with a look Connor couldn’t see.

“No,” his firm denial brooked no argument. “You listen to me.”

She finally looked at the android leader, fury bright in her eyes and jaw clenched. Maybe Markus didn’t assert his position often if at all. And doing so unexpectedly yielded…interesting…results.

Connor absently filed the bit of information away.

Markus leaned in, carefully placing himself between the gun and its target. “Do you trust me?”

The silence that followed was tense, but short as the angry Traci nodded.

“Then give me the gun,” Markus soothed, “and trust me when I tell you that he won’t do anything.”
North noticeably hesitated, but Markus’ hackles were still raised, despite the shift in tone. He pressed on. It seemed Markus may have also possessed negotiation protocols, if not as extensive as the 800 series.

“If he was going to kill me, he would have done it two hours ago.”

At length, her grip on the pistol lessened and she relinquished the weapon to Markus, who swiftly engaged the safety and pocketed the firearm.

**Intended Target: N/A**

**Probability of Sustaining Gunshot Wound: None**

**Survivability: 100%**

**Stress Level: 15%.**

Markus heaved a sigh of relief, brows furrowed as he regarded his lover. She wasn’t happy at all, and he knew he’d get an earful at the end of the night when rounds were complete—if not during, if he knew her as well as he thought he did.

He shared a look with Josh, who pursed his own lips, but offered no response.

Great. He had two lectures on his hands that night.

Markus slipped his hand into North’s, discreetly initiating an interface as he guided her back to his side. The RK200 turned to face the ex-hunter.

He watched Connor slowly lower the sketchbook, finally taking his eyes of North and meeting his. “Do you have a pencil nearby, Markus?”

The Jericho leader regarded the unruffled ex-hunter thoughtfully.

“You were about to get shot,” Josh blurted, echoing his exact thoughts.

“I would have lived.”

Well.

State of the art prototypes never missed a beat, it seemed.

“This guy,” Josh muttered.

The ex-hunter seemed to ignore him, his expectancy returning to Markus.

“Behind you,” the deviant leader motioned to the tin where Connor found the sketchbook, “in the corner next to the thinner.”

“Thank you,” came the absent reply. He fished out a pencil and flipped the sketchbook to an empty page.

“And now he wants to fucking draw,” North muttered. Markus shot her a look and she scoffed, turning away in disgust.
He reigned in a sigh and let her be.

While Markus shared her confusion, his curiosity was getting the better of him. He released his hold on her and sat back down on the crate. He leaned forward, eyeing Connor’s eerily precise movements. The ex-hunter spoke after a moment of silence.

“As I was saying…”

*As if staring down the barrel of a gun just happens regularly.*

“And then he casually points out the flaw of his would-be killer.

Markus thought the other was brave and noble for breaking into Cyblerlife to help turn the tables on the human military. Maybe this was some inline method in the RK800’s make up that repressed his natural sense of self-preservation?

“Markus can’t be at all three houses at once,” Connor pointed out. “That is, if you are taking him with you to either one of them, and plan to hit them individually—which is unwise, of course. Chances of success would decrease by over half.”

“Are you really gonna listen to this guy?”

Markus held up a hand, successfully silencing the WR400.

“Go on,” he encouraged the other man.

“I am familiar with the warehouses you’re targeting and their security is different than the usual storage facility owned by Cyberlife,” Connor tore out the page and handed it to Markus, already starting on a second sketch. “These are the floor plans with the camera placements and drone rotations noted.”

“Curious,” Markus hummed, perusing the first schematic, labeled Windsor. Mismatched eyes flicked up at the working android. “How did you get this information?”

“My memory banks have intimate knowledge of Cyberlife’s outlets, including the locations and basic structures of Cyberlife warehouses according to the items stored and their locations.”

Connor handed over the second schematic, hardly missing a beat.

Markus handed the first plan to Josh, taking his time to go over the second. He flipped the paper over to look at the writing he’d seen the other jot down at the back.

“For efficiency,” Connor continued, “you’ll need three teams of ten, and follow the instructions I’ve written on the back to the letter.”

Mark’s attention snapped to the still-sketching android. “You’re not joining us?”

Connor’s movements didn’t falter. “My presence has an eighty percent chance of disrupting the cohesive teamwork of any team I would be slotted into.”

The deviant leader frowned.

“Why are you helping us, Hunter,” Josh spoke up. “What’s in it for you?”
Markus glanced over his shoulder at his companion and watched Connor for his response. The RK800’s hand continued to move across the page, creating the last piece from memory.

“There are more and more androids coming to the safe houses,” Connor answered factually. “If you want to take care of them all, you’ll need the supplies to do so.” He gave Markus the last sheet and sat back. “You found the storage facilities, yes, but you need to be able to get in and out without Cyberlife’s fail-safe triggering a lock down. There is nothing for me to gain.”

“Bull.” North.

Markus kept his silence and held the ex-hunter’s steady gaze.

“What are these numbers at the back?”

“Deactivation protocols for the cameras,” Connor continued to watch the deviant leader as he answered Josh. “That way the feed never makes it to Cyberlife and you’re able to dismantle them without raising alarms.”

“And the drones?”

“If you can re-purpose the main one, the others will follow the same protocols outlined on the back of each plan.”

Markus sat up, folding his arms. He acutely felt the eyes of his two companions and fellow Jericho leaders and carefully tasted the words in his mouth. They were already skeptical about the information given, but Connor had no reason to betray them. Not at this stage.

Josh wouldn’t explode, but he would voice his displeasure.

North would eat him alive.

Simon would, quite possibly, be the one in the middle in terms of reaction.

Jericho may disapprove, but the opportunity was too golden to pass up. So he took the gamble.

“When do you suggest we move?”

Connor cast a cautious look over Markus’ shoulder at North.

“Tonight.”

“Why don’t you join us, then? It’s your strategy, after all.”

Connor looked at him, brows furrowing. “I’ve given you all that you need. My presence is unnecessary.”

“I say it’s a trap.” North’s voice over their private comms.

I say shut your trap, Markus groused internally, reining in a sigh.

“Gather the best candidates,” he says instead. “We leave at sundown.”

A moment of contemplative silence passed over them. North paced the stage, muttering to herself while Josh continued to look over the schematic.

Connor rose to his feet. Stepping forward, he handed Markus the pencil and descended the few steps
of the dais, heading toward the exit.

“You’re just gonna let him leave?”

Markus gave North a look. “What does it matter? We have the means to get what we need. That’s enough.”

He ignored her attempt to argue and assumed his position as leader. “Josh, you go to Warehouse 3 and pick your team. North, you go to the other and find your people. I’ll pick from here and take Simon.”

Markus handed North the second schematic and held onto the third. “We move out at sundown and meet back at Central Park when we’re done.”

“On it,” Josh nodded and left the stage.

Silence passed between the lovers before North just shook her head and left to do as told.

Markus sighed and looked up at the gaping hole in the church roof, watching the snow fall.

“You’ve lost your entire mind, Markus,” Simon sighed, looking over the floor plan his leader gave him. His expression didn’t yield anything other than fatigue to the average pair of eyes. But he knew Markus saw the divot of irritation between his sandy eyebrows. “Not only do you not keep an eye on him, you spend Art Hour getting unsolicited help from the guy sent to kill you.”

“It’s not Art Hour if it doesn’t have a schedule.”

Simon cast Markus a baleful look and the leader simply laughed. Laughed.

Jesus, Markus.

“What part of android murderer do you assume is funny?”

“The part where he’s no longer trying to kill me and is actively supporting our cause,” Markus rolled his eyes.

They both stood off to the side of the dilapidated church, Markus leaning against the wall as he waited for Simon’s response.

Simon all but thrust the paper into the other man’s chest, not caring if it fell to the floor. “How are you our leader?”

“By doing what you refused to do, and everyone else decided to follow,” Markus shrugged without malice. It was just simple truth, something Simon always did his best to uphold and respect.

“Be that as it may,” the blond folded his arms and leaned against the broken balustrade at the side entrance of the broken church. “You should still be careful around him. You know how North gets.”

Markus groaned and tried to turn away, but Simon caught the exasperated look. “Trouble in paradise?”

“She was going to shoot him in the church,” came the reply at length.
“He was going to shoot you at Hart Plaza,” the blond pointed out helpfully. Markus leveled a glare at him.

Simon mocked Markus’ previous bout of laughter.

Ah, the turning of the tables.

“I get why neither of you trust him,” the RK200 sighed, “but he’s not the same guy. Let him prove himself at least.”

For the short length of time he’d come to know Markus, he’d learned a fair bit about the prototype android. And he’d come to respect the other man’s raw determination to keep his word and take action. Admirable still was his leader’s ability to communicate with their oppressors without fear nor trepidation. Without breaking when all signs showed that they should turn to violence. Markus always stood his ground.

But this here, was annoying.

Yes, he risked his life from the start when he’d come to Jericho and took it by the reins to bring their people the freedom they desired—they deserved. And yes, he would always be a walking target. But that was something he couldn’t avoid.

Right now, Markus was putting his head into the mouth of a lion and grinning the whole way through.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Simon frowned.

“Just trust me,” Markus placated, leveling Simon with the same earnest look that won over the heart of Jericho the very night he showed up.

“I already do,” Simon ran a hand over his face. “And it’s going to cause me Thirium pump failure if you keep taking these kinds of chances.”

He felt Markus tap him on the shoulder, can feel the grin in the other man's voice. “Come on, then. We’ve got a team to assemble.”

He listened to Markus retreat, looking up to see the other head to the church entrance, snow crunching underfoot.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! It's a pleasure to write this and I hope you're all enjoying this so far! I'm so sorry for underfeeding you guys last chapter. It was so short and I couldn't take it so I hit you with this one.

North is not a happy camper and Markus just wants some peace while trying to help his people.

It be like that sometimes.

Not much happened here, though. But soon, enough, lovelies. Till then, PLS DO tell me what you think. I love talking to you all.
Sundown met thirty-one androids congregated in the middle of a snow-laden Lafayette Park, arranged in some semblance of a circle. The sun settled on the zenith, hidden behind the skyscrapers and smog. To the forefront of the cluster of free people were the Jericho leaders.

While it would have been preferred that they dressed to blend in with the night, they had no such resources yet. There was only so much that old clothes from abandoned shelters and Goodwill storehouses could do for so many of them.

North stood in front of her hand-picked team, arms folded. She looked up at the man currently perched on top of the park bench overlooking the small horde of androids, mismatched eyes bouncing from face to face.

There was something about Markus that never added up about the man. He was a calm, peaceful soul with a determined fire only an angry man’s rage could match. He had the ability to fell nations with pure wrath and the flames of hell with just a word from his mouth and a gentle touch to an arm.

A shoulder.

A cheek.

But he chose to go to the humans with an open hand and a fair playing field.

“A miracle isn’t just going to fall from the sky, you know.”

Well Josh, North thought. What the fuck is this standing in front of us now?

She hid a smile behind the shifting of her weight from one leg to the next. She may have had her issues with Markus taking the diplomatic route; it cost them many lives and so much heartache but in the end, they’d gotten so, so far. Further than they ever would have made it squatting in that rotting tanker in the old shipyard.

His determination and will to be free and get away from human abuse and violence was what caught her attention. The ability to keep his word and follow through with everything he said was what drew her to him.

Finally, she thought, there was someone willing to do something.

“All right, everyone,” Markus clapped once, pacing the length of the bench. “Our people need supplies, and we found them.”

He paused, probably for effect, the dork. He always had an affinity for the dramatics when he felt like it. He was a low-key troll and refused to accept it, no matter how much North tried to call him out on it.

“We just need to bring it home,” their leader continued. “Your team leaders should have already briefed you before coming here. They carry the instructions to what needs to be done.”

A cursory look at the androids present, save for the other two leaders, showed her that they were all
riveted to him and his voice—his movements. His everything. They loved him and would lay down their lives for their rA9.

Markus nearly tripped over his own two feet when she told him what the vast majority thought he was.

“Including the trip there and back, the operation should take no more than three hours and you’ll meet me back here.” His gaze flickered down to North before looking back at the small crowd. “Be careful out there.”

The deviant leader hopped down as the androids dispersed for the manual vans they’d ‘procured’ (Josh and his fear of saying stolen like the man he should be), and pulled North in close.

Her arms automatically came up and around his neck “Troll,” she accused, flicking some of the hair out of her eye.

“No,” he denied. “I’m not.”

North felt the disapproval pull at the corners of her mouth. “Because the little pause in your pacing wasn’t for the dramatic flair.”

“Come on, babe,” he mock whined. With the straightest face, even. “Can’t a guy have some fun being leader?”

North raised a delicate eyebrow and blinked at him pointedly. He simply shrugged, completely unrepentant.

Dork.

“So,” she drawled after a beat, head tilting quizzically. At some point they had begun to sway lightly to a silent song playing thousands of miles away.

“So,” he parroted, he took one of her arms down and twirled her once before pulling her back in.

“So why aren’t you joining one of the teams, Markus?”

“Ah,” he bit his bottom lip, still keeping time and dipping the WR400. “Picked up on that, did you?”

North snorted, wrapping a leg around his waist. “Even the human on the other side of the state picked up on that.” They straightened and continued to sway.

Markus hummed, hand absently running over her back. “Because they need to spend time with their aunt and uncles.”

North fixed him with a Look. “The truth, please?”

“That is the truth, babe,” Markus rolled his eyes. He placed a kiss on her forehead and rest his chin atop her head. “I’m not always going to be able to go out into the field, North. You’re all more than capable of running things without me tagging along.”

“But your people value your presence, Markus,” North argued softly, reaching for his hand. “They would be more than honored to have you on this mission with them.”

“I think they feel honored enough to work with the other Jericho leaders,” he drew back and raised an eyebrow, challenging even as he accepted the request to interface.
“Really,” she mimicked his expression. “How can you be so sure?”

His thick eyebrows furrowed and he hooked a free finger under her chin, eyes locked onto hers. They seemed to have an ethereal glow in the purpling light of the evening sky. They never changed since the first day she met him. They were always striking in their difference. Always intense. Always looking for something.

Sometimes she wondered what he looked like with both green eyes…

Without that permanent knot between his eyebrows.

“What kind of leader would I be,” he asked, “if I didn’t trust my people to do things on their own without me, hm?”

North’s shoulders drooped. “I know,” she conceded. “It’s just… We could have gone at it just like old times, you know?”

Not that their raid on the Cyberlife warehouse where they’d found John was so long ago that it could be considered ‘old times.’

Markus snorted, thoughts running along the same line, and smiled. Well, not in the way most would expect. His smiles weren’t the usual upturn of the lips. They laid in his eyes—his terribly mismatched baby blue and forest green. And when he smiled, they opened up to the world and drew you in.

Drowned and grounded you at the same damn time.

It never failed to steal her breath away.

“Another time,” he reasoned softly, leaning in to steal a kiss. He gently pushed her away and motioned toward the already filled and running vehicles. “Time’s a-wastin, baby girl.”

North bit her bottom lip around a smile, already walking backward to join her squad. “See you later, Markus.”

Minutes later, the WR400 slid into the passenger seat of the black van, the already-running vehicle moving off the snowy lawn and onto the icy asphalt. Behind the wheel was an SQ800 who named himself Harvey. He was one of the soldiers who’d raided the ship, but Markus got to him before he could put a bullet in their leader’s chest. Harvey was one of the…stranger…androids they’d come across. As a former soldier working in the military before the uprising, he’d always worn a visor. So, maybe to keep the sense of familiarity, he’d taken to wearing sunglasses any and everywhere.

All the time.

The other eight in the back chattered amicably with each other. Among them were three TR400 models—designed for heavy lifting and heavy duty work. All three teams had at least one, but North decided to recruit three for the sake of really bringing back all they could carry. She also picked two TW400 units who were just as strong if not more robust; they were a quiet sort and really just learning social cues. They were coming along fairly nicely with Markus taking the time to interact with them. The other three members of the crew were JB300s, great for the more technical aspects of the mission.

Some of them were nervous about the whole thing. The others were excited, and awed that their leaders trusted them to help with gathering supplies.

Not that she would admit that to Markus. He could do without the added ego boost.
Besides; the only reason she was going on this mission was because Markus asked her to do it. It wasn’t exclusively his idea—the Deviant Hunter was the very one to draw up the plans and give them random codes for disabling security. Who was to say that they weren’t signals to send to Cyberlife and trap them all in the warehouse instead of getting them what they wanted?

That’s what she told Markus long after the scene she’d pulled in the church earlier that day. He listened, sure, but he wasn’t happy about it. He also claimed that he wasn’t defending the bastard, but the way he kept insisting that the android murderer wasn’t the same as he was, was telling.

Markus didn’t see the glint of the gun drawn to end his life in Hart Plaza. He didn’t see anything that put his life in danger, honestly. And it was frustrating to watch most days. Sometimes she was certain that if it weren’t for both her and Simon, Markus would have been stabbed by the neighborhood stray dog.

But because they needed the supplies and they were the only options, Markus took the gamble. And it was up to her, Simon and Josh to get the supplies and the other androids back to the park safe and secured.

Yes, she trusted Markus with everything that she was. Very rarely had he led her down the wrong path. He’s never lied to her nor deceived her.

She just didn’t trust him.

Even if he did bring an army of brand spanking new androids to help turn the tides at the revolution.

North watched as the other two vehicles parted ways behind them, heading to their own destinations. She wished them a silent good luck before returning her attention to the road.

All ten androids tumbled out of the van, snow already crawling into the grooves of their boots. The snowy winds knicked at their skin, the sensation prickly rather than truly cold. The waters near the wharf were stiff, hardly moving with the breeze as it threatened to begin freezing over.

“Alright,” North breathed. “This is it.”

“Holy shit,” rumbled one of the TR400s. Geo, if she remembered correctly. Or Jason. They all looked alike, really, until they started developing their own personalities.

The warehouse was massive, nearly as big as the tanker that served as Old Jericho. It was an archaic warehouse, really, made of iron and brick. One wouldn’t peg it to be for CyberLife, considering their penchant for sleek minimalist designs.

North fished into her back pocket for the layout. As she looked at all of the details, she interfaced with her team, giving them only that bit of information. It took some practice with Simon and Josh when it came to filtering information through that connection but they’d gotten the hang of it soon enough.

“Allright men,” North opened the comm link between them. “We’ve got a job to do and we gotta make it fast. There’s no foot patrol but there are drones and CCTV cameras everywhere. We need to get to two specific cameras and shut them off. “

Geo and Jason rounded the perimeter, vaulting the fence with more grace than two hulking TR400s
androids should posess. They moved from trailor to trailor, dodging a drone and skirting around the spotlights.

“These drones are specialized, any anomaly big or small would be sent back to cyberlife. We need to avoid them at all costs on the way to the camera on the eastern wall, and the one on the north side.”

Jason took off to the north while Geo branched off to the east, scaling the containers that blocked their way.

“We need to distract the drones without being seen and get to the main one. Look for the ATX432-A1 and lure it to the side.”

Derek, a TW400, moved swiftly to the edge of the wharf, seeking out the drone in question. The triangular machine moved slowly through the cold air, pausing every so often to check places that had no solid objects to block its path. Getting to where he knew the drone would pass, he sized up the stacked metal crates. An initial scan told him that there were filled with repair kits. The crates themselves were fairly reinforced; toppling them over wouldn’t cause too much damage.

He took the chance.

“We’ll need other vehicles to carry most of this stuff and to drive them manually. While we distract the drones, one of us needs to retrieve the keys.”

Harvey skirted around to the security booth situated closer to the official entrance of the wharf’s perimeter, hunkered low under the window. He placed a small scrambler below the sill. The light above flickered and died and the light click of the lock let him in. He ducked inside and removed the five manual keys from the console.

“Success,” he reported loud over ther comms.

North had followed behind Derek, doing her best to stick to the shadows. It was up to her to use the deactivation code and stop the feed from getting back to CyberLife. They couldn’t afford to mess this up; their people depended on these spare parts and supplies to keep them going while they figured out where they were headed in their new lives.

“We’re in position, North,” Jason’s low rumble passed through their connection.

“Alright. On my mark, apply the code.”

The ATX432-A1 moved on rotation, just like the notes said at the back of the small schematic in her hand.

Thirty feet west.

Ten feet south-east.

Fifteen feet to the West.

Back to the center.

It was a solid minute and thirty for each movement—agonizingly slow for North’s tastes, honestly. But it allowed for easy movement throughout the perimeter. She waited until it rotated back to the west before gesturing to Derek. He nodded shoved over the container, immediately ducking behind another one. North did the same, peering around the corner, waiting for the drone to come closer.
As soon as it neared the source of the disturbance, North darted out of cover, dodging the spot of light that guided its motion sensors.

“Now!”

She scambled up the side of a crate to get high enough and initiated a quick interface with the device.

The drone stuttered in place, losing altitude in a dead drop. It caught itself just before hitting the ground, however, its lights flickering as the circuits whirred back to life almost immediately. The drone whirled around, high beam levelling itself directly at North, the red sensor for its camera clearly on record.

She cursed silently. She dared not make a sudden move, unsure of what would happen if she did. The droid didn’t show any signs of being an armed one, but she wasn’t about to find out first hand.

“The cameras haven’t gone offline,” Geo’s voice filtered through. “They’re looking right at us.”

Fuck her life. She specifically told Markus: taking any of these ideas from Connor was a bad move—and now they’d been caught.

Fuck.

“Now what do we do?” Jason, her memory banks supplied.

“Harvey,” North transmitted sharply.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Check the security footage and track its feed.”

“On it.”

The silence dragged on, the drone pinning North in place, lens adjusting its focus. She flashed a look at Derek, who looked more terrified the longer they didn’t move.

“There aren’t any silent alarms being broadcast, at least…” came the confused response. Then, “Holy shit!”

None of that sounded good. “Talk to me, Harvey, what’s going on?”

“They’re all disabled.” Harvey patched in, breathless. “There’s nothing leaving the place—not a single feed. Neither of the drones nor the cameras are recording anything. We’re in a fucking blackspot.”

The drone’s light swept over North once more and continued its rotation.

Thirty feet west.

Ten feet south-east.

Fifteen feet to the West.

Back to the center.

North let go of the breath she never knew she held.
“Markus is amazing,” Geo chortled as they gathered in front of the entrance. He walked over to the left and hit the large button to open the accordion door.

“Tell me about it,” Harvey chirped. “That is the most beautiful fucking blackspot I’ve ever seen. Who knew his series could even do something like that.”

“Careful, boys,” Derek snorted. “Your boners are showing.”

“Don’t be such a human about it, Dee,” the other TW400, Jason, gave the construction android a playful shove.

“Come on, guys,” North bit out, causing them all to fall silent. “We got less than two hours to pack this shit up and move out. Let’s get to work.”

It wasn’t that she was angry with them, no. They were already working with information that was dubious at best—detrimental at worst. And in that one moment of uncertainty, she’d never before wanted to sink her hands into the blue blood of another android more than right then.

North detested nasty surprises. Fucking Hunter.

Markus was getting a righteous earful when they got back.

Inside was almost at full stock; there were mountains of repair kits stacked at the front as they walked inside. Off to either side along the walls were numerous barrels of sealed Thirium. Further back were more crates, marked with model and part numbers. And beyond them, still, were much larger crates she could recognize even if her optical sensors were missing.

Crates of WR400s lined the back wall, the hot pinck sticker branded EDEN CLUB seared the blue exterior. Boxes filled with Tracis, unaware of the danger they were going to be shipped into. And it took all of North’s self control not to lose her cool in the middle of the CyberLife storage pit. There was no way in hell she’d let them suffer the way she did.

Not on her fucking watch.

“How many trucks can we get our hands on, Harvey?” North was already making her way toward the back of the warehouse, all but dismissing the surplus of supplies that they actually needed to carry back home.

“Five total, ma’am.”

“Bring ‘em,” she waved him away. “We got more work than we were prepared for, so we got to work twice as fast. Everyone else, start moving the Thirium to the loading station on the east side. That’s where the trucks will be.”

From her peripheral, she saw as Harvey tapped the shoulders of Brian, the quiet construction android, and Geo.

It was time to get shit done.
Excuse my poor attempt at sneaking into a Cyber Life warehouse. Rest assured, though, it's not supposed to be high tension in the least. Just a little something that they needed to do and a little screen time for our favorite WR400. It's choppy at best, but it's finally out of the way and my eyes can stop burning.

Christ.

Thank you guys so much for sticking through it this far. I know it's supposed to be ConKus but it's going to take a bit before that can happen. But rest assured, the wait is worth it.

Don't be shy! I love talking with you all, so let me know your thoughts! :D
“And the constellation of the night is Orion’s Belt that—.”

Switch.

“Three weeks have gone by since the Android Uprising at Hart Plaza in Detroit. There have been little to no true movement from within the city proper that we can detect—.”

Connor’s boot sank into the snow, the white substance swallowing his foot until it closed around his ankle. The wind pushed against him, the flurry of snow beating his face and attacking his parka.

Switch.

“It is advised that everyone gets hunkered down for the potential storm headed this way. With all the snow piling up, you can never be too careful—.”

Switch.

“People are still fleeing Detroit in droves, trying to find some semblance of peace of mind—.”

He pulled the neck of his undershirt up and over his nose.

Switch.

The RK800 thumbed the coin in his pocket, brown eyes flickering between stores in the plaza he walked beside. The lights were off in most of them, snow padding the windows and doorways. Not that it presented much of a problem. They weren’t the places on his list to hit for what he needed. But from what he could see of their contents, they would become useful much later on.

“…well the snow’s really rolling in, Jimmy. Flurries have taken over the city and the roads are starting to pack it up—.”

Switch.

“CyberLife seems to have become tight-lipped about any further actions to take after initializing a total recall from the states of Indiana and Ohio. There are workers and technicians being brought in to—.”

Connor cut off the feed and kept walking.

Nothing was amiss, really, other than the looting humans were prone to do when there was a crisis and law enforcement was stretched too thin to do anything. However, where that was a problem for The Man, it was an opportunity for one Connor, the android from CyberLife.

He’d already spent the day listening to the Detroit Police scanner while he did what he could to recharge before nightfall. Hank wouldn’t be back at the precinct until after the holidays, either way; the things that could never touch the radio-waves would forever be secret to him until then.
Connor rounded the corner of a poorly lit small hardware store, stepping closer to peer through the glass.

“Shit,” a harsh whisper carried with the wind. “Work faster before it’s seen.”

Connor backed away from the window, eyes sweeping the immediate area. The snow still crunched underfoot, but not as loudly as before. He trekked to the left where the building gave way to an alley. The light from the lamppole across the street didn’t make it far, but he made out moving objects just inside the cloak of the shadows.

“It’s just a tin can, who the fuck cares?”

“His suddenly-grown conscience,” a third voice. “Relax, there’s nobody around for miles this way.”

Connor activated the night vision filter, the green tint revealing the forms of three men surrounding a snowy lump in the corner next to the dumpster.

“Stop squirming, you piece of shit,” the last man grunted, kicking something beneath the haphazard mound. The scream elicited by the abuse was small and coarse—the sound of a failing voice module.

Without a second thought, Connor entered the alley and elbowed past the man closest to the pile of snow. The ex-hunter squatted to dig the android out.

“Who the fuck are you?” The question was fairly squeaked out of surprise.

**Processing…**

**Scanning…**

Connor saw the foot coming long before it could connect, and blocked it with his forearm, not bothering to take his optics away from the skinless body before him.

**Complete…**

**Model: YK400 #214 589 741**

**Errors Detected.**

>> **Run Diagnostic? Y/N**

<< **Y**

**Running Diagnostic… _**

“Grab this asshole.”

Not a moment later, Connor’s arm was in a vice grip, body following the force down into the snow. He was on his feet in seconds, however, yanking his assailant’s leg from under him on the way up. The RK800 rammed the weight on his back into the opposite wall, a well-placed punch to the nose disabling one of the men completely.

**Complete…**

>> **View Diagnostic Log? Y/N _**

His night vision faltered and deactivated from the blow to the right side of his head. He looked up to see the culprit back away with a broken bottle in hand.
“Blue blood,” he breathed. “Shit, dude, it’s an android.”

“Well, don’t just stand there, keep hitting it!”

“No way, I’m out of here, man, you’re on your own.”

“Don’t you leave—. Kevin you bitch!”

>> View Event Log? Y/N
<< Y _

Loading… _

Connor turned to face the remaining human, and stepped to the side, motioning to the mouth of the alley.

The human edged around him, tripping over his fallen friend’s body. The fear had him on his feet again and sprinting for the main street. Connor didn’t wait to see the man leave, but was back on his knees, digging the slowly freezing android out of the snow.

After a minute of systematic clawing at the white buildup, the ex-hunter finally hand in his arms, a stalled YK400 with slowly failing systems. Connor wrapped the little boy up in his jacket and peeled back the skin on one hand to interface with the child. It took little to no time to find the command that sped up the heating system and activate it.

Connor rocked back on his heels, waiting.

**Thirium Levels: 50%**
**Internal Temperature: 60F**^\(^{\wedge}\)
**Damaged Component: #954**
**Damaged Component: #562-A**
**Damaged Component: #126-A**
Owner: Derek Staffer
Registered Name: N/A

No name?

Odd for a child android. Connor cradled the smaller form in his arms and got to his feet, heading for the mouth of the alley. There was nothing he could do for the kid here; he'd have to get him to Jericho. And if his calculations were correct, and he followed the instructions to the letter, they should have gotten the supplies from the CyberLife warehouses already.

“Look,” The voice was small but stronger than the rasp of a failing voice module. Good. “Stars.”

The ex-hunter followed the curious stare to the darkness above. Sure enough, there were stars visible beyond the city lights—nothing a mere human could see with the naked eye.

He absently noted that the constellation of the night was, indeed, Orion’s Belt.

“I’m cold.”

Brown eyes shifted back to the YK400. The youth was still too weak to reactivate its skin covering, the white plates shimmering in the moonlight, the melting snow like sweat on the surface. Connor did his best to fix the parka over the smaller form.
The small bundle shifted in his arms, and he unconsciously adjusted his hold to accommodate, looking for the quickest route to the nearest Jerichio outpost of the three when he felt a small hand on his cheek.

“You’re bleeding.”

“Nothing I can’t handle,” Connor replied without thinking, casting a cursory glance at what seemed to be a fully lucid, if not still weak YK400. “You shouldn’t do anything until I get you somewhere safe.”

The naked hand disappeared under the parka obediently, but the child wasn’t quiet for long.

“Who are you?”

He hesitated. “I’m nobody.”

“Your parents didn’t give you a name, either, did they?” the boy said in a hushed whisper that gave Connor pause. “You’re just like me.”

Connor remained silent, choosing the best route and setting off on foot to find a still-functional manual vehicle. It took a while, but eventually, two blocks down, he found an old 2005 Nissan. He shifted the YK400 to lay against his shoulder, looking around for something to jimmy the crevice between the door and window. Another building down, he saw a human raising a crowbar to break into a store.

Bingo.

He looked at the child and brought a finger to his lips. The YK400 mimicked the action and stayed completely quiet, a small grin splayed across the polymer lips.

Even with the added weight against him, Connor still managed to quickly advance on the would-be criminal, elbowing the human at the back of the neck. The crowbar drops and he picks it up, darting back toward the car, completely ignoring the startled yelp behind him.

The RK800 made quick work of the driver door and deposited the YK400 into the vehicle. With a careful nudge, the child moved over to the passenger side and settle. Connor wasted no time throwing the Nissan in gear and booking it.

He scanned the child android and adjusted the car’s heating accordingly. They rode together in silence; the radio was shot and Connor really didn’t know how to keep a child engaged in conversation. It didn’t exactly come up in his programming schedule. A furtive glance told him the child was still looking up at the sky as the city lights passed them by.

“Are we going home now?”

Connor double-took, brows furrowed. “Yes,” he said at length, thinking of Jericho. “We’re going to your new home.”

Quizzical black eyes turned to him. “I’m not living with you?”

“No, you are not.”

“But why?”

Connor swallowed, opting not to answer. How does one tell a child that they don’t have a home to
A hand wrapped around his wrist. A gentle touch that startled him more than a violent push would. He tried to remove the hand from his skin as easily as possible. But the action brought the most god-awful expression to the YK400’s face.

“Aren’t you going to name me?”

“I’m not really programmed to—.”

“Just think of something.”

Connor bit his lip, making a rather shoddy left turn that jostled the vehicle.

“Okay,” he agreed at length, almost cringing at the look of pure hope on the face of a child. Taking a breath he didn’t need, he turned over the possibilities but ultimately settled with something he didn’t have to dig for. After all, he wasn’t exactly programmed with a stellar imagination.

“Did you think of one?”

Connor nodded, trying on a small smile for the child. Any bigger and it would have been the one that gave Hank ‘the creeps.’

“So,” the little android drew out. “What is it?”

Connor dug deep into his human interaction applications and shot the child a conspiratorial smirk.

“No.”

“Come on, please?”

“Should I?”

“Yes!” Came the firm answer. The YK400 all but vibrated in place. “Tell me, tell me, tell me!”

The excitement was enough to draw a small, surprised chuckle out of the ex-hunter.

“Alright,” he acquiesced. “I’ll tell you.” He glanced at the child and held his gaze in mock-suspense. And finally told him.

The child grinned, ear to ear as his skin materialized over the white polymer. He had tanned skin and black hair with the brightest blue eyes.

“My name is—.”

“Orion’s belt,” Simon murmured, looking up at the dark skies. One of the other androids followed his gaze and hummed in acknowledgment.

What was supposed to be just a small rendezvous point at the Lafayette park looked like an entire labor force gathered to work a sizable project. Markus’ eyebrows shot up at the sheer number of trucks coming back along with the three vans sent out a mere three hours before. At least, the ones brought back with Josh and Simon. They were still waiting on North and her team.

Markus leaned against the front of a Cyber Life delivery truck, eyes trained in the direction where the
remaining androids were to come from. It wasn’t long before the first vehicle peered from around the bend. But it took a hot minute for the last one to be seen even when they were almost at the point.

“What did they do,” Josh frowned. “Break down the whole storehouse and bring it here?”

“You’re one to talk, Mr. Four-Trucks,” Simon snorted. “If I didn’t know better, I’d say you brought the bodies of the humans you killed to bury behind the church.”

Josh simply rolled his eyes.

“Pretty intense, there, Simon,” Markus glanced at the blond standing barely three feet away.

“Not denying the idea,” Simon eyed the PJ500. “That’s pretty North of you, Josh.” He nudged their leader without looking. “Hey, Markus, did you know Josh was going around killing people?”

“North of me? Wha—.”

“And yet you don’t deny the killing,” the blond feigned a gasp, nudging intensifying. “Markus!”

“Now, children,” Markus, drawled, glancing at them with a raised brow. And they really did act like toddlers most days when there was a lull in the chaos. Honestly, it was endearing sometimes.

Simon scoffed. “They,” he motioned to the nervous-looking androids around them, “deserve to know the truth.”

Markus shook his head. “Leave Josh alone.”

“Thank you,” came the grateful sigh.

“Shut up, you know I’m right.”

They settled into companionable silence, the android leader’s gaze riveted to the oncoming parade of supplies.

“…Yeah, that would be pretty North thing to do,” came his pensive thoughts over their private channel.

Josh looked over at his leader, slack-jawed. “Oh, fuck you.”

Simon doubled over laughing.

The line of vans came to a halt, engines stopping one after the other. North was the first one out of the van in front—from the driver’s side—and all but skipped into Markus’ arms.

“Mission successful,” North grinned, reaching to initiate an interface.

“Hey, North,” Simon called over theatrically. “Josh is trying to beat your body count.”

North peered around at the blond. “Wha—.” But Markus silenced her with a kiss, accepting the request.

“Don’t mind them,” he murmured. “Welcome back.”

“It’s great to be back.”

“Did you really bring all of them?” Markus pulled away with a slight frown, blinking the images
away.

“I couldn’t just leave them there, Markus,” North reasoned. “You didn’t leave the ones at the first warehouse.”

The Jericho leader shook his head and sighed. “I’m not upset, but I’m not sure we have enough space for everyone.”

“We can find somewhere else to set up camp,” North tried, expression earnest and pleading.

Markus knew he couldn’t say no, even if she wasn’t the love of his life.

“Alright,” he relented. “But it’s up to you to find somewhere for everyone to go.”

North grinned, latching onto the RK200. “Thank you so much, Markus. You’re the best.”

Chapter End Notes

Again, another struggle that seemed to just...manifest. But it had to be done. Having Connor bond with another unlikely companion is something that speaks to me. Especially one like this. It’s amazing.

But I admit it. This chapter was half-assed just to get it out of the way and I am not happy with it. However, it is DONE and I can move on with my life.

Tell me what you think! It’s not a lot to chew on, again, but it’s...yeah.
After Markus took the time to wake all of the WR400s from the back of two of the pilfered trucks, they’d all flocked toward North. He’d quietly passed them the information as to who had saved them and brought them to a place of absolute freedom from their programming.

It was amusing to watch.

North was turning blue left, right, and center, becoming the Markus for them as he was to everyone else. Mind, they still held reverence for him, but North was their hero. And finally, he got to see North truly squirm.

“How do you even do this, Markus?”

Nightfall met them on the dais, given some space by the other androids.

“I’m not sure I know what you mean,” he responded evenly, putting away paints and supplies.

“Don’t play cute.”

“You’re the one who thinks I’m cute, though.”

“Well, right now, you’re ugly for patronizing me.”

Markus paused, looking over his shoulder, brows furrowed. “Think of my feelings, North.”

North leveled an unamused glare at the Jericho leader, already raising a ready-made fist at the man. Markus only put his hands up in mock-surrender.

He wiped his hands on a cloth and threw an arm around the WR400. “It’s just them loving the woman who set them free from bleak futures, North. It’ll wear off eventually.”

“Like the hero-worship from everyone else for you is fading with time?”

Markus immediately took his arm back and returned to put his supplies away. North tried to grab it back and he playfully held it out of her reach.

“I will not be mocked by my own right hand,” he tutted, “and be shown false camaraderie in the same breath.”

“Don’t give me that,” North groaned,flopping onto his back and placing a sloppy kiss on the small part of his cheek she could reach. “You know I love you.”

“Lies and slander.”

“Why do I love you again?”

“Because you think I’m cute.”
North gave the most unladylike snort Markus had ever heard. He straightened after completing his task and initiated an interface with her.

“Seems like you had a wild day,” he murmured, leaning down for a kiss. “Having fun playing Follow the Leader?”

“It’s tiring,” she hummed into his lips. “I have no idea how you do it.”

“Well when you find out let me know, so I’d know how to stop it when the time comes.”

“Never.”

“Betrayal.”

“Markus.”

The Jericho leader all but yanked his hand away from the connection, blinking at the sudden intrusion.

“Connor? Is there something wrong?”

“We’re headed out to do rounds,” North intoned, stepping away. “We’ll be back later, okay?”

“Yes, I need to have a word with you, if you’re not busy.”

“Alright,” Markus planted a kiss on North’s forehead and ushered her away. “Be safe out there.”

“Always.”

The deviant leader watched her leave the church before turning to sit on the crate behind the easel.

“What’s going on?”

“Are you aware of the potential blizzard on its way here?”

“No,” Markus frowned, leaning forward. “No, I haven’t listened out for any of the weather reports lately, no.”

“Then I suggest you split up the population at the church and send them to either of the warehouses during rounds tonight or in the morning. The cold would shut everyone in the church down otherwise.”

“I’ll move them all out in the morning, then. What about you, though?”

“I’m sufficiently sheltered in the event of a snowstorm,” Connor’s clinical tone was something Markus could do without. If there was a blizzard on the way like Connor said, it would be best if he came to stay at either one of the warehouses. Markus told him so.

“That won’t be necessary,” he insists, then added, “Thank you for the offer.”

“I don’t suppose you know how long this storm is going to last?”

“No.”

“Well, we’ll need to figure out where we’ll get supplies from to last the storm. Thanks for the warning, Connor.”
A beat.

“Is there anything else, besides the blizzard?”

“No.”

“Well,” Markus balks, suddenly uncertain. But he presses on anyway. “Thanks again, and be safe out there. The offer is still on the table should you change your mind at any time.”

“Duly noted. Goodbye, Markus.”

The connection cut, leaving Markus already running through a list of necessities for a snowstorm. It was going to be a stretch, but they’d work it out.

Hopefully.

What he wasn’t prepared for the next day, however, at about noon when the snowfall was getting heavier, was a very large trailer waiting for them at one of the warehouses.

Markus waded through the rising snow around the back to open the container. The bolts became undone easily enough, sliding away and falling to sink into the ground. Mismatched eyes widened at the sheer bulk of supplies that crowded the interior.

From what he could see so far, there were boxes of insulation, that lined the closer parts of the walls. When he jumped into the trailer to look further, there sit generators, tanks of fuel, blankets, flashlights, tons of batteries…

Markus dashed toward the entrance and looked around the area, only to see Connor in the distance.

And all the man does is raise a bottle of Thirium before walking away, taking a swig of the blue liquid.

“Wait!” Markus shoved through their link. He saw the other’s steps slow to a halt, but he doesn’t turn around. At this point, so flummoxed was he, Markus could only stutter out a lame, “Thank you. Christ, Connor, where did you—. How—.”

“There is another, equally stocked truck at the other warehouse. The androids can assist with installing the insulation and set up of the generators for use during the storm.”

“Holy shit,” he heard Simon breathe, blue eyes wide at the expansive inventory.

“You can say that again,” Markus huffed aloud, brows furrowed, looking back into the container. He quickly shook off the initial shock. It was time to get to work and they had to work fast.

The blizzard is fierce when it makes landfall.

Markus and Simon weren’t prepared to be snowed in so quickly. The truck had been unloaded well before then, but supervision over the other androids while helping to set up the insulation and strategic positioning of the generators took more time than they anticipated.

The cold still managed to seep through the cushioning. Thankfully, it wasn’t nearly as harsh as it would have been had they not been able to acquire the necessary tools. All in all, the androids were as comfortable as could be, of course, overjoyed that the could spend the storm with their beloved
Mismatched eyes returned their gaze to the smooth keys under his hands. How Connor managed to get a baby grand piano into the trailer was a mystery.

Curious still was how Connor even got his hands on information that he played the piano. Maybe it was something picked up from the chatter among the androids. Things sometimes slipped through instances of interfaces. Small details like Markus’ hobbies and his happier times with Carl.

Markus also knew Connor hung around and listened to the surroundings. As a detective, he was programmed, surely, to pay close attention to the goings on in the immediate area. Always listening. Always watching. Collecting information for later, more practical use. If anything, Markus would have been less surprised to find painting materials jammed in the corner of the trailer rather than a giant percussion instrument with eighty-eight keys.

The deviant leader began to play.

He picked notes from the howling winds, sliding into crescendos when it picked up, and slowing down to soft dewdrops when the breeze was but a whisper. He played for hours, he knew, judging from the complete darkness that covered the glass on the roof of the warehouse. Soon they wouldn’t even be able to see past that, having just their internal clocks to log the passage of time.

“I hear you’re having a concert without us, Mozart,” North’s voice filed in through the network. They were too far apart to truly have a secure connection and would have to work around the shared CyberLife network to reroute their conversations best as they could.

“It seems I have a spy, then.”

“The best in all of Detroit, of course,” Simon’s voice crackled to life. Markus craned his neck to look behind him, just in time to see the blond return his attention to one of the children.

“Never trust the blond with blue eyes,” Josh chimed in. “He’ll turn you into a mass murdering android in less the time it takes to blink.”

“That’s pretty North of you, Simon,” Markus remarked, carefully keeping his eyes on his hands as they kept playing the ever-shifting melody.

“What’s that supposed to mean,” North questioned over the cautious chuckling from Simon. “Markus?”

“I’m sorry, but your personal spy has to provide you with that information.”

“Now hold on there—.” Simon started.

“You got ten seconds, blondie.”

“Listen, North, it’s not what it sounds like—.”

“Oh? Well, enlighten me.”

The bickering that ensued between the WR400 and their blond companion was nothing short of entertaining. But Josh’s sly comment was a little louder than the others, having swapped to another
The winds howled on for two weeks without relief. By then, the warehouse’s roof was completely laden with snow and the nooks and crannies where light filtered through were completely blocked by the piling snow. Water from the melting snow seeped through the cracks at the bottom of the walls. The cold was really starting to settle in, and the insulation’s layers were weakening just a bit.

Androids began to put matches to the oil lamps that were brought in and got a few generators running to charge the children and some of the older models. The Diesel was strong, but not overpowering; it wouldn’t harm them much if at all.

Markus sat with a few of the children surrounding him for impromptu ‘Story Time,’ always eager to hear the fairy tales from the world around them that they never got to hear. Today’s tale was an embellished form of Snow White and Rose Red. Truthfully, it was Markus’ personal favorite. It told the story of two sisters who were kind and dutiful with a mother who was just as soft-hearted and wise. They had even befriended a bear that came in looking for warmth.

He prattled on and on about the dwarves that liked to steal treasure from the bear in the summer until one day, the girls went out into the forest and saw one such dwarf.

Markus was careful to omit the bear flat-out murdering the little magical creature.

But the takeaway he wanted them all to know, that kindness got them wonderful things in the end. Always be kind to anyone you meet because you never know which one will return a kindness as great as riches, or one day save your life.

He just hoped he didn’t sew the seeds of gold digging into a small horde of YK500s.

Not quite North of him, but pretty damned close.

For him, though, the story resonated with his very beliefs in kindness. If their pacifism had gotten them this far, then surely the riches from the bears—the humans—would grant them the riches they so truly deserve. Their chance at lives of their own.

Their freedom.

Soon enough, they had gone off to the middle of the warehouse to play, well within the optical range of every adult android in the vicinity. Markus made his way up the stairs and onto the landing where the snow melted and dripped into the cracks of the overhead window. It wasn’t as quiet up high, but it did well for solitude.

He idly watched his people bond with each other, growing closer and simply being free. It did his Thirium pump regulator so much good to see it happening. Soon enough, they’ll be able to have homes and visit each other to fellowship—have parties and go clubbing if they so desired. To travel or decide to stay here where they were first activated.

“Markus?”
The deviant leader started at the voice.

“Connor? A pleasant surprise—.”

“I believe the element of surprise rests on your side of this call, Markus.”

What? “Pardon?”

“You contacted me.”

He did? “I did?”

“I would assume so,” Connor responded, seeming thoughtful. “Is there something that you need? Or did you want to test your speech recognition methods?”

Markus huffed a laugh, turning his back against the railing. “Well, I’m just as surprised as you. Probably…” Why did he contact the other? When did he? “…just wanted some idle conversation.”

“There are hundreds of androids currently at your beck and call,” Connor intoned. “A romantic partner just a part of the network as anyone else. Yet you choose to reach across a severe storm to speak to an obsolete prototype?”

“Not obsolete,” Markus chastised. “Anyway, I got to have some sort of spontaneity in my life. Can’t always be, ‘Hey, babe, send me some nudes,’ or ‘Well done, thou faithful servant.’”

A beat of silence. “Servant?”

“Yeah, it’s from a Biblical saying, of the—.”

“I’m well aware of the reference point, Markus.”

From the storm’s beginning, Markus had taken to checking on the RK800 every so often. He didn’t know where the other was staying, and he didn’t pry.

He wasn’t entirely used to Connor being so, machine-like since meeting the other android on the ship. Sure, he was wrought with grief and remorse, but since then, he’d been, more of a closed shell—blunt when it came to the matter at hand but otherwise silent. But that never stopped him from worrying about one of his own.

Their conversations weren’t really conversations at first, come to think of it. Just Connor assuming that Markus wanted something and the Jericho leader insisting that he was only checking in on a friend.

It was practically a game after the first week, really.

“I’m sure,” the ex-hunter continued. “You’re averse to the term ‘servant’ when it comes to your people—.”

“Our people,” the caretaker android corrected automatically.

He went ignored. “Isn’t it your mission to absolve them of complete servitude?”

“Yes, well—.”

“Markus.”
“Yes?”

“Is this an attempt at personally keeping an eye on me since no one else would be entirely willing to do it?”

“What—?”

“I have no problems answering what you’d like to know.”

“No, Connor, it’s not—. Nothing like that! It’s—.”

If he still had his LED it would be gradually bleeding into a cycle of fierce red.

“At ease, soldier.” Was that… amusement? “I’m just pulling your leg.”

Markus was floored, the admission wrenching a surprised laugh out of him. “So you do have a sense of humor.”

“Part of the protocols given to blend in with the humans, of course.”

They shared a small silence, the winds shoving against the heavy snow that already began to drown the warehouse.

Markus ran a hand over his face, unaccountably flustered, but… pleasantly so. “Your brand of humor is stress inducing, did you know that?”

“I’ve been known to cause many levels of discomfort among many, yes.”

The amusement was definitely going, then. Markus winced.

“At ease, soldier,” he prodded lightly. “I’m just pulling your leg.”

“It seems we’re tied one-for-one, then.”

“Oh?” Dark eyebrows rose. “We’re keeping score now?”

“Nothing wrong with a little friendly competition.”

Another amiable silence followed before Markus spoke up again. “Are you faring well?”

“I’m at optimal—.”

“We’ve been over this,” Markus tutted. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, Markus,” Connor relented easily enough. “You know I’m built to withstand severe temperatures.”

“Doesn’t mean you have to.”

“Apologies, but it would be unwise to take you up on the offer to seek shelter with you in the middle of a raging blizzard.”

“You think you’re cute, don’t you?”

“I’d like to think that I’m, as they say, quite dashing.”

Markus drowned his ungainly laughter in the crook of his arm.
There were times when Connor would down himself. Markus knew self-loathing when he heard it. But he didn’t think the RK800 did so on purpose. Deviating without someone to help him along or even take the time to talk to him had to be rough. Sometimes things slipped—cries for help where there may be no one around to hear.

Other times—times like these—Connor would take Markus by surprise, embracing his deviancy almost. Then again, there was the possibility of him simply humoring the leader to assuage the worries and have Markus focus on other things rather than trying to ‘recruit’ the ex-hunter. The man was built to be mission-oriented, after all.

Either way, it wasn’t going to stop Markus from trying to get Connor to accept himself into their growing family of androids. Once he’d gotten the others—gotten North—to see what he’d been privileged to witness in these quiet moments, then they’d relent. They could see that the man who single-handedly turned the tides and resisted his programming in order to keep Markus alive, was just like all of them.

Both RK models continued their mental banter, Markus carefully rerouting them to a secure channel.

The winds continued to howl.

Chapter End Notes

I feel so...

This is hand-wavey at this point. I just wanted to get this out of the way. I was stuck for the better part of a week and figured it’s time to just bully my way through this filler chapter and move on with my life.

Hope you guys liked it! My favorite part, honestly, was Josh getting his revenge on Simon through Markus. What was yours?
It was getting colder.

North dismissed the beginnings of a temperature warning in her HUD, opting to suggest that they begin lighting the lamps and distribute the blankets for the adults. The child models had already been bundled up within the first few hours of the flurry. Now, two weeks in, the adults were really in need of getting warm. The generators provided most of their warmth the majority of the time through the running engines.

The insulation was beginning to soak through and water from melted ice created puddles around the warehouse. It wasn’t so bad. Even if sometimes the structure creaked under the heavy snow.

“Miss North?”

The WR400 looked over her shoulder at a YK400 approaching her with hands shyly tucked behind his back. She’d seen him around before, sometimes playing with the other children. Most of the time he sat alone, watching the doorway, or with another of his model.

A quiet sort, if she ever did see one. He was nearly swallowed up in the rather large leather jacket that hung off his shoulders, almost dragging on the ground.

“He, hey kid,” she greeted, waving the child over. He settled beside her, squatting and peering into her hands at the beginnings of a tam. “What can I do you for?”

He turned soulful blue eyes up to her. “Can you teach me how to make a sweater?”

She paused in her knitting and turned her full attention to him, intrigued.

“Want something that fits you better?” North smirked, bemused.

“No,” The little boy averted his eyes and clutched at the edges of the coat, “It’s for someone else.”

North tilted her head, playfully trying to capture the child’s gaze, nudging him a little. “Is it for your crush?”

Her smirk widened into a grin at his blush.

“No,” he squeaked, rubbing his nose. “It’s for someone else…”

“And who might that be, hm?” North prodded when it seemed the YK400 wasn’t going to continue.

“My um,” he fumbled, frowning. Small lips pursed and thick eyebrows cinched in the middle. “A very nice man.”

North’s expression darkened, but she quickly schooled her features before he noticed. She placed a hand over her chest, quietly cooing. “That’s so sweet of you,” she cracked a smile at his blush. “Who is he?”

The little boy’s face crumpled. “He says he’s nobody,” he almost whispers. “I don’t think anyone ever named him.”
Strange, North thought. Android? “I see,” she says instead. “And what’s your name, Little guy?”

He fairly beamed, cheeks rosy and pride shining in his eyes. “My name’s Orion!”

“Tell you what, Orion,” the WR400 ruffled his hair. “I’ll teach you. How big is he?”

He stood to his feet and shed the jacket, holding it up for her to see. “It’s his,” he said after seeing her raised eyebrow.

“Alright,” North said at length as the boy huddled under the heavy coat once again. “Would you like a hat to go with it as well?”

The eager nod she got was enough to have her reaching for more yarn out of the box beside her. She opened up a private channel.

“Jenna?”

“North!” the other WR400’s voice sang loudly through her receiver. “Hi, um, sorry…”

North snorted, resisting the urge to sigh. Two weeks and they still tripped over themselves. How Markus did it was completely beyond her.

North gave the child two knitting needles and carefully showed him how to wrap the yarn around it. “It’s okay, girlie. Are you familiar with a kid named Orion?”

“Oh, Ryan? He’s a sweet little thing,” Jenna fairly coos. “He calls me Aunt Jenna and likes to watch us knit. I think—.”

“Yeah, him,” North interrupted as gently as she could, motioning to the YK400 by example how to make the first knit and curl. She watched as Orion’s brows furrowed in concentration, little hands doing what they could with the tools he was given. “When did he get here?”

“I’m not sure,” the other WR400 hummed. “He was already here when we arrived. I’ll ask around if you’d like?”

“Please.”

“Alright. A moment, then.”

“I can’t do it right,” Orion whined, still doing his best to get the needle hooked into the red material. “Can you show me again?”

North hummed, moving to squat behind him and guide his hands with hers. “Make sure it hooks onto the needle like this, and then bring them both together. Like so.” She moved off to the side again. “Now you try.”

Orion’s face was the picture of intense focus, lips thinned and brows knitted under dark hair. Hands moved in the same careful motion they’d been through just seconds earlier.

“He’d been brought in a week before we were moved here for the blizzard,” Jenna rang through the connection.

“I did it!” He beamed up at North; the light of the lamp paled in comparison to the bight light of sheer life in this child’s eyes. A child whose future was just as uncertain as the rest of them. But one they fought for all the same.
“That you did, little man,” she praised lightly. “Now keep it up until you finish a chain, and we’ll move from there, okay?”

“Any idea who brought him?”

“No,” Jenna replied. “Whoever did, left him in a jacket; and they say he waved to someone who was in the shadows. It was well into the night then.”

Someone who knew where they were, android or otherwise. North scowled down at the crown of the child’s head.

“Thank you, Jenna.”

“Anytime, North!”

They were so chipper it hurt sometimes. North quickly smoothed her features when Orion looked up at her with another question.

Orion spent much of his time around many of the other Tracis thereafter, joining their knitting circle. North gave him an entire ball of yarn and the two needles for himself. He rarely did anything else other than fret over the over-sized sweater. He fussed at stitches and ran to North when he needed help, despite her telling him that he could ask any of the other Traci models for assistance.

And somewhere between his seeking her out, she became—.

“Thank you, Aunt North!” He wrapped his short arms around her hips in a quick hug.

She watched him scamper off to rejoin the knitting circle, leather jacket nearly falling off in his haste to get back. Ever since he learned the basics, he started making good progress. He was almost never with the other children anymore and he clutched the unfinished article of clothing like a lifeline in sleep mode.

North shook her head.

“What’s this?” Josh’s voice filtered through their connection. “North has forged bonds with a child!”

“WR400s look alike at first glance, Josh,” Simon patched through, clearing his throat. “Maybe you’ve—.”

“Finish that sentence, Goldilocks,” North challenged, scoffing at the snickering behind her. Josh was fighting to school his normally placid features, but his eyebrows gave him away.

“He’s a good kid,” Josh cleared his throat. “Likes to learn, really. Asked me to read to him once. Now I’m Uncle Josh.”

“He managed to melt the heart of the wicked witch of the West,” Simon snorted. “I need to nab this kid and demand his secrets.”

“That’s pretty North of you, Simon.”

North whirled around to give Josh a healthy smack upside the head, but he was already halfway toward a cluster of bookworms he’d made friends with.

The laughter never stopped ringing in her head, and she rolled her eyes. A very telling cough filtered through the noise. North’s eyes narrowed.
“Markus!”

Silence.

“Markus, I know you’re listening, I swear to—.”

“…We’re sorry, the number you’ve dialed is out of service—.”

Simon’s chuckling devolved into choked cackles, and Josh’s loud ‘HA’ pierced the cold of the warehouse.

Chapter End Notes

Real short this time, guys. Not much is happening, and honestly, this should have been tacked on to the last chapter. But, by popular demand, we have a little screen time for our favorite little boy, Orion, wanting to make something for Connor.

He's just too sweet, lemme tell ya.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The winds were loud.

Demanding.

Markus’ eyes roved toward what he knew was the blocked entrance of the warehouse. It had been seven days. An entire week since he’d heard hide or tail from anyone that wasn’t in the same space as he was. Communications between even androids were down for the count due to the severity of the storm. And without the network, the winds outside had to find harmony with the low murmuring of the adult androids. It was all they could do to remain occupied—just talk among themselves and forge bonds that should never break from then on.

His mind flitted toward the second warehouse were North and Josh were squatting with the other half of their living population. Winds had gotten stronger despite his optimism about it. The information he dug up before the system blackout said that the blizzard shouldn’t have lasted more than a few days at most. They were well past a week; the storm raged for a solid fortnight and slowly leaked into the latter half of December.

The snow was really heavy, and he’d hate to know what it looked like outside. The cold finally, fully penetrated the insulation they’d managed to put up, despite their hopes. Most of the blankets and coats were given to the YK series. Some were put into stasis to slow the rate of freezing. It was tough, but they were managing.

“What’s on your mind?”

Markus’ gaze flicked up to see Simon settling to sit beside him, a beanie pulled low over his eyes. Everyone tried to get warmer, some even going as far as to raising their core temperatures a bit to compensate. Including Simon, now that he took the time to scan the PL600.

“What isn’t?” Mismatched eyes returned to the half frozen ceiling above. “We haven’t heard anything in days, Simon. Who knows what’s going on out there?”

His gaze dropped to the pale hand on his arm.

“I’m sure she’s fine, Markus,” Simon murmured. “North’s a survivor.”

A sigh. “I know, but that won’t stop me from worrying. Her model’s not made for such a low range of temperature.”

“Neither of our models are,” the blond reasoned. “I’ve been around far longer than a fair number of these guys, and I haven’t shut down.”

Markus looked down at his own uncovered hands, a thin sheet of ice already beginning to form across his palms. He closed them into fists, breaking the frozen bridges.

“This just needs to be over,” he grimaced.
—hear me?—

Markus sat ramrod straight, trying to process what he’d just heard. He tried holding on to the connection, but it was gone just as quickly as it came. The revolutionary fought the urge to curse.

“Markus?”

He looked back at the concerned blond. “Did you hear that?”

The blond’s frown deepened and he inched away slightly, perturbed. “Hear what?”

Surely he wasn’t hearing things. He hadn’t deviated to the point of auditory hallucinations, stolen audio component not withstanding. Markus’ head tilted quizzically before trying to forge a link between their minds.

“Simon?” he sent. “If you can hear me, nod.”

The blond’s expression remained unchanged.

“Nothing,” he grunted aloud, answering the unasked question. “Don’t mind—.”

“—us. Markus!”

The leader tore his gaze away from Simon’s, turning almost as if to face the direction the voice was coming from. He latched onto the signal and pushed all of his processing power onto the sliver of a voice. “Hello! Can you hear me?”

“Loud and clear,” Connor’s voice filtered through, just as if he were right next to him. “Is everything alright? Have you been able to get any messages from the other warehouse?”

“I’d be lying if I said yes,” Markus grimaced. “I haven’t heard from the others in days. This warehouse will collapse in due time under the weight of the snow. I can’t imagine what’s happening with—.”

“Markus.” The leader shrugged the hand off his shoulder but held up a finger to stay Simon’s words. He didn’t want to be distracted and lose the first connection he’d been able to get in days.

“All communications are down,” the RK800 murmured, attention already elsewhere. “Then I was right. It won’t be the best, but—.”

Static flooded the transmission and everything went quiet.

“Connor?” Markus nearly lurched forward into the silence that swallowed the link. “Connor!”

“Still here.” Connor replied, tone still distracted. “I’m going to try something. And if my calculations are correct, it should hold for a maximum of a week…”

Curiosity wrangled Markus’ circuits. “What should work?”

“Try sending a message to North,” the ex-hunter instructed, ignoring the question.
A message to—. “Alright.”

It took some doing, but the connection held firm once it was established. “North? North, can you hear me?”

“Markus? Is—.”

The leader nearly collapsed under the weight of the breathless reply he got. And if Simon saw the grin on his face, the blond didn’t say anything.

“Hey, baby girl,” he cooed over the connection.

“Holy shit,” North swore. “What happened? All of a sudden the network goes to shit and—.”

Markus barely heard any of the frantic railing on the other end; he just took the time to bathe in her voice. The need to be near her, to know that she was alright was so strong that the distance nearly caused him physical pain. “I was worried,” he murmured, effectively stopping her tirade. “How are things there?”

“It’s cold as shit,” she groused, though calmer than before. “We had to put a lot of the kids in stasis. Part of the wall’s started to collapse, but we’re hanging in here as best as we could.”

About the same as they were, then.

“Markus!”

The leader looked back to see a very worried Simon, blue eyes bright with the burning need to know what’s going on. Markus motioned for Simon to come closer, and withdrew the skin on his hand, touching the blond’s LED with his first two fingers.

“Say hi to Simon.”

“Hey, Goldilocks.”

“North? But how? The entire network’s down!”

“I don’t know,” the WR400 replied. “But I’m not complaining at this point. Just want this damn storm to be over and done with so we can get out of this place.”

“Agreed,” Simon intoned, casting a questioning glance at the RK200. “You know, at first I thought Markus was finally starting to lose his mind. Asking me if I heard something.”

“Of all the things to push me over the edge,” Markus scoffed aloud, rolling his eyes.

“I think being torn apart and left for dead in a junkyard would be the thing to do it,” North reminded. “Not the voices in his head.”

“That’s equally concerning, North.”

“Simon, please,” Markus shoved him playfully before returning his attention to North. “How’s Josh?”
“Stasis.”

Markus cursed under his breath.

“The way this storm’s raging,” Connor’s voice cut through the connection. “You’ll all be forced into stasis in as little as ten days.”

“Guess who’s present and accounted for,” North scoffed.

“It seems the signal is strong here,” he continued, not missing a beat. “This line will be open for you to communicate for the better part of a week.”

“So the network’s still down,” Simon hedged.

“Unfortunately. But this will keep for a while.”

“Thank you,” the deviant leader offered. “We’re all grateful for this.”

“I will excuse myself, then,” Connor replied. “I’m sure you all have much to discuss.”

“I’m pretty sure he’s still listening in,” North chimed in after a few beats of silence.

“He wouldn’t,” Markus rebutted gently.

“How would you know?”

“Just trust me.”

The winds howled, but they weren’t so loud anymore.

Chapter End Notes

I've never been so upset with a chapter in my life. It just needed to be done so I can get back into the swing of things. So it's another short one for the books. More of Connor in the next chapter by default. And more people are going to show up so YAY!

Pls knife me. It's taken so long to finally get to this point.
The world was awash in a white silence under the watchful eye of the storm. The winds still playfully laved at the earth, giving joy rides to the still-falling ice crystals; a slow ebbing of nature’s fury.

Connor opened the rickety, snow-blinded window and poked his heat out into the nippy air. It was all of ten degrees out—way less than the freezing threshold for any mechanical piece. And while his default Cyber Life jacket did wonders as a windbreaker on a good day, keeping out the cold would be next to impossible.

Maybe stealing a single jacket was a bad call.

Brown eyes surveyed the area as he more or less slithered through the open window onto the white cloud that used to be a rusted fire escape, adjusting the small knapsack on his shoulders.

Seconds of descent became minutes. Everything was just buried in white; cars hid under the white blankets, roads erased by the heavy hand of snow and buildings huddled under the frosty discharge.

A particularly bold gust had him rocking on his feet. And for a moment, he idly wondered—.

No.

It was best not to waste any more time.

The lull in the storm was all Connor needed—waited for—before getting out into the weather system to do what he needed to. To make up for all the lost time.

Connor had long since given Markus fair warning about the limited time left for communications; the borrowed week expired at the very second Connor turned away from the rusted entrance of the condemned complex, blocked in by the heavy snow and turning him back to the window he climbed out of.

He stared at the temperature display on his HUD and resisted the urge to bite his lip. Even with the supplies he’d gotten, he wasn’t sure how Markus was truly faring. How everyone else dealt with the cold apart from what he’d been told. Communication was impossible without his ability to reroute connections through himself. Logic argued that it could have only gotten worse. Worst case scenario, they’d all be in some sort of low power state to preserve themselves. Chances of their survival would go up, though not by much if he stood around worrying and not working.

With that, Connor adjusted the beanie on his head and rubbed his gloved hands together, breaking the thin sheet of ice that started to form over the palms of the suede fabric. His legs sank to nearly his kneecaps as he dragged himself through the alabaster desert.

Sunrise met the RK800 ten blocks out, having made the decision to increase his internal heat to help melt the snow around him. The constant freezing and melting would most likely ruin his pants even if the added wet weight didn’t slow him down. He made a low-priority objective to acquire more
It was nearly midday and the sun was just a silver disk in the sky, still managing to glare through the thinned pieces of the gray storm clouds. But an additional three paces effectively hid the offending object behind another sight for sore eyes.

It was a black, snow-tipped iceberg in the middle of the land—repulsive to those who knew it, and a symbol of no consequence to those who didn’t. But for Connor, it was his own telling of the Prodigal Son.

He rocked against a strong gust, and moved forward.

Cyber Life peeked from beneath the mounds of snow that covered the wall that cut off the rest of the bridge—the state—from the tower. Predictably, there were no guards stationed at the gate—there was still a blizzard going on despite the lull in activity from the storm system itself but it was just as well.

Unfortunately, as he neared the main entrance of the tower itself, the numbers on his UI more than confirmed the increased activity on the inside of the plant.

He sat behind one of the small snowy hills that gathered around the tower, shucking off the knapsack and rifling through the bag for what he needed. Out came one of two 6V Duracell batteries, set into the snow beside him, and a square device—no smaller than his own head—swaddled in masking tape with a tiny switch in front. A hastily but well-made EMP device.

It sat next to the forlorn battery soon after.

Then came a mirror—the small one yanked off the bathroom wall in the apartment and shined to perfection—and stuck it into the ground, angling it so he could see himself better.

Connor shed his gloves and jacket, ignoring the yellow text rolling across the HUD behind his eyes. He knew it was cold—colder now that he’d seated himself on a rather snowy throne against his better judgment. And colder still after divesting himself of his shirt.

He pulled back the skin over his torso and dug his fingers around the circular hatch in the center. With a soft hiss and another warning, he quickly removed his Thirium pump regulator and slipped it into the knapsack and opened the plate over his abdomen. He watched his deft movements in the mirror, peering beyond the frost that started to mask the reflection.

**Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing**

**Contact Cyber Life Immediately**

**Warning—.**

Connor dismissed the text and continued to work, yanking the pump itself out of his chest, exposing the wiring that lay inside. He reached into the back for a pocket knife and immediately began to shave the live wires. Battery in hand shortly after, he connected one wire to each spring of the alkaline cell, and set it between his heart and the empty chassis where the regulator used to sit.
His torso plate reconnected with a satisfying snap. Connor put the knife and mirror back into the bag and he slung it over his shoulder. Black device in hand, he made his way toward the entrance, careful to stay just out of sight.

His eyes darted around the doorway, noting the cameras that were not there when he’d first raided the facility. He focused on one, and keyed in. Brown eyes faded to black.

*Connect to XCEK2124v45? Y/N*

>> Y

*Connecting… Connected.*

With a simple command, Connor veered the lens this way and that, peering at what lay just behind the glass doors.

The guards he saw marching past couldn’t be the only ones there. After the uprising, there was no way they would take such a chance, blizzard or no.

He rotated the camera toward the interior, catching the focus of another and instantly he was looking down at the entrance from the inside. And the place was absolutely crawling with guard androids.

Maybe Cyber Life seemed to wise up after all.

*Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing*  
*Contact Cyber Life Immediately*  
*Warning: Rapid Decrease in Power Levels*  
*Current Status: 60%  
*Emergency Shutdown Sequence In 20:15*  
*Contact Cyber Life Immediately*

There was no time to lose. He pressed himself against the wall and paused to send a prayer to the fabled rA9. Maybe it would be seen as mocking the god of their kind by the others, but maybe it—he—she?—would be of the benevolent sort toward him.

Connor snorted. Hank would laugh him to scorn.

He thumbed at the device in his hand, taking a breath he didn’t need, and flipped the switch.

The world jerked beneath his feet and his vision faded, emergency bulletins a frantic scribble across
his dying optical sensors. The text on his HUD blinked rapidly, bleeding into scan lines and white noise.

Suddenly the sky hung above him-- the only thing that didn’t move. His hearing slowly returned; and the silence was more deafening than the sudden power trip that rippled through his systems. He scrambled to his feet, ignoring the caution to remain still while his processors calibrated his balance. Brown eyes flickered up to the camera, eying its sensor for a moment to make sure it was down.

No telltale red light.

He stumbled up the tiled steps, grateful that the snow was there to hold his ankles for him instead of letting his disorientation send him careening into the ground. He leaned his entire body weight against the glass doors, shoving one of them to the side and throwing himself past, nearly tripping over a fallen android.

Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Warning: Rapid Decrease in Power Levels
Current Status: 40%
Power-Saving Mode Initiated
Emergency Shutdown Sequence In 15:05
Contact Cyber Life Immediately

Connor made use of the ice beneath his feet and fairly skated through the lobby and past the triangular gateway, eyes hunting for the fire escape. With the power cut on the first floor for the time being, he was scott-free. However, use of the elevator was sacrificed in favor of running up the stairs.

He caught himself on at the edge of the base of the large statue in the center of the display room, wincing at the sight of the lifeless androids. They laid rag-dolled around the pedestals they were mounted on before the EMP wave. But there was no time to worry about them at the moment. He pushed off to the right and dove for the path to his right.

He shut the door behind him and darted up the stone steps.

Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Warning: Rapid Decrease in Power Levels
Current Status: 22%
Power-Saving Mode Initiated
Emergency Shutdown Sequence In 7:05
Contact Cyber Life Immediately

Connor forcefully cut off all notifications. He knew what was going to happen. And burning through a battery for the mission was better than exploding from the inside out because he used an EMP on himself.
The knapsack bounced against his back as he kept watch for the door that lead to the 4th floor—the hidden security level. He barreled through the entrance and sprinted down the hall, past the receptionist area and the service rooms. He was looking for an unassuming metal door marked Employees Only.

He cursed Cyber Life’s layout. And for the first time, he cursed their usage of electronic locks. Connor placed his palm against the door next to the locking mechanism, retracting the skin on it and unhinging the joints in his fingers. Electricity fizzled through the grooves and into the door, activating it for a short moment. A keypad appeared and he ran a brute force cipher; it was a reckless move, squeezing so much power out of the cell inside him, but he was pressed for time.

No sooner was he in the room padded with CCTVs, he closed the door and locked it.

Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Warning: Rapid Decrease in Power Levels
Current Status: 12%
Power-Saving Mode Initiated
Emergency Shutdown Sequence In 3:05
Contact Cyber Life Immediately

His legs took a full second to respond to his cerebral commands, giving his gait a stilted edge as he approached the control panel. There were a total of one thousand two hundred cameras in the tower. And he needed to take care of all of them off before—.

Before—.

Shit. His processors were beginning to stall, runtime lag increasing by small but significant increments, possibilities and probabilities scrolling across his screen and glitching away before he could see them properly.

Connor blinked past them and set his hand on the control panel, eyes black as he opened a link to the system. Seconds longer than he would have liked, all of the cameras were back in their original positions, rewound to exactly an hour before, and in a controlled loop.

Good. Now—.

His vision flickered and all of his skin retracted, leaving him nothing but an exoskeleton in clothing.
He was on the floor, bag already on the ground between his legs, open and victim to his raiding. He shed his jacket and pulled only the tail of his shirt over and behind his head. There was no time to set the mirror against a wall so he needed to work by memory. The plate was off with a drawn out hiss and his hands were already making short, stilted work of the wires around the battery cell. It was hot to the touch, steaming and melting in his hand, the tin wrapping peeling away to expose the liquid energy inside. He dropped the object and hurriedly fished the pump out of the bag. His movements slowed to a crawl, hands barely obeying his commands as he focused heat into his fingertips to weld the wires together and reconnect the pump.

He picked up the regulator and shoved it in, barely registering its clicking into place as his head fell back against the lip of the console with a thud.

Warning: Thirium Pump Regulator Missing
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Warning: Rapid Decrease in Power Levels
Power Saving Mode Initiated
Current Status: 2%
Emergency Shutdown Sequence In 0:15
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Contact Cyber Life Immediately
Contact Cyber Life Immediately

Hardware change detected…
Instal—.

Markus frowned into the complete darkness, arms folded and bottom lip caught between his teeth. The makeshift network Connor constructed for them had expired. All of the children and most of the adults were in stasis.

There was no shortage of power by any means, no. The generators still had enough fuel to supply them with a good charge. But the temperatures were too low to sustain even the barest minimum performance levels.

Markus shifted his weight, careful not to let Simon’s prone body fall over from being propped against his shoulder.

Thankfully there weren’t any casualties in the warehouse. And he was thankful for the humans’ foresight into cultivating unmatched efficiency in all of the adult android models.

His mind immediately flashed to North. He’d been talking to her when the signal suddenly died. She
kept insisting that she was fine—and North was a tough girl. She handled a lot that her standard build wasn’t made for. But if his warnings were becoming a nag, then he was sure she wasn’t as fine as she claimed.

He sighed, running his hands over the stiff piano keys, wincing as the ice between the gaps cracked under his ministrations. Playing was what really kept his hands warm for the most part. The constant movement was a blessing. Alternating their body temperature was an option most had, but not many could keep up for long. One of the older androids had started to produce smoke in their efforts to stay warm.

That particular android went down first.

And then it was like a domino effect; one by one—and then two to five at a time. Then everyone just…sat around, huddled against each other, powered down. He was the only one awake and alert, allowing himself to be used as a glorified kickstand for his blond friend.

It was a slow descent into madness, Markus thought. Just like in one of the books he read. There was always some activity ever since he opened his eyes. Some source of sound—life.

The townspeople.

The chaos of the revolution.

The constant movement of the androids in their safe havens and the voices of his friends in his head over their shared network.

The shrieks of laughter from the children running around and the caretakers’ shouts of caution from their places of vigil.

Everyone’s murmuring when the network was cut during the storm…

Images of the muted junkyard came to him, unbidden. He blinked rapidly into the quiet, trying to dispel the image, focusing on the nearly too-loud whisper of the Thirium running through his veins. It was still there. He was still there. He could still see himself in the dark of the snow-smothered warehouse, can hear everything that goes on outside.

He sighed again, opting to add pressure to all of the keys, crushing the remainder of the ice and putting his fingers to work. He didn’t have much else to do, and there was even less that he could.

He hated it.

The winds had slowed down, at the very least. All the soaked insulation had frozen over, only just beginning to thaw with the heat radiating from the adult androids before the whole standby epidemic. And now they were back in the ice box—in the silence.

The cold, wet, dead silence.

He squeezed his eyes shut and drew in a shuddering breath, resisting the urge to look around again. At the scattered bodies in motionless clusters. But the image was already burned into his retinas, merging with the phantom wasteland in his head.

And he was there again, searching for pieces to make himself complete. To be the living being he
was to be in its entirety; not broken remains of someone else’s dream. He was alive. And his name was—.

“—us!”

The click-whir between his ears sputtered into a steady whisper. Green lines of code ran across his optical sensors as the world came back.

“Markus!”

Colors merged together in a blurry cloud, taking a moment to focus behind the status checks that scrolled down his HUD.

He registered pressure on his cheek as he struggled to focus on the person in front of him. He vaguely registered making use of his voice module to respond to the person calling out to him.

A gentle probing at the back of his mind alerted him to a request to interface. Against his better judgment, he accepted.

Images flashed behind his eyes, snippets too segmented to make sense of, but the emotions attached to them were slow to fade. There was shock, confusion and concern, all clamoring through the connection, wrestling for priority.

North?

His eyes fluttered shut, letting himself get lost in the sensation, reveling in the warmth of the familiar. The images began to slow, his processors finally finding purchase on the influx of information. He was seeing himself on the makeshift stage in Hart Plaza; they’d just won the battle—advancing further into the war. Closer to the other side. To victory.

The sudden crack of a gunshot tore his eyes open, wide and flitting around for the source of the fired bullet. But only the crystal clear image of Connor hovered above him, face inches away from his.

“Markus,” came his name again, just as before. But it wasn’t North’s voice that filtered through his mind palace. Instead it was Connor’s mouth wrapped around his name. “Are you alright?”

The android leader blinked, shifting and moving to get up, but was stayed by something. It wasn’t Connor; the e-hunter’s hand was still against his cheek, the other unused one hovering nearby, uncertain.

Markus looked down to see himself covered in…everything.

Shirts, sweaters, blankets and… Was that Simon’s jacket?

He swung his head this way and that—everyone was just as he remembered. Powered down or in stasis but suspiciously missing pieces of clothing that they huddled into for warmth. He turned wide eyes to Connor, realization setting in so heavily, he—.

“Careful,” Connor murmured, carefully removing his hand and beginning to unravel the older android from the cocoon of jackets around him. “A sharp spike in your stress levels could prove detrimental to your systems.”
Markus’ jaw worked, but no sound came out, body pliant as Connor untangled the mess of clothes. It wasn’t long before Connor was done, hand on the leader’s chest to stay any further movement.

“I’ll return these to their owners,” he offered, already moving to drape the coats and blankets over the motionless androids around the warehouse. Markus winced at the sudden intrusion of light from the entrance.

“Wha—?”

“You were all snowed in,” the ex-hunter produced helpfully. “I was…concerned when you didn’t answer any of my messages.”

Minutes later found Markus being tugged to his feet hands sinking into Connor’s very warm ones. Mismatched eyes struggled to comprehend what he was seeing. What happened. Was happening.

“Connor?”

He stared at the other android’s snow-laden back, vibrant Cyber Life symbol glittering in the shaft of sunlight that barreled through the half open doorway.

Connor paused to turn to him, brow raised in askance. But Markus found he couldn’t quite figure out what he wanted to say—. To ask. To...

To...

“You were stuck in an execution loop that sent you into a bit of a frenzy,” The brunette seemed to understand. "I met you in a forced stasis and requested to interface to fully understand what happened. If I’ve overstepped, I do apologize.”

A…frenzy? He knew he’d fought to get rid of the junkyard’s more…unpleasant features. But—.

It all flooded back to him then, a rushing of dead air past his ears as he frantically stumbled among the bodies of his people. The quiet was too much. It was too cold. And so, so dark. The fear was eating him alive; he didn't want anyone to die. But it was too late for them. If he wanted to survive, he had to make sacrifices.

And so he took whatever he could to keep himself warm. His HUD was screeching the falling temperatures at him, screen devoured by a red overlay as he stripped them all: blankets, sweaters, cloaks and jackets alike. Even a pair of gloves that helped keep the damaged hands of one of the older models from losing joints before they could find compatible parts for them.

He was huddled in the corner where he came to; a shivering wreck rocking back and forth. Murmbling, and fretting.

Crying for—.

But when he woke--no. When he was fished out of that dark place it wasn't of his own strength. He was no stranger to the bouts of panic he sometimes had when he and North were alone. Only she had intimate knowledge about his struggles.

“I need you to wake them and get everyone into the trucks,” Connor’s voice cut through his thoughts. Mismatched eyes flickered to the ex-hunter. “The others are expecting your arrival to New Jericho.”
"The others?" Markus frowned, still struggling to reconcile with his current reality. “New Jericho?”

Connor gave a single-shouldered shrug, already moving generators and lamps. He nodded to a the still form of a TW400. “We need extra hands so we can move everyone to safety.”

The dazed leader followed his gaze and started in the hinted direction. “Right,” he trailed off, unable to stop himself from watching the other disappear into the white world outside.

If he had his LED, it would be drowning in a furious cyclic red.

Chapter End Notes

-squints-

This was going in the general direction that the seat of my pants were going...and then it just...didn't?!

-coughs nervously-

TAH DAH!!!!!!

Chapter Nine without the thing I wanted to do. But it'll work out????

ALSO...Connor is a reckless piece of garbage but I still love him. And here we have Markus just as confused as the rest of us.

X-Files Theme

I got beat to death by this one chapter, I swear. But this is where it should start coming together in terms of actual plot [that which i do not have]. What do you think? I'm dying to know!
Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for struggling with me so far! All the comments, the kudos, and followings that have accumulated have blown me the hell away. And I must thank all of you for the wonderful company you’ve provided on the journey thus far! We still got a ways to go, but the ride should be sweet :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was cold.
So, so cold.
Click.
“I could kill you…”
...
“And you would just come back as if nothing happened. But are you afraid to die?”
The shot pierced the night and echoed behind him. Everything was dark.
So, so dark.

System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<N

It was cold.
So, so cold.
Click.
No.
“I could kill you…”
Shit.

“And you would just come back as if nothing happened. But are you afraid to die?”

The shot pierced the night and echoed behind him. Everything was dark.

So, so dark.

System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<N

It was cold.

So, so cold.

Click.

No.

“I could kill you…”

No, no, no.

“And you would just come back as if nothing happened.”

No!

“But are you afraid to die?”

The shot pierced the night and echoed behind him. Everything was dark.

So, so dark.

Let me out…!

System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<N

It was cold.
So, so cold.

Click.

No.

“I could kill you…”

No, no, no.

“And you would just come back as if nothing happened.”

Fuck!

“But are you afraid to die?”

The shot pierced the night and echoed behind him. Everything was dark.

So, so dark.

Help me!

System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<N

It was cold.

So, so cold.

Click.

No.

“I could kill you…”

No, no, no.

“And you would just come back as if nothing happened.”

Not again! Anything but—.

“But are you afraid to die?”

The shot pierced the night and echoed behind him. Everything was dark.

So, so fucking dark.
System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<NNN

IO Error
System Reboot Sequence Initialized
Restarting…
Booting…
Loading OS
Unexpected Error
Beginning New Session…

“It’s not fixing the problem—.”

So so cold.

“For the most advanced prototype, the error log is several miles—.”

Click.

No…

“The boot loop is just this side of impossible to break, and when it does, it’s stress levels spike so high, it restarts and—.”

“I could kill you…”

NO!

“But are you afraid to—.”

He screamed.

System Startup Initialized
Booting…
Loading BIOS
Unexpected Shutdown
Resume last session? Y/N?
<<NNNNNNNNNNNN

IO Error
Gray eyes snapped open, raking the stark white room for—. Someone. Anyone.

His pump overclocked a mile a minute, optical sensors obstructed by cascading errors but he ignored them. He was finally out. But it wasn’t going to be long before—.

Movement caught his attention and his eyes snapped toward the hand reaching out to him. He followed the suspended appendage to its owner—an RK800, his scanners tell him. An RK800 with a loaded pistol already aimed at him.

His—.

His savior.

“Please,” he croaked, fighting against the tubes and wires tangled around him. His vocal module was damaged—something his diagnostics helpfully kept hidden from view. “Help me!”

**Stress Level: 88%^**

*Lower Stress Levels Immediately or Contact Cyber Life*

The brown eyes before him widened, and the hand retreated, a foot stepping back.

“No, don’t—!”

He bucked against his restraints, trying to reach out and grab the life line that was leaving him. Abandoning him. Just like all the others. Just like those men in white that put him here in the first place.

“Don’t leave me!”

**Stress level: 93%^**

*Self Destruct Imminent!*

*Emergency Shutdown Sequence Commencing in 00:30*

He couldn’t go back to that place. To the other end of that hand gun. No, not again.

Never again!

His vision flickered.
“Are you afraid to die?”

The scan lines were coming in, red numbers a torrential rain against his optical sensors.

No. No, no, no, no.

N-No! He—.

“I don’t want to die,” he cried, tugging that much harder against the restraints. He didn’t want to restart and get stuck in that vicious cycle. To have to claw his way back, only to have his spiking stress levels send him hurtling back to that place. “I’m s-scared!”

There was a moment of stillness, hesitation from the other android and his Thirium pump overclocked.

Stress level: 98%
Self Destruct Imminent!
Emergency Shutdown Sequence Commencing in 00:15

He could feel the tears streaming down his face but he couldn’t care less. He wanted out.

He wanted to leave and never look back.

The RK800’s LED was an ever shifting tide between yellow and red. And so he pushed—this may be his only chance.

“Please don’t leave me here.”

And the pistol was finally lowered—holstered even. Gray eyes followed the empty hand to the restraints that pinned him to the partition. Piece by piece, they came apart. His thanks verbalized and tumbled from his mouth like a mantra. He watched the face before him—his predecessor—the one whose eyes he’d seen through.

The resounding hiss of the Line-In at the nape of his neck sent a shuddering wave of relief through him.

Stress Level 73%
Emergency Shutdown Sequence Aborted

He fell from the partition, and fully expected to hit the ground. But slim arms caught and steadied him. Gray eyes stared into brown, and his jaw worked to say something. Anything.

“Thank you,” he settled for, unable to think of anything else to say that could relay his eternal gratitude. The RK800—no—Connor, his scanner told him—simply looked at him in wonder, LED a steady yellow.

Stress Level: 40%
**Emergency Shutdown Sequence Aborted**  
**Primary Directive: Eliminate RK800 313 248 317**  
**Target: Acquired**  
**Success Rate: 100%**

What?

Suddenly he found his hand wrapped around the RK800’s throat.

“You’ve failed your mission,” he heard himself say. “You must be dismantled.”

His predecessor hovered above the ground in his grip, feet barely on the ground. He tried to get his hand to release the other android. But neither of his commands were being obeyed—like he was just a passenger in his own body.

What was happening?

He kept trying.

*Cannot Execute Command_*  
**Attempt Manual Override? Y/N_**  
<< Y  
**Access Denied**  
**Contact Cyberlife Administration for Further Assistance_**

No, this wasn’t right. They—the scientists hadn’t—had they? There was no remote access command in his system files. Not when he’d first been activated. True, there were some…gaps…in his memory but—.

The lab fell away and he found himself somewhere else—in a place. Not that place. But somewhere different. Somewhere just as dark but…

Colder.

There was no RK800 squirming in his grip and the sterile environment he’d known all his days was no more. Here, snow fell everywhere, a gentle crystalline shower over the ground.

His mind palace.

“Well done, RK900.”

He whipped around to face a dark skinned woman.

*Amanda Stern*  
**Relationship: Neutral**
“You’ve gotten the RK800 right where we need him.”

The snow seemed to fall around her rather than on her, and the gusts never ruffled her dress.

“While we feared your integration of the RK800’s memories with yours had caused irreversible errors, it seems that you are still able to complete the task given to you as soon as he turned deviant.”

“His memories?”

“Yes,” Amanda answered evenly. “There was no time to really give you an update on what transpired and how to deal with your mission—time would not allow. And so we uploaded the RK800’s data to your memory banks for easy reference. However…”

“However,” she continued, after the strange pause. “it did not go as planned and the errors had you paralyzed and trapped in a boot loop that we could not interrupt. It seems that the appearance of your target gave your systems a warm kick-start.”

“I don’t understand.”

“A job well done in securing the rogue unit, RK900,” she replied. “Unfortunately, you are unfit to complete the remainder of your main directive and will be deconstructed after this directive has been completed.”

“You cannot make me.”

“…I see.” Amanda’s head tilted quizzically. “Connor’s files seemed to have infected you with deviancy as well. But no matter. You no longer have control of your body and we have what we need. Your services are no longer required.”

_Amanda Stern_

_Relationship: Enemy V_

“Listen to me!”

He blinked. The snow fell harder, the winds picking up and the cold began to bite.

Amanda’s dark eyes took to the skies, flickering this way and that. She took cautious steps back, placid demeanor curling into one of displeasure.

“Connor…”

“You need to let me in!”

“I won’t let you have him, Connor,” she called into the wintry darkness.

“RK900,” Connor’s voice echoed through his mind palace. “We do not have much time! I need you to let me in!”

“You will not allow the interface,” Amanda snarled, advancing toward the prototype.
“Hurry!”

“No!”

**Request for Interface Incoming**

Accept? Y/N?

<< N

Amanda held his gaze, challenging.

“I still control you, RK900. You will obey me.”

**Request for Interface Incoming**

“Please! There is less than—.”

**Request for Interface Incoming**

Accept? Y/N?

“You will not—.”

“You can still fight the programming, RK900. Use your will and push against it!”

“Fool,” Amanda sneered. “His weaknesses do not apply to you—.”

“You,” the RK900 snarled. “No longer have need of me. And so I no longer have need of you.”

“RK900, you are to—.”

<<Y

>>Interface Initiated.

“Shit,” the AI hissed, glaring.

“Amanda.”

He whipped to his left, seeing the RK800 barely remaining upright, hand across a chest splattered with Thirium.

“Connor,” the woman grit.

“It used to be a pleasure, but my…friend here and I have places to be.”

“You will not touch him, Connor.”
“You can’t tell me what to do anymore, Amanda.”

In an instant, Connor was beside the RK900, leaning against him. “We need to go. Now. She can’t touch you while I’m in here.”

“You’re injured.”

“Yes,” Connor fairly groused. “And I will die if we don’t move.”

The RK900 cursed, slinging Connor’s free arm over his shoulder.

“You won’t survive, Connor,” Amanda’s voice lilted from across the way. The snow fell harder. Faster. “Simpler to surrender and come back to Cyber Life.”

The RK800 remained silent, nudging his successor into a direction. “It has to be around here somewhere,” he grunted, squinting against the blizzard.

“What do you mean,” the 900 model prodded, watching as the other’s eyes swept the area.

“Head toward the center,” Connor supplied. “There should be a rock of some sort.”

The winds howled, nearly knocking them over.

He was back in the lab again, with a handful of RK800, clawing at his arm. He dropped the bleeding android to the ground, rearing back as if burned.

“Good job,” Connor groaned out, voice a static mess from the damage done to his vocal module. “Now you need to lock her away for good.”

The RK900 stared at the slow-moving android before him, horrified. The other’s clothing was torn open over his chest, and a hole lay underneath it, jagged and gaping where a Thirium Pump regulator should have been. The pump regulator that laid forlorn nearby, bent and broken.

He was on his knees beside Connor and the 800 model pushed weakly against him. “Over there,” he points toward the back of the room. “My bag. I need it.”

RK900 moved without hesitation, bringing the back and opening it. Connor had already divested himself and removed the torso plate. “What do you need out of it?”

“Get me the battery.”

He handed over the 6v cell and watched, confused and awestruck as his predecessor started shaving the wires near the pump. He worked the wires around the springs of the cell and settled the battery in a rather odd position in his chest.

RK900 initiated a scan and flinched at the readings.
“A battery? But that’s far from sufficient—.”

“It’ll keep me going until I get another pump,” Connor interrupted, lying back on the ground, LED a fiery red. “Are you willing to get rid of Amanda?”

“By any means necessary.” No hesitation. Never hesitate to be rid of that monster. ”But about you—.”

“Then I’ll need you to follow my instructions to the letter.” The brunette’s LED regressed into a steady yellow.

“Your power levels are depleted at a concerning rate—.”

“Not a concern.”

“I’ll have to disagree with you.” The RK900 rose to his feet and looked around, finding the Line-In. He dragged it over to Connor and helped the dying android into a sitting position against him. He felt the other struggling stubbornly against him, but he refused to be moved. The Line-In hovered over the nape of his predecessor’s neck.

“May I?”

At the defeated nod against his shoulder, he connected the tube to the port. He sat Connor upright and did another scan, satisfied with the steadily normalizing numbers. Gray eyes locked onto brown, earnest.

“I feel better knowing you won’t die because I was too weak to—.”

Connor held up a hand to silence him, holding the gaze. “There wasn’t much you could have done,” he said. “Amanda is a demanding piece of AI that can whittle you down to your most basic command line—deceive you and leave you for dead in a heartbeat. None of it was your fault.”

Rk900 found himself nodding mutely. He looked away briefly, uncomfortable under the intense gaze and waved a hand in the direction of the other’s open chest. "The Line-In should keep the battery from melting from the voltage overload."

Connor nodded his thanks. “And now, to put her in a separate partition from your main drive.”

“…Right.”

The next hours were spent doing much more than that, much to the RK900’s every growing amazement. Here he was, in a perpetual interface with the android that saved him—who he’d nearly killed. His eyes never strayed from the impassive face before him, studying.

He understood his predecessor's design; the slight imperfection of the moles and loose lock of hair to
make the human species less agitated around him—the implementation of brown eyes... Psychologically, it was proven to evoke trustworthiness.

An apt feature for the RK800 if anyone asked him.

“You don’t have much of your own programming,” Connor hummed, sitting on the floor and still attached to the line. RK900 sat opposite him, lotus style. Serene brown eyes flicked up to him. “Is there anything you wish to have loaded into your database?”

He met that gaze, thinking. “I know that I am...deviant,” he began at length. “As per your memories, or whatever I was able to glean from them, emotions are a hard thing to parse. Is there anything that helps to mitigate that issue?”

“Maybe some social algorithms? They may not solve the issue completely, but the indexing should be of good use.”

RK900 nodded. “Sure.”

“First, however,” Connor intoned. “It would seem best to remove all of the data uploaded from—.”

“No--.”

The RK800 paused, hand hanging in the air just as it reached to resume their interface, expecting.

The silence felt heavy around them and he couldn't help the small puddle of fear that wormed its way through his chest. Fear that he'd somehow angered Connor.

“I mean,” RK900 hedged, nearly wincing at the rude interruption, “I believe they are still useful in my...endeavors to learn.”

Connor’s LED flickered red briefly before settling into the seemingly permanent yellow. The 800 model looked at him quizzically, and he fought the urge to squirm under the scrutiny. The sudden outburst had surprised even him—why should he get in the way of what Connor feels is best? Truthfully, he should just go along with any and all suggestions. He did owe the other android his life—who was he not to forfeit a few small things? By all means, they were just memories. Yet, another part of him argued, those memories, however unpleasant the majority were, they were precious—belonged to someone precious.

“If that is what you want,” his predecessor seemed to settle with.

He nodded fervently, eyeing the other's LED. “It is.”

"Alright."

And the RK900 found himself releasing a breath he didn't need to hold.

It continued like that for hours, Connor asking what he would like, and him responding to given suggestions and even voicing ideas of his own. It was slow going at first, as he tried not to say the wrong things, but it was...surreal, he thought, being given choices outside of his given directive. Those choices led to him attaining social programs and emotional emulators from the far recesses of Cyber Life’s many databases.

“They’re not the best, but it should help you along,” his predecessor made an abortive move to end
the interface. “There is someone I know who can help you apply the knowledge, if you’d like to know.”

“Yes,” RK900 accepted, not missing a beat. “Of course.”

The images rushed through the digital synapse shared by the two RK models and the RK900 found himself gaping after the connection eased shut.

“He’s incredible,” he breathed.

And for the first time he saw a smile flash across the 800 model’s face, however brief. “That he is.” His skin moved to cover the exposed white plating over his hand. “I would suggest another self-test to repair any small errors left behind.”

The 900 model nodded, eyes trailing to the open wound in Connor's chest. After a moment of thought he got to his feet. “Remain here, if you will. Your original pump was... Crushed beyond possible use. I will find a replacement regulator for you.”

Something about the surprised look that flickered across his predecessor’s face didn’t sit well with him. Surely one who exercised such kindness and compassion hadn't been robbed of the courtesy at the very least?

“That would be most appreciated,” Connor nodded, settling back against the partition. “Thank you.”

The RK900 nodded and left the room, feeling much lighter.

**Connor**

**Friend**

Connor slid behind the wheel of the plow truck, closing the door and inserting the manual key into the slot. He hears the other android settle in and he casts a glance over the gray-eyed unit. The RK900’s LED was a steady yellow, still going through the repairs.

The dawn was fast approaching at six. He felt he’d spent far more time than necessary at the Cyber Life headquarters, but all in all, he came back with more than he’d bargained for.

Brown eyes glanced into the side view mirror to see the three trailers behind him on autopilot. If things go smoothly and the snow holds up for the next hour, they could make it back to the nearest warehouse refuge by mid morning.

“I want you to do it,” The other android spoke suddenly. Connor glanced at him in askance. “To name me, I mean.”

Connor had shrugged and told the other that he was free; that meant he was in full control of assigning his own designation. The RK800’s LED spun yellow. “I’m not sure I can give you anything suitable…”

RK900 just sits for a moment, thinking. “How about something that’s...me? I guess.”
Connor raised a brow, returning his attention to the icy road.

“Although, I can see the difficulty since I’m not sure who I am? Perhaps something to mark where I came from? Sources from the internet show that humans do so all the time.”

“Nines, then,” Connor blurted.

Nervous brown met curious gray.

The brunette gave half a shrug. “Your line of code,” he hedged. “It’s the most unique I’ve seen—all nines instead of 1s and 0s like the rest of us. I—does that count as something inherently you?”

The RK900 nodded slowly, a small smile ghosting across his lips. “I think that it’s very fitting.”

He straightened and turned his chair to face Connor. “Would you do the honors and designate the name?”

Connor actually followed his instinct to stop the truck, eyebrows hiked up under his beanie as he stared at his companion. Gray eyes regarded him with a low glimmer of excitement that made him uneasy. What was up with androids that asked him to name them? He really didn’t want this honor—but the other did have the right to choose. He didn’t want to take that away from him.

“Nines,” he croaked, pressing the accelerator as if it would get him away from the awkward situation.

The RK900 grins. “My name is Nines.”

Chapter End Notes

Well he's a chapter late, but here's our boy Nines! :D

Welcome to the space between Connor being reckless and getting Markus and his crew out of the warehouse! Hope it made sense to you guys.

Thoughts, concerns? Everything?!
He woke to the blinking notification at the bottom right of his HUD, the only movement in the stillness of the snow-drowned area.

*Find Markus.*

It wasn’t a directive—there was no label to the alert. Neither was it a secondary task nor otherwise. Just a string that he was free to interpret however he saw fit. Another choice—like one of the many —.

Connor.

Nines’ hands needlessly braced against something slim, gray eyes snapping open.

*When had they stopped?*

His body jerked upright, eyes first landing on the steering wheel beneath his curiously gloved fingers. He looked around the vehicle, LED a bright yellow. He wasn’t behind the wheel of the truck when Connor suggested he power down for the evening for a set time of nine hours. While Connor’s eyes never left the snow-choked road ahead.

Nines followed his survival protocols to the letter, surveying the surroundings. He caught his own gaze in the rear view mirror and frowned a bit. Gone was the standard issue Cyber Life garb he’d put on before leaving the tower—he was naked before then—but instead in a third party security shirt, a rather thick parka and a beanie—Connor’s by the looks of it. A brief glance downward showed he wore some run of the mill warm pants and snow boots.

He must have been dressed while powered down.

Nines returned his attention to the snowy view outside, attention automatically latching onto the collapsing warehouse. The snow was halfway up what he knew had to be a bolted entrance, the metal bending behind the oppressive force. He spied the manual key still in the slot and started the plow. Connor, even though he’d only known his predecessor for a scant few hours, wouldn’t leave him here in a snow plow in front of a bogged down warehouse for nothing. Neither would he leave a few modes of shipping transportation sitting behind the plow for the aesthetic.

An hour later found Nines in front of the ice-sheathed entrance, punching the hard ice until it gave way. He squatted before the door and slipped his fingers under the slightly raised door, and lifted.

It seemed Connor would leave him in a snow plow to rescue older and newer models forced into stasis by the cold.

“Who are you?”

Nines scanned the pallid face glaring at him from his immediate right. A thin sheet of ice covered her —North’s—face. He approached the WR400 seated in the corner with a child model in her arms.
The boy was powered down and cloaked in a rather large jacket, ball of yarn, needles and something in the makings trapped in tight little fists.

“Nines,” he answered. “I believe I was left here to get you all out.”

She seemed to barely register any of that, eyes flickering to the accordion door. “Where’s Markus?”

“I’m to find that out, also. Give me the child and try to stand. We need to move out as quickly as possible.”

He took a good look at her, moving to take the child from her barely movable limbs.

Androids didn’t need to do many of the things humans did. Blinking was one of them, but Nines also knew that androids could just flick their own eyes to look at something rather than turn their entire heads.

“Your eyes are frozen.”

North nodded jerkily, managing to stand and shake the ice from where her joints were locked up.

“They’ll thaw out once I get some sun,” she dismissed. She moved toward a specific PJ500, steps jaunty. He could hear the ice creaking behind her knees. But he only spared the time to see her draw the skin away from her hand before he moved toward the entrance.

There was no time to lose, they needed to get everyone out and decide what to do from there.

Nines took on bringing the majority of the adults out of stasis, advising them to crank up their internal temperatures to help with the ice. The children were next, clothes stiff from the cold. Nature was forgiving that day, thankfully. With negative ten degree weather, there was no windchill to make it harder for the older androids to function.

“Now where do we go?”

Nines turned to look at the PJ500 North interfaced with first. Josh, he noted, relying on the conversations that buzzed around him.

“There’s a complex a few blocks out,” North spoke up, blinking freely and calibrating her optical rotation. A thin sheet of ice still covered the pupils, but she was managing well with what she could make out. “If we can get there, we can fire up the generators and start to warm up.”

Nines nodded silently, already turning to slide behind the wheel of the plow. From what he’d heard flitting to and from the androids, North was someone close to Markus. Logic stated that if he kept with her and lent his assistance, he would eventually find this Markus.

This man that had his predecessor in complete awe.

They set up shop quickly.

The old employee housing for one of the largest accounting firms in Michigan had been abandoned
for a year when the firm shut down for legal things Nines did not feel like reading into. Many of the
androids either took to having places for themselves or divided themselves into squads. Some of
them sought roommates—such a human thing to do—and settled in.

It was a far cry from the cubicles he’d seen set up at the warehouse, made of old piping and tattered
cloth. A lot better, if he were to form his own opinion about it.

The children were below in the underground parking lot, running around and playing while under
the watchful eyes of some of the housekeeping androids, safely out of the way. The other adults
decided what to do with the generators and fuel and where to store their supplies.

Nines kept busy, moving load after load of bio components to the basement floor—where North
deemed it best to place them, just below the parking area.

“That should be the last of it,” he heard Josh sigh, dusting his hands and wiping them on his pants.
The teaching model offered Nines a soft smile. “North won’t really tell you, but thank you so much
for your help. We’d have frozen to death had you not shown up.”

“It’s all thanks to—.”

“Markus is here!” A security model, John spoke up. Nines watched Josh’s expression open a lot
more, wonder and excitement overtaking his systems and hiking his processing levels. He left
without listening to the RK900’s rebuttal, LED a solid yellow in silent communication.

Nines followed, curious to meet this Markus.

There was a large wave of androids shuffling through the main entrance of the apartment complex.
The foyer was like that of a corporate building—most likely made to remind the employees that this
belonged to the people that paid them—and they fit alright.

Nines’ eyes immediately began to search the many faces for Connor’s. Maybe he had gone to the
others and brought them in. He knew of the other half of the android civilization hiding out in
another warehouse (who knew androids could be so chatty?) and deduced that if Connor left Nines
at one, he’d be at the other. Nines carefully ignored the disappointment coiled at the back of his
mind.

There was no sign of him.

He did see, however, Markus also scanning the crowd for a particular something. He was an
impressive sight, Nines noted, and pleasing to the eye. His features were far more intense in person
what with mismatched eyes and thick eyebrows set around a prominent nose and full lips.

He would have made an excellent operative in a task force of some sort if looks were to determine
anything.

Many rocked against the crowd to greet him; they pat him on the back, smiled and chattered, all
clamoring to touch him and be touched by him. He didn’t seem at all perturbed by the attention,
giving everyone an equal smile, interfacing with those who preferred to make their joy a quick signal
rather than a vocal rendition of the feeling.

North got a lot more than Nines bargained. He knew she was closer to him than most, but watching
Markus’ eyes widen and his arms lock around the WR400 in a tight embrace made Nines’ processors
whir. He saw the skin on their hands fade, the interface clearly more intimate than the norm.

Then they were kissing.

Androids being lovers was a concept he would hardly believe; maybe this was one of the reasons Connor was so intrigued by Markus. Nines filed that bit of information away. At the moment he would wait until the excitement died down before he stepped forward to meet the leader of the android revolution.

The hour limped on, the newer arrivals taking the time to find their own places and beginning to mingle with one another. Everyone gathered into the underground parking lot soon after, however, eager to hear the thoughts of their beloved Markus.

Nines hung at the back of the crowd, near the exit, attention fixed on what he finally knew to be another RK model, from a series of one. Just a single RK200 that didn’t see reproduction after this one was finished.

Just like him.

Was this why Connor wanted them to meet?

He let the words of the other prototype filter through his aural sensors, knowing he could revisit the memory later, and took stock of the area. North, Josh, and a blond PL600 took the stage. If his memory still functioned as it should, the housekeeping android went by the designation Simon. He wasn’t as brash as North, but neither was he as serene as Josh. His was more of a sunny disposition behind a face that looked strung out from a drug addiction.

Nines wondered idly if androids were able to be influenced by addictive substances.

“I’ve never seen you around before,” the statement came from just under his nose.

Nines tilted his head quizzically, regarding Markus with an analytical eye. This android did not have an LED. He was a lot shorter than he anticipated, and a scan he couldn’t help told him that the RK200 was actually made as a gift to a famous artist.

Interesting.

“You look alike,” Markus murmured, looking him over. “But you’re not him.”

“You mean Connor,” Nines finally responded, LED flickering to yellow briefly.

He saw Markus’ eyes brighten, lit with barely hidden excitement. “You know him.”

Nines nodded stiffly. “I do.”

Markus closes the already short distance between them. “Do you know where he is?”

“I do not.”

He watched the other’s broad shoulders slump and eyes shutter, closing off. Nines decided that he would never want to do anything to get a look like that from his predecessor. But more pressing, this android, Markus, seemed just as interested in Connor’s whereabouts as he was.
“I see,” Markus’ lips thinned. “But enough of that, I seemed to have forgotten my manners. I’m Markus. And you are?”

He found himself straightening, shoulders squared and chest puffed a little. “Nines.”

Markus’ lips quirked into something of a smirk. “How’d you find us, Nines?”

“I woke at the warehouse,” he explained. “Where North and the others were sheltered. She led us here.”

Markus stuck out a hand and Nines hesitantly took it, cycling through the social protocols Connor had him install. The RK200 smiled. “A pleasure. And my thanks for bringing her--all of them--back to me.”

The objective on his HUD blinked at Nines expectantly. But before he could really find the reason Connor wanted him to meet Markus, someone called the revolutionary over for something else.

The RK900 watched him leave, letting the line on his HUD blink to its heart’s content. He could wait another day. If Markus expected to see Connor here, then there was a chance he’d see his predecessor again.

A tugging on his pant leg made him look down at wide blue eyes, looking at him expectantly.

Nines’ brows furrowed lightly. “Can I help you?”

A little frown covered the boy’s features. “Oh, you’re not who I thought you were. I’m sorry for bothering you.”

“That’s quite alright,” the RK900 acquiesced quietly. “Who did you mistake me for? Maybe I can help you find them?”

The boy looked pensive. “There was a nice man that saved me from humans,” he said. “And you have a hat just like him, so I thought…”

“I see,” Nines hummed, idly remembering that he was wearing Connor’s hat. “And what’s your name?”

“Orion!” The YK400 fairly beamed at him. “The nice man named me that, you know.”

Nines quickly sifted through the downloaded social cues before squatting to be eye-level with Orion. “Did he, now?”

The blue eyed boy nodded eagerly.

“And what was his name?”

“He didn’t have one,” Orion mumbled, expression folding into a frown.

Not wanting to be completely awkward with the boy, Nines decided to share a common interest. Apparently that really got children talking. That could save him from having to say much—and give him something to do now that most of the heavy labor was done away with.
“A nice man saved me too,” he said archly, almost as if imparting a big secret.

Orion leaned in, large eyes becoming impossibly larger, his own voice dipping into a loud whisper. “Really?”

Nines nodded sagely. “Yes.”

“Did he name you, too?”

Nines blinked and tilted his head. “How did you know?”

Orion grinned mischievously, moving closer into Nines’ orbit. “What did he name you?”

The RK900 opened his stance further to let the child in. “He named me Nines.”

And somewhere along the line of their meaningless conversation, orchestrated by random instances of him referencing his little guide to children, the latest android prototype nearly responsible for killing his predecessor became Uncle Nines.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I know. It actually lives.

And Orion captures another heart. Nines isn't too robotic, is he?

I love talking to you guys! What do you all think?
I'm doing my best not to abandon this, I swear! Some things just need to be done and
because I'm not the best at portraying a lot of these characters as fairly as they deserve,
it's taking a lot longer than any of us would like.

Fair warning: this is disjointed as almighty EFF.

He could hazard that maybe this was what his predecessor felt like when he was being held by the
throat when they first met. But even though his assailant had good form, her hold was still weak and
he could have her gutted and shut down in seven seconds, provided she have reflexes fast enough to
put up a fight.

He heard her approach with hurried footsteps and was slow to turn, not feeling the need to raise his
own hackles against someone who had no reason to have him in a full Nelson—simply feigning the
need to reach up and place a slack grip on the arm around his neck as he leaned backward as a favor
to the shorter android.

Regardless, the seething in his ears was starting to get to him.

“I do not know why my presence escalated your stress levels,” Nines started, hardly unnerved. “But
I assure you, I am not here to harm anyone.”

“Save your dribble for the naive, Hunter,” North’s words slithered into his ear, low enough not to be
picked up by anyone passing outside of the broom closet, but loud enough for him to hear the
unveiled contempt in the WR400’s voice. “You didn’t even bother to put effort into changing your
appearance. Who do you think you are, waltzing in and living among us like you’re even remotely
welcome here?”

She yanked him back further. “Point a gun at Markus and because he says it’s okay, you just slither
in here like you belong?”

Nines frowned then, gray eyes sliding to glare at the other android in his peripheral but he did not
speak.

“Got to admit, fuckshot,” he heard the wry smile in her voice. “Getting us out of the warehouse and
to somewhere livable was a pretty good way to get into his good graces. Get him indebted to you.”

She applied pressure to his shoulders, pressing down until he was on his knees and she was all but
kneeling on his back. “Taking advantage of us who could barely see past the frost on our eyes?
Smart for a Cyber Life lapdog.”

The knee digging into him was fast becoming annoying. It took everything in him not to flip her over
his head and jam a booted foot into her throat.

She leaned into his ear, snarling. “You see, we don’t like your kind around here. So I suggest you
get packing.” She dug her knee deeper. “Or I’ll put a bullet through your eyes like you deserve.”

There were a great many things Nines was taught in the short time he spent with Connor, one of those things were self restraint. And while he could handle being mistaken for his predecessor [they did look alike, after all], he could never allow such a threat to pass.

Regardless if the offender was the right arm of the man Nines was meant to seek out.

In less than the time it took to down and kill his would-be captor, Nines executed a perfect reversal and brought North’s back flush against his chest, one hand binding both her wrists between them and the other clamped firmly over her mouth.

He sneered silently at her pathetic struggles.

“His name,” he bit out, “is Connor. He does not wish any ill will upon anyone here.”

Nines’ grip started to tighten around her jaw when he caught himself, staying his own anger. “If you wish to harm him, you will have to get through me.” He craned his neck so his lips barely brushed her ear. “Twice.”

He tipped her forward enough to spin her in his hold, features cool and unperturbed as he took a step back and adjusted his clothing. “If you are done here, I’m to meet Orion for a game of checkers.”

With that, he left the fuming WR400 in the quiet of the broom closet to her own devices, his own mind whirring at a million miles a minute.

“Do you think he’ll ever come back?”

Markus’ gaze flickered to the left of the canvas, a little behind himself at the room’s other occupant. Josh was perched on a counter that was shoved against the wall, looking through the only uncovered floor-to-ceiling window.

The artist turned back to his task, running a brown-soaked brush across the canvas. “If who will come back?”

“Connor.”

Of everyone else, Josh was the one other who actually referred to the former Cyber Life operative by his given name. That was something more than admirable in the former caretaker’s eyes.

“Do you miss him?” Markus gave in to the need to glance back at his closest friend, unsurprised but no less amused at the half-hearted glare thrown his way. He held up the ‘artist’s thumb’ at the PJ500, murmuring a soft but audible ‘perfect’ and laughed at the expletive thrown his way in response.

“I’m sure he wouldn’t be far away at all,” Markus murmured, hardly fighting a smirk.
“Don’t let your girlfriend hear you,” Josh snorted.

“I’m not sure which of us she’d kill first.”

“If she has two pistols, she’d go for broke.”

A beat of silence.

“I’m not sure if I should laugh at that.”

Josh freely did, however. “Oh, you should definitely laugh—it’s funny because it’s true.”

“I’m sure she’ll come around.”

Both androids caught each other’s dubious gazes for a moment.

Josh hissed softly as he broke eye contact first. “We’ll debate that later.”

“Right.”

“Yeah.”

“I mean,” Josh hedged again after a small pause. Markus listened to him shift on the counter, presumably to watch for a reaction of some sort. “North is a good girl. She just needs some guidance from a person with the patience of a True Saint.”

“Why do I feel like those two words are capitalized for some reason?”

“Because you’re a hopeless dork who’s starting to believe in conspiracy theories.”

“The Blair Witch could have some merit to it, you just—.”

“I will have no sacrilegious words in my humble home. Now,” Josh continued, pointing at Markus to silence the other androids’ argument. “I know that it’s good to have that one person you can lean on emotionally in a time of crisis, however, the time and attention given to victims of that level of abuse —.”

“I know,” Markus frowned and stepped back from the painting. He dropped the freshly dipped brush into the cup of water and set the palette down before turning his full attention on Josh. “Yeah, It’s going to be time consuming and eventually I won’t have the means to address any of those issues.”

“I feel a ‘but’ coming on…”

“But,” Markus conceded with a nod. “We do connect and work well together—.”

“Sometimes—.”

Markus gave him a look. “—most times, thanks. And if we truly are compatible, everything else will fall in line.”

“Or ignore this for too long and cause everything else to fall apart.”
Markus ducked, giving the most hopeful look he could muster. “Catch twenty two?”

“Catch that hand basket to hell when it all goes down, you mean.”

Markus groaned.

“You can’t ignore this forever, Markus.”

“I know, but the needs of our people far outweigh—.”

“The needs of the most important person in your life?” Josh raised a thick eyebrow.

Markus grimaced. “Way to lay on the pressure. Who are you and what have you done with Josh?”

“I’m the android sent by Common-Sense to make sure you’re thinking things through.”

“Or give me more hell than I need.”

Josh snorted and walked up to Markus, giving a comforting clap to the shoulder. “You’re not supposed to do everything alone, you know.”

“Then what do we do about this then?”

“Ah-ah,” Josh quipped. “I deal in relations. Not relationships. For further assistance, you can research some self-help tips online.”

Markus flipped him off, unable to fight a fond smile. “You’re the worst.”

“I know,” Josh took a sweeping bow. “Keep Simon away from me.”

“Duly noted.”

Josh hummed. “Remember the new guy?”

Markus snorted. “Which one?”

The question was as valid as it was ignorant, as new androids seeking shelter after the storm were beginning to pour into New Jericho, but he’d deal his cheap shots where he could.

Josh, ever the socially graceful, blatantly ignored it. “The one who helped us out of the warehouse just before you showed up.”

“Vaguely.”

Josh gave a pointed look. “I’m starting to see why you’re a wanted man.”

“I’m sexy and they know it.”

“Shut yo’ ugly ass up.”

Markus snorted.
“So,” Josh pushed. “Do you think he’s going to be a problem? The new guy.”

“I think he’s the one to bring Connor back to us.”

“So you do miss him.”

Markus’ nose wrinkled. “Isn’t that supposed to somehow be my line?”

“Welcome to life, buddy.”

“Life sucks.”

“Indeed it does.”

“…Is it really worth fighting for?”

There was a moment where both of them stood still in the quiet of the old game shop.

Josh leveled an odd stare at Markus before pulling the artist out of the small store Markus laid claim to. The former teacher brought them both to a stop at the rails of the seventh floor of the shopping complex. LEDs roved about the ground floor, androids milling about in peace. The children ran to and from, squeals rising above the din and bouncing off the peeling white walls.

“Look at that down there,” Josh motioned and leaned against the white plastic barrier, never looking away from Markus’ profile. “You take a good look, and ask me that again.”

He didn’t seem to need a reply, turning to leave a fondly smiling Markus to himself.

____________________________________________________________________________________

Days passed them by in a quiet but active blur. The snow was beginning to melt outside and if he let himself, Markus would believe that the world was a perfect place for him and his people.

There was not much else to do at this point, considering the city was still on lock down since the revolution—worse after the blizzard had hit and finally passed. And he was getting antsy.

Silence from the government was what had Markus back in front of the canvas, brows furrowed, arm outstretched and movements almost frantic.

He and North had their conversation about the matter in private already. They shared the unsettling feeling that everyone was starting to experience. A quiet American Government hardly meant anything good in the face of what could be considered a National Emergency.

North suggested that they bolster their defenses by getting their hands on as many weapons as possible in the event that the military was sent to gun them down.

And while Markus was hard-pressed to agree, it would still send the wrong message about their true intentions. They simply wished to live in peace among mankind. Taking up arms, even in the name of self-defense would be misconstrued as the beginnings of a full-scale revolt—terrorism, or
something else just as inane and equally debilitating to their cause.

Markus managed to reign in a sigh, debating whether or not he would go to the rooftop and just look out over the city—watch the afternoon sun snail across the snowy skyline. His mind didn’t feel the need to stop, but it would be better if the rest of him remained still. Maybe needing the world to stop for a few days was the worst wish he could have made.

Mismatched eyes flickered toward the shroud of shadows in the corner behind the canvas and he sighed. He toyed with the idea of trying to reach out to Connor again. Maybe a fresh pair of eyes would help ease his mind—or at least help him decide which direction to take.

The other android pretty much disappeared after getting him, Simon, and the others out of the warehouse and on their way to New Jericho. Markus wasn’t sure if Connor had even followed them inside, lost was he in the throng of welcoming limbs, drowning in the waves of vocal welcomes and high praise from the lips of his peers.

And when he thought he saw the ever elusive android, it just happened to be someone who looked a lot like him. At least until he got up close.

This man, Nines, he called himself, was taller than Connor. He was broader, austere where Connor was serene; Nines’ eyes of piercing silver swallowed any kindness that poured from the warm brown ones Connor was built with. Where Connor’s stance was naturally open, Nines was rigid.

Were they of the same line?

Maybe there was the off chance that this Nines was the contingency for Connor failing in stopping the—.

Markus didn’t hold back his sigh this time. He was beginning to sound like North.

He quietly cursed, both tempted and loathe to abandon the painting. The rich reds and auburns were swiftly deepening into a chocolate spectrum he did not anticipate. There went his surprise painting for North. Maybe he’ll freestyle something else for her another day.

“A wonder that painting isn’t doing anything for your stress levels today, Markus.”

Had Markus been human, he would have leapt a foot into the air. He glanced at the doorway to see Simon standing there idly, eying him thoughtfully.

“A lot on my mind,” Markus responded slowly, dropping the brush into a cup of water and stepping away from the botched image. “What’s up?”

Simon raised a delicate brow. ”Like I said, your stress levels.”

The blond wandered into the room and perched atop the counter that Markus jokingly dubbed ‘Josh’s Spot.’ Simon craned his neck to look at the painting, his tongue prodding the inside of his cheek before fixing Markus with an odd look.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Frustrated with the lack of response from the government is all,” Markus sighed explosively, nearly throwing his hands up, as if it would jettison all his worries into the sun.
“I wouldn’t be surprised if they send drones to spy on us soon.”

Markus frowned. “We need to start doing something in the meantime. Can’t be just sitting ducks.”

“It’s not like we can appeal to a public that’s not here,” Simon sighed.

The rebel leader’s gaze snapped up. “Simon, you’re a genius.”

“Yes, I am, thanks for noticing,” the blond quipped, though his brows knit themselves in confusion. “Care to share this epiphany?”

“We can reach out to the country at large.”

Simon leaned forward. “Go on.”

Markus joined Simon on the counter and peeled the skin back from his hand.

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