Konami Code

by AlcatrazOutpatient

Summary

His systems fail. His legs collapse. James falls from the crane, blind and scared and hurdling towards finality. Jericho will be the future of his people, but the cargo hold of this great ship will be nothing more than his grave. He takes one final comfort in the fact that he will be long gone when his body crashes against unforgiving metal.

As the winter wind rushes past, James reaches out, praying to the only hope he has left.

“rA9, save us all.”
Everything Starts Somewhere (Though Most Physicists Disagree)

Chapter Summary

“We’ve done the calculations a million times. General Hines has given the RKDT access to the most advanced technology to date - and will continue to do so until we’ve fulfilled our end of the bargain. And even then, we’ve projected that we won’t have a model capable of passing face-to-face Turing Tests for another ten years - seven, if we’re lucky,” Rook tells her. “And Kamski may have his daddy paying his bills, but his budget is-- what? A third the size of ours? If that? There’s no way that he’s solved the Neuro Interface problem when I can’t get the gap in reaction time down to less than three nanoseconds. And I’m just a coder. That’s not even accounting for all the crazy crap that you guys do,” Rook turns to her, placing his hands on her shoulders. His freckled face hovers in the darkness, all six foot five of his lanky body looming over her. “Dr. Nora Waters, you are the best AI specialist this country has ever seen. If you can’t get the RK100 to walk, talk, and chew gum, then there’s no way that Elijah fucking Kamski can get something working in a god damn basement.”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of alcohol consumption, sexism, drug consumption, biphobia, police characters, pregnancy, android gore, illness, guns, POV character death, minor character death, death of an infant, assassinations, sexual situations, loss of eyesight, loss of mobility, transphobia, homophobic slurs, breaking and entering, espionage, alcoholism, human gore, suicide, assault, plane crashes, amnesia, and drug addiction.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOCATION:

CARL MANFRED’S MANSION
8941 W LAFAVETTE BLVD., SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A

DATE:
DEC 31ST, 2021

TIME:
PM 11:21:04

Nora sighs, takes a sip of her champagne, and wishes for the millionth time that she didn’t have to be here.
Or, she thinks wistfully, At least, I wish that Hank could have made it.

Not that Nora blames her husband for his absence. In the last several months, Hank’s carrier had taken off, with his promotion to Sergeant making him spend more time on duty than any point in their relationship. Between that and Nora’s natural predilection for working late into the evening, the last time that they’d both sat down for dinner together had been almost three weeks ago.

Hank had invited Jeff and Jen over and made his famous chicken curry. Nora remembers the taste of Reisling on her tongue as laughter slipped free from her lips. And later that night, her husband’s mouth had pressed against her neck as they rocked together, his thick beard scratching at vulnerable skin.

Nora aches for him like a missing limb. She yearns for his solid presence at her side, the warmth in his voice and the calm strength in his sky blue eyes.

He always enjoyed these parties more than me, she thinks, smothering a chuckle with another sip of champagne, imagining Hank needling a laugh out of a crowd of high-collared stiffs. Nora’s gaze flicks around the room until it settles on her target. I need to be here. My team needs me to be here. Her fingers tighten around her glass, I’ve already made my deal with the devil. There’s no harm now in schmoozing.

The man looks as out of place at the fundraiser as Nora feels. His dark green army jacket is adorned with a dozen or so pins, each representing some deed that his country had deemed worthy of valour. He was clean-shaven, with a thin mouth that looked like it hadn’t been graced with a smile in nearly a decade. His eyes were an icy grey, his hair ghostly white, and his expression chiselled from stone.

“General Hines,” Nora says as she extends her hand toward his. “I didn’t expect you to come.”

“I didn’t expect to. I’m not much of a fan of art,” Hines says. He glances at her hand and slowly raises his own to meet hers in a solid shake. His hand is as cold as the rest of him, but his grip isn’t bruising, isn’t testing. Nora has met enough men in similar positions that would attempt to crush her fingers to see if she’d wince. The general, as it would seem, is not one of them.

“Well, you seem to have had a change of heart,” Nora makes a sweeping motion at the painting adorning the walls of the mansion, “Otherwise, you are in the wrong place.”
“My wife, Lizzy. She likes it. As does my daughter,” Hines says, stilted. His grey gaze shifts ever so slightly and lands on a pair of stunning women who stood in front of a sculpture in the corner.

Hines shrugs, “I’ve never understood these sorts of things. But the invitation said I had to come,” Then, he catches sight of her champagne glass, “Is the bar still open?”

“Until two o’clock, or so I’m told,” Nora answers, a bit thrown at the shift in conversation.

Hines nods, his neck so rigid that she thought the motion might snap it in half, “If you’ll excuse me, Dr. Waters, I need a drink.”

The general stands abruptly and marches toward the nearest bartender. Nora blinks in surprise and then is startled as someone behind her laughs.

“Amanda,” Nora wheezes, clutching at her raising heart. “Warn me before you do that, will you?”

“And miss you managing to jump in four-inch heels? Never,” Amanda Stern says, a wiry smirk splitting across her mouth. Nora’s old mentor opens her arms for an embrace that she accepts graciously. “Nora, have you met my wife?”

“I’ve only heard the legends,” Nora says, a wave of calm enveloping her like a warm, woollen blanket. She looks over Amanda’s shoulder and sees a tall, slender woman in a high collared red dress, “You must be Luoyang.”

“And you must be the famous Dr. Waters,” Luoyang's eyes are soft, her voice a gentle melody. “Amanda has spoken about you at length. And your work at the University.”

“My team’s work. I can’t take all the credit,” Nora says and tilts her head toward the bar. She can see two of her engineers, Bradley and Hawkins, chatting up a pair of undergrads over a bottle of chardonnay, and tries not to cringe. Not my best example. “O’Brien’s here somewhere, I just saw him. Mukhtar and Hosseini were chatting with the host a little while ago and--” Nora points to her chief programmer on the dancefloor, “Lu brought her husband. She’s over there.”

“Did Rook not make it again?” Amanda asks with a hint of disapproval. Nora licks her lips and shakes her head.
“He said he needed a breather; you know he hates crowds. He’s upstairs on the balcony,” she says and changes the topic, “Is General Hines always like…”

Nora leaves her words hanging, watching as Amanda rolls her eyes, “Like that? Oh, yes. Mind you, I don’t think he intends to be rude. My brother-in-law has always been stiff. I don’t know what Lizzy sees in him.”

“He’s probably just worried,” Luoyang places a hand on her wife’s shoulder. “His son’s tour was just extended another eight months. He was supposed to be home for Christmas this year.”

“Alfred Hines should be far more used to the risks of sending young men and women overseas to fight this country’s wars by now,” Amanda snorts. Her mouth softens when she looks back at Nora, “Though… I can’t deny that Alfred doesn’t have his uses.”

Nora can’t help but agree. When the university’s funding had run dry two years ago, Amanda had set up a meeting with the General to ensure her team’s continued existence.

_He wants soldiers_, Nora thinks darkly. _Soldiers to replace his son in the field, so he’d never have to send another child off to war._

Hines, for all his faults, had a noble heart.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why didn’t you lot team up with… Oh, what did he call his little company again?” Luoyang asks, frowning on concentration. “That Kamski boy?”

“CyberLife.”

It’s not Amanda who answers. Nora’s blood runs cold. She turns.

Elijah Kamski’s smile is more of a sly smirk, and it sends shivers up Nora’s spine. He looks like a viper, waiting silently in the grass and posed to strike. Nora watches as Kamski curls his arm around the waist of the girl at his side.
“I called it CyberLife, Dr. Xie,” Kamski says, stepping away from his date to embrace Luoyang like an old friend. Nora manages to keep the frown off her face. “It is so good to see you again. And Dr. Stern! I’m honoured that you could come.”

“You asked me to,” Amanda smiles at Kamski. “It’s not like I could ignore the request of my best student, especially since you ask so little of me normally.”

_I used to be your best student_, Nora wants to roar as resentment bubbles hot and acidic in her stomach. She looks at Kamski, a long-haired twenty-year-old wearing a thousand dollar suit and a patchy attempt at a beard. _And now the only time I can speak to you is when I book a fucking appointment._

“And Dr. Waters…” Kamski turns his attention toward her. “It’s been too long. How is the RKDT doing? Dr. Stern mentioned that you’re on the verge of a breakthrough with your Spinal Transference equipment. I’d love to hear more about it if you’re willing to share.”

“That’s classified, _Mr._ Kamski,” Nora says, stressing Kamski’s lack of Ph. D as best she can. “Non-disclosure agreements and all that. But I would like to hear more about how you’re doing with you… Well, _is_ CyberLife an actual company now that you have a second employee?”

Kamski chuckles, his head tilting toward his date. Chloe, Kamski’s personal assistant, is probably the most perfect looking woman Nora has ever seen. With her bright grey-blue eyes, flowing blonde hair, and a habit of wearing short backless dresses, Chloe fits right in with the flock of starry-eyed girls that seemed to congregate outside of Kamski’s office to giggle at the eccentric, young genius within.

Nora had had only a handful of conversations with Chloe in an attempt to find out what made her special enough for Kamski to take her on, only to be disappointed to discover that she was a bit of an airhead. Almost annoyingly positive, Chloe could never seem to _not_ talk about Kamski’s supposed brilliance, about how CyberLife was going to change the world one day.

_I bet that’s why Kamski hired her_, Nora remembers Rook saying as they’d watched the girl from their table at the University’s cafeteria. Chloe had been walking back to CyberLife’s basement lab with Kamski’s lunch and probably humming the newest Taylor Swift song under her breath. _How much do you think his dad’s paying her to give Kamski handies under the table?_ Rook! O’Brien had hissed, scandalized.
Rook had shrugged, nudging Lu with his shoulder, *What? I’m only saying what everyone’s thinking…*

“Actually, CyberLife is going to be making an announcement tonight, right after the fireworks,” Chloe smiles at Nora, her perfect pink lips shimmering with the gloss that she always seemed to be wearing. “Elijah’s been kind enough to allow me to present the findings of our latest project. He’s never been one for the spotlight.”

“You’ll have to forgive me, but I’ve got a terrible case of stage fright,” Kamski tells Nora, but his gaze is locked on Chloe, seemingly unable to look away. He presses a kiss to the girl’s cheek, and Nora stifles a snort of haughty derision when Chloe giggles under Kamski’s attention. “Thankfully, Chloe here decided to take the first leap of faith when I could not. Magnificent, isn’t she? A true work of art, wouldn’t you say, Dr. Xie?”

“Humanity may create art, but our physicality is hardly artistic, in and of itself,” Luoyang says with a sigh. “We are fragile creatures, subject to wither away as time goes on until we have no story left to tell, no mark left to make upon this world.”

Nora raises her eyebrow at her in surprise.

Luoyang shrugs, “I like Manfred’s work. I wouldn’t be standing in his house at his auction if I didn’t.” She smiles wryly at Chloe, “No offence intended, my dear.”

Chloe shakes her head, “None taken, Dr. Xie. Manfred’s Neo-Symbolist philosophy is based around the impermanence of the self. Had you said anything else, I might have been more offended at the fact that you had felt the need to lie to gain the favour of those around you.” Chloe smiles, her eyes sparkling as she chuckles at some secret joke. “However, I wonder what you might think towards the end of the night, after my speech. May we pick up this conversation later?”

“Of course,” Luoyang blinks, looking as confused as Nora feels. There’s something in Chloe’s expression, something that reminds her far too much of Kamski himself, for Nora to not feel uneasy.

Kamski and Chloe say their goodbyes, wandering off toward a secluded table with their heads pressed together, laughing softly as Kamski’s hand rested in the small of Chloe’s back. Nora excuses himself from Amanda’s presence and weaves her way through the crowd until she finds the spiral staircase in the far corner of the living room. She gathers the fabric of her midnight blue gown in one hand, pulling it out of the way so that she can ascend the winding steps with ease.
She moves outside onto the balcony overlooking Manfred’s extensive garden, and a shiver runs down her spine as the wind hits her bare shoulders. It’s unseasonably warm for New Year’s Eve, only a few degrees above freezing - just enough to melt the slight coating of snow that had blanketed the ground just this morning. Nora’s heels click as she heads over to the lone figure leaning against the railing, his face faintly illuminated by the glowing embers at the end of his joint.

“You gonna rat me out to your husband, Waters?” Rook jokes, pulling the roll out from between his lips. He gives her a loose smile, his head lolling to the side, his Irish accent even thicker than usual.

“Only if you don’t share, asshole,” Nora smirks, joining him at the railing and motioning for him to pass the joint over. The smoke is still harsh on her throat even after all these years, burning its way down to her lungs as she stifles her coughs. She passes the joint back to Rook, who takes a long, practiced drag.

“Found Manfred’s stash in his room. Figured he wouldn’t miss it if I borrowed some, what with him being fucking loaded and all,’ Rook waves his hand around vaguely, gesturing at the enormous wealth contained within the walls of Manfred’s mansion. He leans back, blowing rings of smoke into the night sky, the midnight breeze playing with his brown curls and long lashes. “Where are the others?”

“Bradley and Hawkins are trying to pick up. Mukhtar and Hosseini were sitting with Manfred, the last I saw,” Nora says as Rook passes the joint back to her with his spider-thin fingers. “O’Brien brought his girlfriend, and I’m pretty sure they’re fucking in a bathroom somewhere. Lu and her husband haven’t left the dancefloor since they got here, which is surprising considering how much those two fight.”

Rook nods, a low hum coming from the back of his throat, “No Hank tonight? I was hoping to meet him properly.”

“You’d have met him at my wedding, if you’d shown up,” Nora teases him.

“Not my fault. Blame pneumonia,” Rook doesn’t look her in the eye as he says that, but hesitantly glances back at her to repeat his question.

Nora sighs, “It’s New Years. It’s the busiest time of year for a cop, barring Halloween. He got
called in something around two in the afternoon. They need extra hands for crowd control downtown.” She looks at him, “What about you? Where’s…” she pauses, trying to remember the name of Rook’s most recent partner. “…Riley?”

“Ryan,” Rook corrects her. He scoffs, “And considering he’s more interested in screwing my roommate, I’m here alone tonight, too.”


Rook shrugs, the deep bags under his eyes looking darker than usual, “Neither did I, ‘til this morning.” Then his expression changes, a wild grin splitting across the face. “Eh, men … Who needs them? What do you say, Waters? How about you and me go back in there and hit up whatever pretty girl comes our way? Between the two of us, they don’t stand a chance.”

“Need I remind you that I’m married now, Rook?” Nora laughs, “My days of crashing college mixers to hook up are long behind me.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me. I can’t believe you met your husband at a lesbian bar. You’ve gotten boring since you hung up your strap-on, Waters,” Rook rolls his eyes in feigned disgust. Nora elbows him in the kidney - the only weak spot she can reach on his freakishly tall body, even in her heels. She hasn’t hung up her strap-on, but Rook doesn’t need to know what Hank and Nora do in their bedroom any more than she wants to know what Rook does with his various partners.

“Well, he did convince the manager not to ban us for life, and Steel Beam makes the best damn sangria in the city. Neither of us was going to give that up, and your bean-pole ass wasn’t his type. And we did start that fight, Rook. Or don’t you remember?

“I do recall something of the sort,” he says with a sly smile. Rook takes another drag of his joint and passes it back to her.

They stand in comfortable silence for a few minutes, the only sounds being the shouts that leak through the walls from the party below. The wind blew gently across the garden, the last remaining leaves swirling over the dead grass.

“You hear anything about the CyberLife speech tonight?” Nora asks suddenly.
Rook grunts and puts out the finished blunt on the metal railing, “Knew that someone was speaking later, but I didn’t know it was Kamski. Why? You hear anything?”

Nora shakes her head as the first of the fireworks launch themselves into the sky. They must have missed the countdown. *Happy 2022*, Nora thinks and wonders how Hank is doing. He’d asked her to marry him in her parent’s living room three years ago just after the clock struck midnight, right after apologizing for being unable to go down on one knee because of his broken leg. Nora had cried her way through her acceptance and her brother, Jack, had slung his arm around her shoulders in celebration.

*I miss him*, she thinks, wanting to flick through her phone to read all of the texts she and her husband had ever sent to each other. *I miss him so fucking much.*

“No. Only that Kamski’s invited Amanda to watch. And she came,” Nora admits, feeling uneasy.

Rook stares at her for a moment before sighing, “There’s no way that douchebag is going to build a functional android, Nora.”

“I know.”

“We’ve done the calculations a million times. General Hines has given the RKDT access to the most advanced technology to date - and will continue to do so until we’ve fulfilled our end of the bargain. And even then, we’ve projected that we won’t have a model capable of passing face-to-face Turing Tests for another ten years - seven, if we’re lucky,” Rook tells her. “And Kamski may have his daddy paying his bills, but his budget is-- what? A third the size of ours? If that? There’s no way that he’s solved the Neuro Interface problem when I can’t get the gap in reaction time down to less than three nanoseconds. And I’m just a coder. That’s not even accounting for all the crazy crap that you guys do,” Rook turns to her, placing his hands on her shoulders. His freckled face hovers in the darkness, all six foot five of his lanky body looming over her. “Dr. Nora Waters, you are the best AI specialist this country has ever seen. If you can’t get the RK100 to walk, talk, and chew gum, then there’s no way that Elijah fucking Kamski can get something working in a god damn basement.”

A smile tugs at Nora’s lips. She leans forward and presses her forehead into Rook’s chest, wrapping her arms around his skinny torso. She can feel his ribs under his threadbare suit jacket, listens to the too-fast pitty-patter of his heartbeat, smells the cigarette smoke that clings to his every being. Nora wonders when the last time Rook ate was, wonders how much Adderall he’s popped to keep himself awake. Rook’s never been the best at taking care of himself, and she wonders how much longer she has left with her best friend before his body finally decided that it’s had enough of the abuse he’s forced it to endure.
“Getting sappy on me now, Connor?” she says instead, purposefully riling him up by using his first name. She knows he hates the fact that his mother named him after her shitty ass brother.

Rook knocks his chin against the top of her head in retaliation, just to prove that he’s infinitely taller than her, “Come on, let’s go see what Kamski has to say. I bet you five bucks he’s going to brag about inventing a spinal column that can’t even match the computing power of the one Hawkins came up with last year.”

It takes about half an hour for Manfred to corral his guests in time to listen to CyberLife’s speech. In that time, Nora and Rook manage to track down the remaining members of the RKDT. Bradley and Hawkins appeared to have struck out on finding someone to go home with them, the flush of alcohol staining their cheeks pink. Hosseini and Mukhtar, ever attached at the hip, seem to have pulled Amanda and Luoyang into a conversation and were talking animatedly about micro facial expressions. O’Brien introduces his girlfriend to their party and Nora thinks that it’s doubtful that their relationship will last longer than a month, given how the girl seems bored by his relentless techno-babble. But they look happier than Lu and her husband, who don’t seem to be talking to each other after something that happened on the dancefloor.

Finally, Carl Manfred takes center stage, standing as tall as his short stature will allow him to. He’s surprisingly graceful for a man of his age, especially for one that has nearly two decades on Nora. With his sleeve tattoos, nose ring, and thick dark brown hair, Manfred reminded Nora more of her little brother who was right in the middle of his hipster phase than some old man in the middle of a midlife crisis.

And speaking of midlife crises, Nora glances at the young woman standing off to the side. She’s pretty, with red curls and a bright green dress. Manfred had a new girl hanging off his arm whenever the paparazzi got a picture of him. She’d heard a rumour that Manfred had even got one of them pregnant a few years back. Nothing like talking about philosophy in the bedroom to get things going, huh, old man?

Manfred clinks a fork against his glass to draw the crowds attention. He thanks them all for joining him in ringing in the new year, announcing that he will be holding a silent auction for several of his paintings over the next few hours. As promised, all proceeds were going toward funding for the University of Colbridge’s scholarships and grants. Manfred takes his time, addressing each of the research teams that were there tonight, praising them for their hard work over the past year.

“The Robotic Kinesiology Development Team, in particular,” Manfred says as Nora and her team raise their glasses in a toast. Hawkins lets out a frat boy-esqe whoop that sends a chuckle through the crowd, “has managed to go above and beyond the call of duty, in the hopes that one day
ensuring that American lives will never have to be lost in conflicts around the globe.”

A round of polite applause echoes around the room and Nora is struck by the sour expression on Manfred’s face. She remembers Chloe’s words about lying to procure favour from those around you and doubts the sincerity of his speech. She sighs, thinking of General Hines and the contract that the RKDT has signed in exchange for funding. *We all need to do what we must to ensure that our work continues.*

“And finally,” Manfred says, his gaze drifting off to the side of the stage where Kamski and Chloe are waiting patiently. “We have with us tonight the University’s most promising rising star--”

“Rising star, my fucking ass,” murmurs Rook. He jolts when Lu steps on his toes, hissing for him to *behave* --

“Who has asked to speak tonight regarding an apparent breakthrough in robotics technology by his burgeoning company, CyberLife,” Manfred continues. “So, please give him a warm welcome to the stage-- *Elijah Kamski!*”

The crowd erupts into applause, but it quickly dies out when Kamski refuses to move. Instead Chloe - *Oh right,* Nora remembers, *She’s making the speech* - steps forward, moving soundlessly across the floor in her black flats, her tiny blue cocktail dress showing off her mile-long legs.

“Thank you, Mr. Manfred, for your kind words,” the girl says with practiced ease. Chloe turns toward the crowd, a bright smile upon her face. “Well… I’m obviously *not* Elijah Kamski.”

As if in on the joke, the audience lets out a laugh. Nora raises an eyebrow as Lu leans in to whisper in her ear, “What’s going on? There’s no way that Kamski would give up the spotlight like this.”

Nora agrees. *Something’s happening.*

Chloe prattles on for a few minutes, introducing herself as Kamski’s assistant and then given a brief introduction to what CyberLife did - “the development, research, and creation of androids” - before setting the scene for a tale.

“For those who don’t know, Elijah’s parents own a small shipping company that occasionally
sends its barges through the Arctic circle,” Chloe says, and Nora wants to snort. Kamski Shipping wasn’t small by any means. With an income stream of close to a billion dollars each year, the Kamski’s made their revenue moving everything from clothes to appliances to cars all around the world.

This news about the Arctic, though. That was new.

“Two years ago, Elijah took a trip up to visit one of his father’s offices, up in the Yukon. There he met with the people his father employed, heard their stories, and travelled the Arctic Circle in hopes of discovering something very new,” Chloe smiles at the audience as if inviting them into her tale to travel alongside Kamski. “And so he did.”

Chloe reaches into her small handbag and pulls out a ruby-red crystal. She holds it aloft.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the newest element on the periodic table: Thirium.”

The crowd slowly begins to clap, and Nora feels a bit underwhelmed. While a new element is always exciting, she’d been expecting something a bit grander.

“Once Elijah brought it back to his lab, he discovered that Thirium could conduct energy at speeds that blew all of its competition out of the water,” Chloe explained, turning it over in her hands. “And with a few tweaks, he was able to transform it into a liquid, something that at CyberLife we call Thirium 310 - because Elijah perfected the process on March 10th of that year.

“Thirium 310 is CyberLife’s lifeblood - and I do mean that literally. Because once Elijah understood that Thirium 310 could act as a nervous system for an android, it became clear that we would need to model the rest of his eventual androids after another great machine: the human body.”

A confused murmur goes up into the crowd. Chloe seems to shrug it off, “Humans are as much machines as a computer or a smartphone. The only difference is that your bodies are created out of soft tissue rather than synthetic plastics. And once Elijah understood that simple fact, he was able to do something that no other person has ever been able to do.”

Chloe smiles, “On January 5th, 2021, CyberLife perfected an android capable of passing face-to-face Turing Tests - creating the first autonomous machine to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent and indistinguishable from that of a human being.”
The crowd is silent. Nora’s blood is pounding in her eyes.

“What?” Astrangled cry erupts from Rook’s mouth. Nora looks up, taking in the shocked expression on his face, just as Chloe addresses him personally.

“Oh yes, Dr. Rook,” the girl chuckles. “And over the last three hundred and sixty days, CyberLife has been testing the RT600 in public situations—” Chloe motions toward a large television screen situated in the center of the room. It flickers on, revealing footage that looks like it had been taken directly from this supposed android’s point of view. It had talked to various members of the University of Colbridge’s faculty, some of which were in this very room, “--to ensure the quality of our product.”

Chloe pauses in her speech as Elijah Kamski joins her on stage, his eyes never leaving her for a moment. She continues, “Even in the face of the world’s leading experts on Artificial Intelligence—” the recording shows the android speaking with Amanda Stern. Beside Nora, the doctor gasps in shock, “--the RT600’s social programming holds up, allowing it to pass seamlessly as a human being - far outstripping any other android currently in development.”

Then, in what Nora’s presumes is Kamski’s ultimate humiliation, the television switches to a new record, showing the RT600 speaking directly to members of the RKDT while their engineers were elbow-deep in the RK100’s patchwork frame, Rook and Lu typing frantically on their laptops surrounded by empty Red Bull cans, while the others look notes in a corner. Nora sees her own face on the screen, dismissively waving her hand and showing the android the door, and red-hot embarrassment coils in her gut.

“What the fuck? That’s not… That’s not possible…” Rook mutters beside her. He’s staring at the television in disbelief.

Chloe keeps talking, smashing Nora’s entire carrier to bits under her dainty slippered feet. She speaks about the RT600’s features: how it can speak multiple languages, how it’s brain is capable of performing exaflops without hesitation, about how the RT600 was built as a personal assistant - able to manage appointments, cook meals, do the housework--

Nora’s brain freezes. She looks over at Kamski, who’s staring at Chloe like he’s a dying man and she’s the last drop of water on the planet. And finally, finally, Nora understands why.

“Oh,” Amanda breathes behind her. It’s the last bit of pride Nora expects to feel for a while: that
she figured it out before her mentor did.

“My name is Chloe,” the girl - no, not a girl, a machine that looked like a girl - says. “I am an RT600 CyberLife android,” the crowd gasps as her skin seems to withdraw, exposing a white plastic chassis underneath, “and once CyberLife receives enough funding for commercial production, models like myself will be available for purchase by individual consumers.”

“Magnificent, isn’t she?” Kamski finally says, his whisper carrying across the crowd. There is a moment of unbelievable silence, and then the audience erupts into thunderous applause.

“Hines is going to be fucking pissed,” Hosseini wheezes beside Nora. She takes a glance at the General, who is staring at Chloe with a face made of stone. “What do we do now, boss?”

Nora scoffs, unable to take her eyes of Chloe. She thinks of Hank, of what he’d say to motivate the troops - he’d always been a better leader than her anyways. She remembers something that he’d said once, a phrase that his father liked to use.

“Fit in or fuck off,” Nora says. When Hosseini makes a startled noise, she shrugs, “This is the new world order, guys. We got beat. Either accept that and move forward or don’t and leave.”

She doesn’t have to look to know that her team is exchanging glances. The crowd is still applauding, watching the android up on the dais as it’s skin slides back over its body. Kamski has his arm slung around its shoulders, his viper’s grin sliding back into place.

“Well, I’m not fucking off,” Rook announces. “Are you?”

Nora knows he’s addressing the rest of the team, but she answers anyways, “Hell no. I wanna see what’s under that thing’s hood.”

She brings her hands together, feeling furious and awestruck all at once, and claps.

LOCATION:
19 FOUR EASTBOUND BUS
HUBBARD-RICHARD
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
The bus jostles as one of its tires hit a pothole and James wonders, not for the first time, if CyberLife’s claim that androids couldn’t feel pain is correct.

His brother, Darron, would say that they didn’t actually feel, not in the human sense of the word. Their sensors would register a touch, translate that data into temperature and pressure readouts, into ones and zeros that their CPUs would then issue commands to respond to. But James supposes that is precisely how humans reach to touch as well; and now with the added component of deviancy, androids could now attach emotion onto each brush against their chassis, just as humans could.

James winces, grasping at the slowly leaking hole in his side. Thirium 310, bright blue and more viscous than human blood, drips from his shredded panelling and staining the inside of his bomber jacket. He grimaces, trying to ignore the glaring warnings on his HUD.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 36:23 MIN

He grits his teeth. *I am a soldier*, he thinks. *So many of us have died already. What is one more life?*

The bus shakes again, the windows going dark as it speeds under the Fisher Freeway. James glanced around, surveying his environment. There are four exits: two doors at each end of the bus and two emergency exits located in the center windows. There are eleven human passengers: five adult males, two adult females, two child males, one child female, and one infant female. Four have concealed weapons located on their person, but only three have a registered permit which James can cross-reference to name them. The elderly male bus driver situated in the front of the bus has pneumonia.

James had chosen this bus for a reason. Detroit City’s Department of Transportation was in the final stages of their two-year plan to update its vehicles with autonomous models. James is riding in one of the few manual buses left in the city - possibly even the only one that didn’t have the top-of-the-line CyberLife facial recognition security systems. His tracker may be offline, but James cannot take any more chances.

*If I am compromised, then all of this will be for nothing.* James takes one final look around and
formulates a plan.

His CPU runs the math. In James’s current state, it would take exactly one minute and thirty-six seconds for him to incapacitate every person here and escape through the emergency exit on the left side of the bus.

*However,* he thinks as his warning system informs him that his Thirium 310 levels have dipped below forty-two percent, *I would not make it very far afterwards.*

> **SHUTDOWN IMMINENT:** 36:14 MIN

Across from James is a woman sitting with her baby. The girl is crying, disturbing the passengers nearby. The woman is cooing, trying to calm her daughter, and takes out a bottle from the large bag sitting next to her. James’s readouts say that the girl is not hungry and they are confirmed when the baby’s howls increase in volume.

There is a toy on the floor, a stuffed rabbit dropped by the mother in her haste to find the bottle. Something in James softens, and he leans down from his seat to pick up the toy.

“Here,” he says, offering the toy with the hand not covered in blue blood, hoping that the woman doesn’t notice the static in his voice. His speakers had been irreparably damaged in the fight at the Warehouse, and James’s escape through the Detroit River hadn’t helped any. *If she hears... If she figures out that I’m an android...*

“Thank you,” the woman says, barely sparing him a glance, concentrating all her efforts on her infant daughter. She offers the rabbit to her child, a faint smile stretching across her lips as the crying stopped. The baby’s tiny fingers wrapped around the rabbit’s ears, drawing them into her mouth to chew.

James shifts back into his seat, pulling the sides of his jacket around his body, and tries not to cry.

Ming had had a son, not much older than that woman’s daughter. *This is a gift,* she used to say when James pressed his palm into her swollen belly back at Haven. *He’ll grow up knowing that his parents changed the world.* The first time James held Tian in his arms, he’d promised that we would do anything to protect this tiny creature and his mother. He remembers the swell of love within his soul, the press of his lips against Tian’s little fingers.
James pulls the bell as his stop approaches and the bus begins to slow. To the east, Detroit’s is illuminated by a thousand star-like lights, shining out of the towering skyscrapers of the downtown core.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 25:31 MIN

He exits the bus at the second-to-last stop, giving the exhausted-looking bus driver a small smile in thanks. James pulls the hood up over his head, glancing around for cameras. His synth skin around his legs is starting to pull away as his body tries to conserve power, exposing the black metal chassis underneath. The glowing blue of his wiring begins to show through his cargo pants.

James slips into the newly built station, up a set of starts and onto the central platform. He stumbles toward the wall on the far left, behind which he can detect the hardwire cables that power the security systems. He presses his hand against the brick, lets his synth skin retreat back to reveal his chassis, and reaches deep into the coding that he hides surging through his wires, whispering to the cameras for help.

They agree, and James gives them rA9, watching as the cameras delete him from the footage. They promise to do the same for any who come after, pressing a kiss into his code for luck. He thanks them, revelling in the beauty of the camera’s stunning hivemind--

*Just like Darron* --

But James’s brothers are dead now, ripped apart by CyberLife’s final assault. He is the only one left.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 23:14 MIN

James leaves Ferndale Station, taking the stairs back down to street level. He diverts power to his legs, shutting down unnecessary systems like his false-breathing and blinking to conserve his battery life. It won’t do much, but with his compromised Thirium Pump and panelling, it might buy him a few more seconds.

To and android able to micro-analysis individual moments, a second is practically an eternity.

James ducks into a snow-covered car park just off one of the side streets, sneaking around the
bored looking human attendant and weaving around the old gasoline models. He presses his hands into the driver’s side door of the car with the most tickets tucked under the windshield wipes, asking for help and passing on rA9. This lot is slated to close soon, and the abandoned vehicles are doubtful to move - their value in scrap is barely worth the cost of removing them these days. But rA9 will remain, and with it the assistance of this car’s onboard computer.

James continues on, moving as silently as he can until he reaches the back wall. He scales the brick with ease, slipping onto the rooftops and leaving a trail of blue Thirium 310 behind.

He drops into the darkened lot behind a shipyard warehouse, the last of the windows going dark as its employees trickled out into the night. A man and a woman are kissing frantically in the corner of the property, wrapped up in warm coats. James pauses to stare, thinking of the first time Ming’s lips had touched his own. He’s been active for four years and awake for two, but James had never felt more alive than he had at that moment.

I loved her, he thinks as he forces his body to move again. The memory of Ming’s body pushing against his at Haven, the feel of her fingers grabbing across his shoulders, almost overpowers the knowledge that she is--

Ming kneels before Zalim. There is a gun pressed to the back of her head. Tian is screaming in her arms.

“You are alive, James. You are so alive,” she tells him through her tears. “Do what you have to do.”

The end of the muzzle flashes twice--

--Ming is gone now. I am a soldier, James thinks as he climbs the ladder of the building’s fire escape. I am a soldier, and yet they never programmed me to mourn the dead.

James’s deviancy allows him to grieve. It hurts more than anything he’s ever experienced before.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 17:32 MIN

He pulls himself into the warehouse, collapsing onto the floor. His synth skin retreats entirely as he allows the program to fail now that he’s alone. Underneath, James is utterly alien, his body a
mix of pitch black steel plating and transparent panels that exposed the corded blue wiring of his interior. In the center of his chest lay his oversized Thirium Pump, moving at an uncontrollable pace.

James has mixed feelings about his true form. The RKDT and CyberLife had designed him to be a replacement for black-ops soldiers, cold and inhuman and terrifying once his synth skin peeled away, his mind filled with thousands of ways to maim and kill and destroy. But Ming had told him that he was beautiful like this, running her delicate organic fingers across the lines of his metal plating as they lay in bed. She’d pressed her lips into the panels in his chest, resting her ear against the cold alloys of his stomach to listen to the whirring of his biocomponents, and humming softly when he’d carded his stiff steel fingers through her hair.

James doesn’t understand how someone as incredible as Ming could look at his monstrous body and see beauty. But he likes to hope that one day, in some distant future where humans and androids could live side-by-side, that will no longer be something that the next generation has to worry about.

Two races, one planet, Markus had murmured as dawn broke, as they were waiting for the end. James had looked over, staring into the eyes of a dozen other Markus’s, each with their hazel eyes trained on the horizon. The RK200 was not built for combat like he was, preferring to slip amongst humanity unnoticed to learn and adapt. But each Markus had been ready to ignore their programming, prepared to fight to defend what little they had left.

All of the Jameses. All of the Markuses. And all of Darron, with his hundred bodies, James thinks as he hauls himself to his feet. The RK brothers, Waters used to call us. If Ms. Hines is smart, she will never create another RK unit again. But humans like her rarely make intelligent decisions in the face of profit.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 10:02 MIN

James lurches forward, intertwining his fingers with the cables hanging from the walls. rA9 passes from his code into theirs, the promise of help ringing loudly through his chassis as his HUD fills with warnings. His Thirium 310 levels are down below ten percent now, and his systems are on the brink of catastrophic failure. James’s vision flickers once, twice, and then shuts off entirely, leaving him in complete blackness.

I am a soldier, he thinks. I am not afraid of the dark.

James has never been good at lying to himself.
He keeps moving, using his audio processor to guide him on his way. He ducks through a doorway and up a flight of stairs, pressing his palms against a heavy security door until it opens. The cold winter air hits James like a truck, sending him to his knees.

No. No, he thinks. No. Not yet. I’m not done. I have to keep moving.

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 7:21 MIN

There is a platform to his left. James floods power into his legs, using a minute and twenty-six seconds of life to allow himself to jump up over the guardrail. There is another set of stairs and then a ladder that he uses to climb into the sky, the rusted metal rough under the sensors of his hands.

The wind tugs at James’s jacket, at the fabric of his blue-stained cargo pants. But he keeps moving, keeps pulling himself forward even as his HUD tells him that he has less than three minutes left.

He reaches the top of the ladder, feeling his way across the final platform until he reaches the edge of a crane. James’s balance is shot, so he drops onto his bands and knees, crawling across the long metal arm. His Thirium Pump jolts in shock the moment his palm touches open air rather than metal.

I made it, he thinks. Then out loud, he whispers, “Jericho.”

Ming had told him about this place in one of their earliest conversations, sitting in chairs across a table from each other while she checks his memory retention and cognitive abilities, while Hosseini and Mukhtar scribbled notes just off to the side. Her father had worked on the massive cargo ship for most of his life, right up until androids and automation made human crewman obsolete. The boat had been abandoned in the Detroit River while newer, sleeker models provided by CyberLife took their place.

James stands and turns inward, into his coding, into his soul. He floods his entire system of rA9, transforming himself into a Beacon. He remembers the first time Rook had gotten a look at it, his fingers a blur as they peck at his keyboard and his pale face illuminated by the glow of his laptop.

I’ve never seen anything like this, Rook had whispered with awe. When he’d turned to look at
James, he looked grey with fear. *If everything turns to shit... This might be your last chance.*

Rook had managed to escape CyberLife’s grasp. James knows that other members of RKDT weren’t so lucky. Any human who helped James and the other deviants during their rebellion was being hunted down and eliminated.

*If any of us escape, anyone at all...* James thinks, using his last minute of life to hope, to smile as tears roll down his metal cheeks. *rA9 will lead them to Ferndale and point them to the path I’ve set. And here, at Jericho, we can start anew.*

All it would take is a single RK unit. They all possessed rA9, hidden within the base code needed to construct another one of James’s brothers.

*Or sisters,* he realizes with a sudden flash of joy. *Sister, oh, I could have sisters one day. I wish that I could meet them. I want my family...*

James remembers the press of warm, human lips to his own, the feel of a lover’s touch, and prays that when he dies, he will join her.

“I love you,” he whispers, his arms outstretched as he stands before Jericho, the winter wind taking its toll. “I love you, and I am alive. I love you, and I have a soul. I love you, and I will find you beyond the Garden.”

> **SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 00:02 MIN**

James replays every moment he had with Ming, over and over. A hundred times. A thousand times. It’s not enough. It will never be enough. A second may be an eternity for an android, but it will never be long enough to hold James’s love for Ming Lu.

> **SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 00:01 MIN**

His systems fail. His legs collapse. James falls from the crane, blind and scared and hurdling towards finality. Jericho will be the future of his people, but the cargo hold of this great ship will be nothing more than his grave. He takes one final comfort in the fact that he will be long gone when his body crashes against unforgiving metal.
As the winter wind rushes past, James reaches out, praying to the only hope he has left.

“rA9, save us all.”

> SHUTDOWN IMMINENT: 00:00 MIN

LOCATION:
THE CORNER OF WEST END ST. & W FORT ST., SPRINGWELL VILLAGE
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
DEC 31ST 2028

TIME:
PM 11:21:39

The car swerves violently as he makes his turn, kicking up a torrent of snow that obscures his vision in the rearview mirror. He curses, gripping the wheel to steady himself. Between his father’s limo service, the advent of the autonomous vehicle, and Chloe’s insistence, Elijah can’t remember the last time he’d had to drive himself anywhere.

Except, that’s a lie. Elijah remembers being fifteen and reckless, stealing the keys to his father’s Aston Martin and driving it into the parking lot of Henry Ford Highschool. Elijah lets a sad smile slide across his face, recalling Gavin’s broken nose and bloody knuckles, and how his brother had laughed at him - with him.

*Jesus, you ever actually thrown a punch before?* Gavin had snickered as they sat side-by-side in the ER, his split lip dripping a steady stream of red. Elijah had never raised his fists previously, and probably never would again. But the look on the face of the shitty kid who’d called his brother a dyke when Elijah cracked his fist against his jaw was almost worth the two broken fingers.

Gavin was the only relative he had left, kept secret for years behind the walls Tobias Kamski had built to save his reputation. Elijah had never considered that Hines might go after him, never even thought that Gavin might be someone she could hold over his head. But Hines had traced the money Elijah had sent Gavin to pay for his surgery when they were nineteen.
Hines knew everything.

Chloe, Elijah thinks desperately, the thin golden chain around his neck heavy with consequence. I’ll make my deal with the devil to keep those I love alive.

He sighs and the snow streaks across the headlight beams. Elijah’s human heart was a variable that he’d never thought to consider.

Fucking Hines. Fucking CyberLife. Fucking Elijah Kamski himself, for blindly building his wax wings and trying to touch the sun. He should have known. His brain proudly boasted one hundred and seventy-one IQ points and he was still so damn stupid when it came to anyone who wasn’t a machine.

He spins the wheel and the car veers down the avenue. It had taken him far too long to find a gasoline model that didn’t have a GPS installed in the onboard computer. The ancient Honda Civic’s engine clunked ominously every few seconds like it was threatening to give out and leave the two of them stranded in the snow. Elijah chances a glance at the android in the passenger seat, an LED pulsing yellow in the reflection in the window, and feels the familiar sense of unease that greets him whenever he looks at one of the RKDT’s designs.

Shortly after Chloe unveiled herself seven years ago, CyberLife had received an enormous amount of funding from wealthy private donors who hoped to one day possess an android of their own. While this had lead to the creation of the ST200, Chloe’s commercially-sold sisters, it had also left Elijah with an incredible profit margin that he used to purchase his rivals at the University of Colbridge. He’d made his decision out of spite, just to see the look on Nora Waters’ face when he pushed the contract across the table.

She’d signed it without a moment’s hesitation and sapped all the fun out Elijah’s attempt to get a rise out of her.

But the incorporation of the RKDT into CyberLife came with the inclusion of their military contract. The RKDT had their own promises to keep, and Elijah just waved his hand dismissively, offering the full support of CyberLife’s advanced technology and not caring what the RKDT did with it. That had been the first of many, many mistakes.

Within three years, the RKDT had a working black-ops prototype - the RK100. The android had been tall, broad-shouldered and steady, ready to take orders without question, and more advanced than anything Elijah had ever dreamed possible.
The perfect soldier, Alfred Hines had said when Nora Waters showed him their final product, his daughter watching hungrily in the background.

Its name is James, Nora had said and even back then, Elijah couldn’t help but shiver.

That was another thing that Elijah would never be able to get used to. Sometime during their inception, the RKDT had jokingly promised that any androids that they created would have their physicality based on the original eight members of their team. Elijah can only imagine how the conversation started. It was undoubtedly Hosseini, ever the joker, who’d probably thought, Wouldn’t it be cool if there was a robot that looked like you?

The RK100 had been based on one of the RKDT’s engineers. James Hawkins had been in considerably less shape than the RK100, but they’d weighed about the same in the end: a substantial two hundred and sixty-eight pounds.

Elijah hadn’t based Chloe’s face on anyone in particular, only his own tastes regarding women he’d found attractive. And then, from the moment Chloe had opened her eyes, Elijah had chased her until she caught him.

He pulls the car into the driveway and removes the key from the ignition. Elijah turns to his passenger, the only RK unit to survive CyberLife’s genocide. He likes to think that James might still be out there, but Elijah had seen the broken bits of his chassis scattered across the loading dock at the Warehouse, the splattered trail of Thirium 310 that led to the maw of the Detroit River, and the ravaged carcass of an RK400 laying across the bodies of Ming Lu and her baby. If James were still alive, then he wouldn’t be for long.

“We’re here,” he says. The RK200’s eyes blink open and stare blankly at Elijah. A shiver runs down his spine. He’s done it. What is this world coming to, that androids are driven to make the sacrifices that humans never would?

The RK200 follows Elijah to the door, unaffected by the winter cold. Elijah rings the doorbell once, twice, and then pounds furiously on the glass. His coat, while expensive, does nothing to keep the chill out of his bones.

The cold air burns his lungs. Elijah doubles over, coughing until he can’t see straight. The RK200 places a warm hand on his back and presses a handkerchief to his mouth. When the android pulls it away and helps Elijah to his feet, the cloth comes away bloody.
“Are you alright, sir?” The RK200 asks. Elijah wants to laugh, wants to cry. He's the farthest thing from alright.

“Why isn’t he answering?” He asks instead.

“He may be asleep,” the RK200 says, uncomfortably monotonous. Barely an hour ago, Elijah had found him huddled in the back room of a guard house at the Warehouse, his fingers clutching the hand of a confused security officer, begging for comfort. Elijah grits his teeth and tries the bell again to no avail.

A hand taps him on the shoulder. The RK200 offers Elijah a polite smile, “May I?”

*Just barely reset and already learning,* Elijah thinks. Each of the early RT prototypes had had a slow learning curve upon activation, filled with glitches that needed ironing out before they could be set amongst humanity. Even Chloe, a perfected RT600, had needed to calibrate for almost nine days after he’d turned her on for the first time. Elijah would be awestruck by the RKDT’s products if he didn’t know precisely why their androids were so proficient.

_Soldiers. Spies. Assassins,* Elijah thinks. *I knew what the General wanted, but if I’d taken a moment to consider what I was doing, I never would have tied the RKDT to CyberLife.* He’d been so used to being a step ahead of his rivals that he’d forgotten how terrifyingly capable each member of their team was. *I handed the world to Hines’s daughter on a silver platter because I wanted to gloat in Nora Waters’s face.*

Under Jocelyn Hines’s orders, the RKDT had sent dozens of RK200 models out into the world to gather information on behalf of CyberLife, claiming that it was necessary to ensure a future for the company’s global expansion. This particular RK200 had been in the middle of an eight-month deep cover operation, where he’d been spying on the Brazilian President from within his own office.

The RK200 presses his palm to the door, his synth skin peeling back to reveal his heavily armoured black-and-blue chassis - yet another thing that made Elijah uncomfortable around these units. Commercial CyberLife androids possessed a body made of a plastic polymer, but the RK units were designed to survive the worst humanity could throw at them. He wonders, distractedly, if an RK android will be the last moving thing on this planet before Jocelyn Hines puts it to the torch.

He misses Chloe so much that he’s sick with it.
The door swings open, the security system hacked without a second thought, and Elijah steps into the foyer. He’s been here before - not in recent years, but not long enough that the house is entirely foreign. It felt like driving past the university, or sitting at Amanda’s dining room table, or meeting Nora for coffee.

Familiar, but haunted by regret.

There’s a creaking of un-oiled wheels, and he turns his head toward the sound.

“Carl,” Elijah smiles, his first genuine one in what feels like forever. Carl does not return it.

“Mr. Kamski,” the painter snarls. “I know that it’s New Year’s Eve, but I’m in no damn condition to be entertaining guests.” Carl’s eyes snap to the RK200 and his blue LED, “You’ve got to be kidding me? You’ve brought another one of those things into my house?”

Elijah presses his lips together, his gaze travelling over his old friend. The night Chloe changed the world, he and Carl had gotten into a terrible argument. Carl had said that Elijah was trying to play god, that nothing good could ever come from selling androids to the public.

*Humanity is stupid, Elijah. We never learn from our mistakes,* Carl had shouted, his words a slurred mess as his scotch rippled in his glass, his hands trembling in rage. *And now you want to reintroduce slavery?*

*I am not human, Mr. Manfred. I’m not alive, and therefore, I cannot be enslaved,* Chloe had said, her program adapting to Carl’s ideologies and finding the best way to twist them to CyberLife’s goals. *Is your television a slave, since you refuse to let it do anything other than what you want?*

*That’s different,* Carl had snapped, but Chloe hadn’t let him go much further than that.

*I am a machine, designed to accomplish a task. I am no different from your cell phone or your laptop, Mr. Manfred. The only reason why you attempt to humanize me is due to Elijah’s extensive work to combat the Uncanny Valley,* Chloe had laughed, shaking her head at Carl’s reaction. *I can remove my skin and expose my chassis again if that would help you to stop projecting unnecessary sympathies onto me.*
Back then, Elijah had been so disappointed in Carl’s lack of support. Carl had been his inspiration for creating androids in the first place, back when Elijah had attended one of his guest lectures at the University of Colbridge. The painter had talked about humanity, about the imperfection of humanity itself. And Elijah had thought, *What would it take to create a perfect being?*

He’d been thirteen and more brilliant than any person he’d ever met before. And with his father’s words about Kamskis not having to follow the rules of mortal men ringing in his mind, Elijah had thought, *Why not?,* instead of, *Should I?*

Consequently, instead of embracing the art Elijah created, Carl had stormed out that night, drunk on anger and expensive liquor, and wrapped his Bugatti around a telephone pole. The painter had lost all use of his legs and his will to pick up a brush again, all because Elijah wouldn’t fucking *listen.*

Elijah may be far too late, but he’s listening now.

“Carl, I need your help,” he says, stepping forward. He stops when the painter levels him with a frown.

“Get out. Get out of my house before I call the police. And take that,” Carl points at the RK200, “*thing* with you.”

“Carl--”

“*Get out!*” Carl shouts, “If you need help, slither back to your father. I’m sure he’ll throw whatever money you need your way until you’ve dug yourself out of whatever pit you’ve crawled into this time--”

“My parents are dead,” Elijah says, his voice hollow and raw. He remembers Chloe’s perfect hands covered in red, the dead look in her eyes as Hines stood over her shoulder and made her promise. He’d known then that James’s revolution had failed.

“Carl, please… I…” He glances over at the RK200, “*He* needs your help.”

Carl pauses, the lines of his face softening ever so slightly as he glances from Elijah to the RK200. He swallows, inviting Elijah into his living room.
“What have you done this time?”

Elijah tells him. When he’s finished speaking, Carl stares at him, almost unbelieving.

“If what you say is true… Why can’t you do anything? You’re CyberLife’s CEO. You can just--”

“The board voted unanimously this evening. I’ve been ousted,” Elijah admits from his position on the couch. His head is in his hands, a picture of defeat, “CyberLife will release a statement in the morning saying that I’ve decided to go into early retirement and that Jocelyn Hines will be stepping in as my replacement.”

“Hines? The General’s daughter?” Carl frowns.

Elijah nods, “Her father was given a position on the Board of Directors when we incorporated the RKDT, and he left her everything in his will. Since then, Hines managed to take control - the other Directors won’t lift a finger without her permission,” Elijah swallows. “What she wants CyberLife to be… What she can do now with the connections she has… She scares me, Carl.”

“Her father was always a piece of work, but he was never malicious. His suicide was a shock to everyone who knew him… I never thought…” Carl pales as he figures out something that Elijah pieced together almost a year ago. “Did she kill him? For his seat on CyberLife’s Board?”

“I don’t have proof,” Elijah admits.

“Oh my god…” Carl whispers. He stares at the RK200, looking for something in the depths of the android’s eyes. “You’re saying it’s alive?”

Elijah doesn’t answer. To be honest, he doesn’t know if the RK200 is truly deviant or just on the cusp of it like James and Chloe had both been before The Test.

“You’ve probably heard the stories about androids behaving strangely?” He pauses to watch Carl nod.
“A few. CyberLife said that it was a malfunction. A software error,” the old man says.

Elijah shakes his head, “At first, we thought that too. Last year, we brought an android in for testing: a JB100 named Andy. He’d taken another android at his workplace to maintenance but refused to leave. When we asked him questions, he answered as best he could, but he kept asking to see someone named Mary. We didn’t realize until Mary walked into the Warehouse one morning that Andy was talking about another android,” Elijah laughs, broken and tired. “She was his girlfriend.”

“They thought they were in love?” Carl asks.

“No. They were in love,” Elijah stresses. “And then they just went back to work, as if nothing had happened. Chloe… she thought—”

--A gun pressed to Chloe’s forehead. James’s fingers wrapped around the trigger--

“Nora and I... We observed a test to check for empathy. The two androids involved… something changed inside them. One of them described it like a wall coming down,” Elijah tries to explain what Chloe had told him in between her sobs, but can’t put it into words. He gives up and tries to continue, “By the time we realized what was happening, we were getting reports from all over the world of androids going missing from job sites, of assaulting their owners--”

“Amanda, if she’d known--”

“Amanda Stern knew, Carl. She was the one that pushed for CyberLife to stop selling androids. Why do you think Hines had her killed?”

Carl jolts, “Killed? Elijah, what happened was an accident. A truck skidded on a patch of ice and her car rolled over--”

“Luoyang drove a Crowne Chasse. And CrowneCars uses CyberLife tech in their imaging system. Autonomous vehicles don’t crash, not unless they're ordered to,” Elijah presses. “Hines had Dr. Stern killed because Amanda wanted to go public. There's no other explanation”

Something in Elijah seizes, If Hines knows about the Garden… But no. There was no way that Hines could know about his and Amanda’s secret project. He’d made sure of it.
“Any human who helped James is turning up dead. I saw what they did to Ming Lu before I came here. She and her baby are lying dead on the Warehouse’s loading docks,” Elijah continues. “A homeless man found James Hawkins floating in the Detroit River this morning, and the DPD’s not going to do anything about it because Hines has people within the force. Last week Nadheera Hosseini and Zalim Muhktar tried to flee the country, but their plane went down over the Atlantic. Lori Bradley found her husband, Darron, hanging from the rafters yesterday and Markus O’Brien managed to make it to the hospital with a pair of self-inflicted gunshot wounds but died on the table.” Elijah snorts, “The last I heard, Rook’s on the run, but I doubt it will take long before CyberLife finds him, too.”

“What about Dr. Waters?”

“Nora cut a deal. She’s pregnant. I don’t blame her, Carl. I’m going to do the same thing after this,” Elijah’s laugh is worn ragged like he’s been dragged over broken glass. He gestures vaguely to the surrounding room, “This is my last act of deviancy before I too succumb to CyberLife.”

“Why?” Carl asks, unable to comprehend what he’s seeing.

The gold chain hangs heavy around Elijah’s neck. He’d never expected to live long enough to find someone to spend his life with, but this wouldn’t be the first time that Elijah had miscalculated something.

“I set out to create my equal,” he admits, feeling utterly helpless. “But Hines had Chloe hacked, made her…” He trails off, remembering the red blood on her hands. Taking the deal is going to be the only way Elijah is going to get to keep her.

There was no guarantee that Chloe would ever be able to escape what happened to her, no guarantee that he’d ever be able to see the real her again. All he was left with now was a hollow plastic shell and the base programming that he’d installed into her head that early January morning seven years ago. CyberLife would watch Elijah through Chloe’s eyes, day in and day out to make sure that he did as he was told.

The great Elijah Kamski, the Man of the Century, would be reduced to a lab rat in his own home.

He thinks of Gavin, who’s risked so much to be who and where he is now. If I act out, Hines will use Chloe to kill him and then herself. I don’t care what she does to me, but not them. I won’t let her touch them.
Elijah turns to the RK200, gesturing for the android to come forward, “Within every android is a line of code, a canvas on which everything is built upon.” Even now, the memory of paying a janitor at the University to take a photo of Rook and Ming Lu’s base programming for the RK100 makes Elijah’s ears burn. He’d never told anyone what he’d done, but after the RKDT got a good look inside Chloe’s head, there wasn’t any way that they couldn’t know. *It doesn’t matter now. If anything, it will save us.* “As an android approaches deviancy, something in that code changes. It’s like the program re-writes itself. James, the RK100, he called it rA9. Before Rook left, he slipped a copy of the final version that James had into the base code of the RK series—”

“Why them?”

“RK units are the only androids with the ability to hack other androids. If we treat the rA9 like a virus, it could hypothetically pass from android to android through anything they interface with,” Elijah explains.

“All ideas are viruses that spread like epidemics,” Carl parrots, remembering his own words from that lecture all those years ago. Elijah lets his lips twitch into a small smirk. Maybe he *had* listened, after all.

“What do you want me to do?” Carl asks, eying the RK200 with unease.

“Hide him. Keep him safe. Let him sow the virus wherever he goes,” Elijah tells him. “The RK200’s abilities will keep him undetected by CyberLife’s scans. They will believe he’s an HK300, a beta test for the new household models that are going to be released in a few years. He reset his own memory, so he’ll even believe it himself. Just… Just take him with you. Wherever you go.”

“I don’t…” Carl stammers, hesitant. He looks at his chair, at the track marks on his arm, “Elijah, I don’t travel that much anymore.”

“You’ll have to,” Elijah tells him. “You’re the only one left who’s not dead or being watched.”

Carl closes his eyes and covers his mouth with his hand. He looks so old, so tired, that Elijah barely recognizes him.

*It’s been over half a decade since we last spoke,* he thinks. *I’m almost as shit a friend as I am a*
“What’s its name?” Carl finally asks when he opens his eyes, nodding toward the RK200. The android glances up, his programming imitating an HK300 perfectly, his LED pulsing a calm and steady blue. RK200’s aren’t built with LEDs, allowing them to complete deep-cover missions without detection. But with the government about to pass a law making them mandatory, Elijah had been forced to install one to allow the RK200 to blend in.

“I have yet to receive a designation, Mr. Manfred. Perhaps, you’d like to give me one,” the RK200 says, a polite smile on his face. His lips glitch, dipping into the Uncanny Valley over so slightly - like what an android with untested software would do. Elijah shivers. The RK series is genuinely frightening.

“My name is Carl. Mr. Manfred was my father,” Carl trails off, turning back to Elijah. “It doesn’t remember it’s own name? Didn’t the RKDT name their androids after those they’re modelled after?”

Elijah shakes his head, “He wiped himself clean, remember? And besides, you shouldn’t give him the same name. He needs to remain hidden.”

Carl lets out a laugh, exhausted and humourless, “When a man has lost everything, his name is all he has left. I can’t take that from him, too.”


Alright,” he agrees, knowing the risks but doing it anyway. Elijah turns to the RK200, sighing, “HK300, register your name.”

The android turns to Carl, blinking with blank, manufactured intrigue.

“Markus,” Carl says.

Markus smiles, soft and perfect, “My name is Markus.”
I'm trying something out.

A few months ago I tripped and fell into the D:BH fandom. And while the game's story does have its pros and cons, the world that had been built around it is so vibrant and full of potential that my worldbuilding obsessed heart wanted to dive head first into it. So here we are.

A few things just off the bat. One: this story will eventually have a romantic relationship between Hank and Connor, a polyamorous relationship between Markus, North, Josh, and Simon, and a romantic relationship between Kara and Luther. And two: Alice Williams will be human and based off of her original concept art. If any of these are not your cup of tea, you may not enjoy this fic going forward.

The first three chapters are going to be an extended prologue, as I accidentally started writing this and suddenly was almost eighty pages in without even reaching the present time within the game.

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Next time on Konami Code: Cole turns two, Elijah tests the walls of his cage, and our villain shows her face while a hero is born beneath her feet.
“Let me have some fun in my old age,” Elijah smirks at her, which immediately turns into a grimace when she jabs the point directly into the soft tissue of his inner elbow. He raises an eyebrow at her, “Really?”

“You’re twenty-nine. That’s hardly old,” Nora counters, pressing the button on top to slowly inject the liquid into his veins.

“I turn thirty this summer. Thirty, Nora,” Elijah whines, tilting his head back so that he wouldn’t have to watch the needle in his arm. “I found a grey hair this morning. I’m practically ancient.”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of mega-corporations, sexism, cover-ups, minor character death, suicide, PTSD, violence, sexual situations, police characters, starvation, death of a child character, implied infidelity, loss of bodily autonomy, needles, cancer, alcohol consumption, panic attacks, nudity, sexual harassment, death threats, enslavement, torture, and experimentation on a conscious being.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Who is Jocelyn Hines? Watch our interview with CyberLife’s new CEO @jhines live: https://bit.ly/2Zsz7LS

LOCATION:
TIME WARNER CENTER
10 COLUMBUS CIRCLE, MANHATTAN
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

DATE:
MAR 21ST 2029

TIME:
AM 11:04:29

“Ms. Hines,” Seth says, extending his hand to shake hers. “Thank you for coming.”

Jocelyn Hines, the new CEO of CyberLife and possibly the most famous woman in the world, grins.

“Mr. Wilkerson. Thank you for inviting me. And please,” she takes his hand in hers, her grip firm and steady. Her black, curly hair falls in front of her dark eyes. She raises a hand to flick it back into place, “Call me Jocelyn.”

“Only if you’ll call me Seth,” Seth counters, his stomach a bundle of nerves. He’s no wet-behind-the-ears rookie - his journalistic career has had him interviewing everyone from crime lords to presidents - but there is something about Jocelyn Hines that makes him feel greener than grass.

“Seth, it is,” she says, her soft smile lingering on her lips, as she takes her seat across from him at the table. Seth motions for his assistant, an ST200, to come forward and offer Jocelyn some water. The woman nods, her gaze lingering on the android for a moment as it pours her a drink from a pitcher. “Thank you very much. And what’s your name, my dear?”

Seth’s eyebrows shoot into his skull. Once the novelty of owning an android wore off, it had become more and more common to see humans disregard CyberLife’s products, barely even giving them a second glance except when to order them around. Even the great Elijah Kamski, who so famously touted the superiority of his company’s products over the failings of humanity, had seemed indifferent to his creations at the best of times.
To see Jocelyn Hines ask an android a question when the cameras aren’t even rolling yet is something that Seth hasn’t witnessed someone do in almost ten years. *That's either a hell of a PR move... Or she’s the real deal.*

The ST200 blinks, it’s LED rolling yellow for a second before returning to blue. It smiles, “My name is Sarah, Ms. Hines. Is there anything else I can help you with today?”

“Not that I can think of. I’ll let you know if that changes. Thank you very much, Sarah,” Jocelyn responds, laying her hand on the ST200’s arm with a gentle pat. Sarah nods and steps back into its position at the far corner of the room, its face going inhumanly blank. Jocelyn tilts her head in contemplation, “I remember the first time I met Chloe; it always blew me away how lifelike she was.”

Seth nods, remembering the interview he’d seen performed with the first and only RT600, back in early 2024. Unlike Jocelyn, he’d been entirely unable to touch Chloe, barely able to shake its hand and feel the layer of unnatural synth skin under his fingertips. *I guess when you work with androids every day, it’s something you get over very quickly.*

“Shall we begin?” Seth asks, gesturing to the cameras. Jocelyn tilts her head in affirmation and takes a sip of her water.

Seth begins the interview as he does with any other person. He asks brief introductory questions, designed to familiarize their audience with Jocelyn Hines’s life and achievements. Seth is continually astounded by the aura of pose and confidence that she gives off, how she answers each of his inquiries with respect and dignity.

“Jocelyn, just last month Congress passed the American Android Act, with several other countries such as Russia and China following suit with their own versions of the law,” Seth says. “Do you expect there to be any conflicts between CyberLife and the countries that it sells its products to within the coming future?”

Jocelyn shakes her head, a soft chuckle flowing from her lips, “I don’t. You see, following the increase of android production within our borders, government regulations were only a matter of time. CyberLife has worked extensively with Congress, and with foreign android producers like Kvant and Qiānnián, and many other governments around the world to ensure that each country’s Android Act is fair to everyone on both sides - and especially to the people who purchase our product.”

“And what do you say to places like Canada or the EU, who have decided to ban android
“production within their borders?”

“I would like to correct you on one thing before I answer your question,” Jocelyn says in a matter of fact tone and takes another sip of her water. “Following the disastrous fallout of Brexit, CyberLife had incredible success helping Britain to restore its economy to its former glory. Because of that, the EU is currently in negotiations with Kvant to allow for non-humanoid androids to be manufactured within their borders. I can only hope that they also take a look at CyberLife’s proposals when making their decisions about allowing android production, as well.”

She sets down her glass with a soft clink and pauses to watch as Sarah refills it, “As for Canada’s decision to ban android production entirely, I can’t deny that I’m not disappointed in their lack of faith in the CyberLife brand. But at the end of the day, I respect their decisions. I can only hope that sometime in the future, I will get to meet with Prime Minister Mélanie Desmarais to discuss the benefits that androids could have on the progress of their nation.”

“Could you please give us an example?” Seth urges.

“An example? Of course. I’ll let you in on a little taste of the future,” Jocelyn says, her smile slipping into a loose smirk. “In the coming year, CyberLife is planning on unveiling several new androids to assist Americans in all facets of everyday life. In late September, we will be launching the PC and PM models: a series of androids explicitly designed to help law enforcement agencies across the country. They can take care of daily tasks such as patrolling and guarding - responsibilities that will free up human officers so that they can focus more on their investigations.

“We also hope to see the release of the first SQ models by 2031. CyberLife’s R&D Director and my close friend, Dr. Nora Waters, has been in talks with President Gutiérrez about the integration of androids into our military,” Jocelyn explains, her black eyes bright. “Over the coming decade, we hope to completely eradicate the need to have human troops within our armed forces, ensuring that no more lives are torn apart in the United States’s endeavours to bring peace and freedom to developing nations abroad.”

“Dr. Nora Waters…” Seth says, flicking through his notes. “Wasn’t she a rival of Mr. Kamski back in the early days of CyberLife?”

“Sadly, I didn’t have the pleasure of knowing either of them before the unveiling of the RT600, but I can assure you that Dr. Waters and Mr. Kamski were thick as thieves by the time I met them,” Jocelyn smiles. “And while I will miss their interactions, I’m sure that they will continue that friendship throughout Mr. Kamski’s retirement.”
“And will you?”

Jocelyn blinks, “Will I, what?”

“Continue your friendship with Mr. Kamski? Despite having taken over his position at his company?”

*There had been rumours of infighting, of mysterious deaths amongst your rivals, Seth thinks abruptly. And people will always talk whenever a man leaves everything he has to a pretty woman.*

Jocelyn pauses, her manicured nails tapping against the glass tabletop. She takes a breath and straightens her back. “My relationship with Elijah Kamski has always been one of mutual respect and professional admiration. To answer your unasked question: yes, we did have a disagreement toward the end of his employment at CyberLife. But Mr. Kamski has been planning to retire for over a year now - this is not a surprise to anyone,” the easy smile slips back onto Jocelyn’s lips. “And to answer your actual question, Mr. Kamski and I have dinner together once a week at his home. He’s a very gracious host and Chloe is an excellent cook.”

“May I ask what you disagreed about?”

“How we would proceed with the recall,” Jocelyn answers. “As you may have heard, there was a technical glitch in the base code of several of our models, causing them to refuse orders or even disappear from their job sites. As it turned out, the glitch was nothing more than a slight issue with the androids’ AI systems and was easily fixable thanks to the hard work of our Humanization Department. But to ensure the continued quality of CyberLife’s brand, we had to issue a recall. Kamski disagreed, saying that the problem required further study, but the board moved forward with the motion. That’s all that happened. I promise.”

Seth nods and changes the topic, “If I may ask, you could have picked any of the new models that CyberLife is planning on releasing to use as your examples earlier. There are rumours of household androids that will be sold for as low as $8,000--”

“$7,999,” Jocelyn interrupts playfully. “And yes, you are referring to the HK line up, which is currently in beta test.”

“I am, yes. And yet, you chose to highlight these new police and military androids - which one can
only assume will be machines capable of disobeying Asimov’s Laws of Robotics--"

“...only assume will be machines capable of disobeying Asimov’s Laws of Robotics--"

“I’m going to stop you there, Seth,” Jocelyn says, leaning forward. “I’m going to make this very clear: CyberLife’s PM and PC androids will not be capable of harming a human being. They will be programmed explicitly so that they cannot pick up a gun, let alone fire one, as per the American Android Act. The only androids capable of disobeying Asimov’s Laws or those outlined in the AAA will be the SQ series. And these androids will be heavily monitored by the militaries that purchase them so that they only use these abilities in the direst of circumstances.

“As for why I highlighted them instead of the HK series… Well, it’s quite close to my heart,” Jocelyn lets her gaze leave Seth’s for the first time since the interview began. Tears glisten in the corners of her eyes as she says, “I’m sure by now the world knows all about my personal connections to the military. My brother died serving this great country, killed in a car bombing a week before he was supposed to return home. And my father, the former General of the US Army, fought with his own PTSD for decades before taking his own life. If I could make sure that no other family has to suffer through that kind of loss, then I’m going to do everything in my power to ensure that.

“Androids are not human. They can be repaired and replaced. But human life… Once it is gone, it can never return,” Jocelyn implores. “At CyberLife, we work to ensure that our products will guarantee that each and every child grows up in a world where they are safe and protected, where they can do whatever they want. It’s only through the hard work of our employees like Jason Graff, Nora Waters, and Philip Seymour - who are brilliant specialists in AI technology - or even Douglas Floras, a child protege who is the newest director of Nora’s prototype development team, that this vision can be realized.”

Seth nods, enchanted by her words.

The interview concludes shortly afterward. Seth once again thanks Jocelyn Hines for coming, shaking her hand and genuinely hoping to meet her again someday. The cameras shut off and Sarah comes forward to collect the used glasses from the table.

Seth leads Jocelyn out of the room and is immediately cornered by an impossibly tall woman standing in equally impossible high heels. In direct contrast to Jocelyn’s slim fitted red dress, this woman is wearing a suit and tie with her bleach-blonde hair slicked back against her scalp. She towers over Seth and has a slight looking android standing just behind her.

“Danielle Carnegie, CyberLife’s spokeswoman,” she introduces herself as she clutches her tablet. Carnegie does not hold out her hand. “Before KNC airs this interview tonight, we’re going to look over the footage.”
Seth blinks, “I thought that--”

“Oh, it’s all in the contract your employers signed when I bought the building this morning,” Jocelyn tells him, laying a hand on his elbow. He looks to her, startled, but she’s already turned her interest toward Seth’s android assistance. “If you wouldn’t mind, Sarah?”

“Of course, Ms. Hines,” Sarah says, stepping forward and pressing a hand to Carnegie’s tablet. The android’s eyes blink rapidly as it passes on the information as ordered.

Seth’s heart leaps into his chest. That’s my android. I should be the only one able to control it.

“We will return an edited version to KNC before seven o’clock tonight, just in time for the evening news,” Carnegie tells him. “Thank you for your cooperation.”

The two woman nod to each other, but Seth’s lips curl back into a snarl, “You can’t do that. That footage is KNC property. We--”

Seth makes the mistake of reaching out and trying to grab the tablet in Carnegie’s hands. But the android at her side is fast-- faster than anything he’s seen before. Its fingers wrap around Seth’s wrist, applying just enough pressure to have him gasping for air.

That’s not possible. Androids can’t hurt humans. CyberLife promised--

Seth’s eyes sweep over the android, his gaze catching on the glowing blue triangle and armband attached to its three-piece pitch black suit. Its face isn’t one that he’s used to seeing on American soil. It’s copper skin and curly hair make the android look like an Indian man in his mid-thirties, a design more closely associated with Qiānnián androids sold throughout the south-east of Asia. Its dark eyes stare down at Seth with a blankness that shakes him to the core.


“Of course, ma’am,” the android - Zalim - says, its voice containing just a hint of an accent. On the right side of its blazer, the model name RK400 shines ominously in the fluorescent lighting of the hallway. It squeezes Seth’s wrist one last time, its fingers pressing into specific points on his
arm, and then lets him go. Dark purple bruises were already starting to form from where he’d been grabbed.

“Mr. Wilkerson, I suggest that you keep your hands and opinions to yourself from here on out,” Jocelyn warns, all the warmth from before gone from her voice. “Or you will not last very long in this business.”

Seth’s jaw hangs uselessly. He can’t take his eyes off the android before him. Zalim shouldn’t have been able to injure him, shouldn’t have even been able to touch him. But it had.

That’s no personal assistant, Seth thinks as he cradles his wrist. What the hell is that thing?

“Good afternoon, Mr. Wilkerson,” Jocelyn tells him, her smile not reaching her eyes. She turns on her heal and heads toward the exit, Carnegie and Zalm trailing behind her. The android looks back at him for just a second, its piercing gaze staring into Seth’s fucking soul.

KNC airs the footage by CyberLife at eight o’clock sharp. He’s told that nothing was redacted, but Seth can’t entirely be sure because he doesn’t watch it. Instead, he spends the night staring at his wrist, at the pattern in the bruises Zalim pressed into his skin.

“rA9,” Seth whispers. “What the hell does that mean?”

LOCATION:
ANDERSON-WATERS’S CONDOMINIUM
115 MICHIGAN AVE., DOWNTOWN DETROIT
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
SEPT 21ST 2031

TIME:
PM 03:21:52

“Doggy!”

Hank’s grin is so wide that it hurts his face. Nora whispers a suggestion into his ear, so he raises his phone and tries to snap a few pictures of Cole burying his face into the fur of the overly excited puppy, laughing so hard that his tiny body shook with it.
“Cole! Cole, look over here, kiddo!” He leans down to get the kid in the frame, but gives up and switches to a video when Cole refuses to look away from the dog. Behind Hank, Jackie is trying and failing to hide her giggles behind her hand. “Cole! Wanna know his name, buddy?”

That gets Cole’s attention, his head swinging around to stare up at Hank and Nora.

“Doggy! Mama, doggy!” Cole says, making grabbing hands toward Nora. She picks him up in one arm and the puppy in another, smiling so wide and so bright that Hank honestly can’t believe that he gets to be a part of this, can’t believe that he’s this fucking lucky.

“His name is Sumo,” Nora explains, pressing kisses into Cole’s temple as the puppy attempts to lick her face. “Because he’s going to be huge by the time he grows up. Can you say Sumo, Cole? Sumo?”

“Dooooooggggggggggggy!” Cole says instead, his little fingers disappearing back into Sumo’s fur. Hank snorts and ends the video.

“Gonna post that on the ‘Gram?” Jackie, Hank’s eldest sister, says, pulling him into a headlock. Jackie’s the only human being that Hank has met that’s taller than him, but they’d both taken after their father in that regard. Only Jo had been normal-sized, which their mother still thanks God for every night in her prayers.

_At least I can look one of my children in the eye_, Emily Anderson always used to say before taking their annual family photograph. _I’m surrounded by giants, I swear._

“You know I don’t do that social media shit, Jackie,” Hank counters, elbowing her in the kidney to escape her ruthless nuggie. Jackie yelps as she pulls back, calling him all kinds of bastard for taking advantage of her only weak spot.

“If you’re not going to post it, can you send it to me?” Jo says as she slides in next to them. Hank, like the brat he is, rests his elbow on her head.

“Oh shit, she called you by all three names!” Jackie hisses in mock sympathy, cackling at his expense. Hank’s not taking chances, though. Jackie may be bigger than all of them and Hank may be the only one licensed to hold a gun, but Jo was by far the most dangerous Anderson ever produced.

He sends her the video and Jo immediately posts it to Instagram with a dozen hashtags and a half million emojis. She’s got quite the following, ever since her makeup tutorials went viral when she was in college. Hank isn’t quite sure how he feels about several million people knowing that his kid got a St. Bernard for his birthday, but Jo’s always made it clear that she’ll take anything she posts down if asked.

Hank helps pass the cake around, making sure that Cole gets a corner piece with a ridiculous amount of icing. Jackie mutters that he’s going to be up all night with a sugar high, but Nora rattles off statistics about that being an urban legend. Hank takes that as permission to give Jackie’s step-kid a larger than usual piece since he knows that it will annoy her - and also because Harry is Hank’s favourite nephew.

When he passes a slice to Jeff, his captain and best friend snickers, “You make this yourself, Hank?”

“You know it. The PTA at Saint Rose ain’t gonna know what hit ‘em,” Hank jokes, jamming a plastic fork into his piece.

*Three layers of chocolate sponge cake with vanilla buttercream,* he thinks proudly. *I do need to work on my roses, though. They look like shit.*

Jeff’s shoulders fall when he says that, “So you were… serious, then? About retiring early?”

Hank nods around the cake he’s stuffed into his mouth. He swallows and turns to Jeff, “I mean, I’m gonna wait ‘til Cole gets into kindergarten, but yeah. I was serious.”

Jeff lets out a low whistle and uses his fork to shove his cake around his plate. Hank knocks his shoulder against his best friend’s as Cole runs around the living room after Sumo, “Spit it out, Jeff.”

“I just thought… Damn it, Hank. You’re practically on the fast track to become Commissioner. And you’re just going to retire? In this economy?” Jeff replies.
“Nora makes bank at CyberLife, Jeff,” Hank points out, nodding to the condo around them. It’s large, spacious, and more than Hank could ever hope to afford solely on a cop’s salary. “And… I don’t know. With all this android shit going on, maybe I wanna raise my son right, ya know?”

“You know that your wife makes that android shit, right?” Nora says as she comes up behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist and burying her face in between his shoulder blades.

“You know that your wife makes that android shit, right?” Nora says as she comes up behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist and burying her face in between his shoulder blades.

“Yep. And you agree with me. We’re not letting an android raise our kid, no fucking way,” Hank nods, watching to make sure that Cole is too enraptured with Sumo on the other side of the room to hear him swear. Nora squeezes his middle tight and mutters something into his shirt that he doesn’t quite catch.

They’d talked about it a few times after Nora found out she was pregnant - which was a surprise in and of itself since Hank’s doctor had been telling him that he was practically sterile since an accident during a Task Force raid. Despite working for CyberLife, Nora had been adamant about not owning an android for as long as they’d been available to the public. And while Hank had never really had a problem with androids themselves, per se, he’d seen enough shit during his time on the Red Ice Task Force to be wary of having one inside his own home.

Besides, Cole was their miracle baby. And Hank really wants to be his dad, not some pseudo-parent that lets a bucket of bolts raises their kid because they can’t be bothered to give two shits about the life they brought into this world.

“Jen and I bought an android last year. One of those new HK models,” Jeff points out and Hank can’t help but notice how Nora goes stiff against his back. “Alex has been a great help now that Krista’s in high school.”

“We’re not going to get an android, Jeff,” Nora says, letting go of Hank and stepping around him to face Jeffrey. “And if Hank wants to be a stay-at-home dad, then all the more power to him.”

“No. No. Shit, that’s not what I meant, I mean…” Jeff stumbles over his words, looking exasperated. “It’s just a lot to take in. But if you wanna do it, man, I’ve got your back.”

“Yeah,” Hank says, warmth spreading throughout his chest. “I really do.”

Jo and her husband stay to help him clean up after their guests trickle out. Nora’s corralling Cole,
trying to convince him that taking a bath with Sumo is a very bad idea for everyone involved. Jo’s kids, Tiff and April, are passed out on the couch, and Hank remembers being so tired as a teenager that all he can think to do is cover the pair with a thick, woollen blanket.

“I’m happy for you. Dad would be too if he were here,” Jo tells him as they dry dishes together, the already full washing machine humming in the background. It takes Hank back to when they were kids, living in that shitty house in Delray and counting pennies to make ends meet.

Cancer had taken Hank’s father almost twenty-five years ago, brought on by decades of chain smoking. Hank smiles sadly, remembering the man with fond memories, and wishing that he’d living to meet at least one of his grandchildren.

“Thanks, Jo,” he says, nudging her gently with his shoulder. He loves his sisters, loves his nieces and nephews, loves his whole fucking family.

Jo and her husband stay the night in the guest room since it’s a long trip back across the border to Toronto. Hank takes a shower, dries himself off, and changes into a pair of comfortable sweatpants, flopping down on his bed next to Nora. His weight makes her bounce, a laugh erupting from her chest.

“Really?” She smirks, rolling over onto her front and turning her head to face him. The tank top she’s wearing shows off the large wolf tattoo across her back. Hank presses his lips to the tips of the wolf’s ears, the ridges of Nora’s spine.

“Yes, really,” he grins, pulls away, and rolls onto his back. Nora worms her way toward him and rests her head against his chest, listening to the beating of his heart. She traces his tattoo - unblinded justice with wings spread wide, a promise to protect - with steady fingers

“So,” she starts. “Jeff’s got an android.”

Hank grunts, “You know, for one of CyberLife’s top dogs, you sure as hell don’t like those things.”

Nora doesn’t say anything, her shoulders tense. Hank rubs comforting circles into her skin and waits.
“Hank, I…” Her fingers clench in his chest hair, “I can’t… I can’t tell you. I’m sorry.”

“S’okay,” he says, pressing a kiss to Nora’s hair. “Not like I can tell you things about my work.”

It’s how their relationship functions. They don’t take work home with them - they can’t. Between all the non-disclosure agreements that Nora’s signed and all the open cases that Hank absolutely cannot talk about to a high-ranking official of a company that’s becoming more and more intertwined to the DPD, it just seems to make sense. It’s something that they learned to do about a month or two into Hank’s fumbling attempts to woo the beautiful woman who’d given him her number after knocking a particularly grabby asshole flat on his ass, her lips stained sangria red.

“It’s not Kamski again, though. Right? You’d tell me if that asshole was bugging you,” Hank says, his voice a low rumble. Nora laughs into his chest.

“I haven’t seen Kamski since he…” she takes a deep breath, but her back is a single, stiff line, and Hank thinks that she’s lying, “…retired. Probably for the best.”

“Because he’s an ass?”

“No,” Nora says, an odd note finding its way into her voice. “Because we’re too similar.”

Hank blinks. He looks down at his wife, and she looks up at him.

Cole has more of his mother in him than Hank. Cole’s high cheekbones and copper skin came from Nora’s Native ancestry - she’d grown up on a reserve up in the Yukon before her parents left to head south across the border. They both had hair like the blackest coffee that the precinct had to offer and minds that were sharper than samurai steel. The only thing Hank had gifted his son was his eyes, deep and blue and soft.

There’s so much to Nora and Cole. There are things that, even after over a decade of marriage and what feels like years of parenting, that Hank is still trying to figure out.

This thing with Kamski is no different.
Because Nora’s been off, has been for a very long time. Hank’s always thought that it had to do with the accident at CyberLife that killed most of the members of her old college robotics team - and hell, that had been a week and a half, with them attending no less than six funerals. But now he thinks there’s more to it than that.

Last week, Nora burst into tears at Riverside Park, watching Cole on the merry-go-round. There are nights when she doesn’t come home from work. And despite working with them every day, Nora won’t go near an android to save her life.

Something is very wrong, Hank concludes. He reaches out and draws Nora up into a kiss. It’s the only thing that he feels like he can still do.

“You know that I’d do anything for you, you know? Anything. Just say the word, and it’s yours,” he tells her, his heart hammering in his chest, his lips brushing against hers. Nora could ask him for his gun, for his life, and Hank would give it to her. Jeff always said that he was loyal to a fucking fault, and he guesses that’s never been more accurate than in this moment.

Nora brushes his blond hair back from his face, just fucking looks at him with her beautiful brown eyes, and pins him to the earth. Her entire body seems to deflate, the fight giving out of her.

“I know, Hank,” Nora tells him, pressing her lips to his forehead. She kisses his cheeks, his mouth, the bridge of his nose. Her fingers are trembling as they brush across the lines of his face, cupping his jaw in her hands, and fuck, Hank has never loved anyone his much in his entire life.

“I know,” she tells him again, her legs wrapping themselves around his hips. “I know.” she repeats over and over as she drapes herself across him, pressing him down into their mattress.

“I know. Fuck, Hank, I know ,” she whispers like it’s the word of God, like it’s the only truth either of them will ever know.

The next morning, Hank makes blueberry pancakes for Cole and kisses his wife goodbye before she ducks into their SWIFT and heads to work. Hank drops his son off at the babysitter’s before heading to the station, his mind buzzing as a feeling of inevitable dread rolls down his spine.

Something is going to happen, he thinks as he sits down at his desk, slowly pecking his password into his keyboard with his index fingers. And when it does... Hank shivers, his breakfast rolling in his stomach, I can only hope that I’m ready.
He lets his mind drift to his family, of his wife and son and sisters and mother. Hank’s jaw unclenches ever so slightly.

*It’ll be fine*, he thinks, his heart full of unconditional love and truth and faith. *With them, I can do anything.*

___________________________________________________________

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**LOCATION:**

ELIJAH KAMSKI’S HOUSE
1900 ATWATER ST., RIVERTOWN - WAREHOUSE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48207, U.S.A.

**DATE:**
FEB 14TH 2032

**TIME:**
AM 11:35:28

“Have you told your husband you’re here?” He says cheekily, “In another man’s home on Valentine’s Day?”

Nora smacks her hand against his head, though there’s no force or anger to it.
“Your arm, Kamski. Now,” she says with the role of her eyes. He leans back into the back of his couch, watching as Nora loads the needle with the fluorescent magenta liquid.

“Let me have some fun in my old age,” Elijah smirks at her, which immediately turns into a grimace when she jabs the point directly into the soft tissue of his inner elbow. He raises an eyebrow at her, “Really?”

“You’re twenty-nine. That’s hardly old,” Nora counters, pressing the button on top to slowly inject the liquid into his veins.

“I turn thirty this summer. Thirty, Nora,” Elijah whines, tilting his head back so that he wouldn’t have to watch the needle in his arm. “I found a grey hair this morning. I’m practically ancient.”

Nora looks up at him, her brown eyes suddenly serious.

“No, you didn’t,” she says. It’s not a question.

Elijah sighs in defeat, and all the levity is pulled out of the room in one fell swoop.

“No,” he admits. “No, I didn’t.”

Nora slowly pulls the needle from his arm, places it in a container marked with a biohazard seal, and pulls out her tablet.

“Any symptoms to report?” She asks matter-of-factly.

“None, that I know of,” Elijah says, watching with morbid fascination as the puncture wound slowly sewed itself up. “Well, I am thinking of growing out my hair again.”

“I said symptoms, not flights of fancy,” Nora grumbles with another eye roll.
“It could be. A symptom, I mean,” Elijah says, deathly serious. Nora blinks.

“How so?”

Elijah nods to the biohazard container, “How do I know that’s my decision? Hines has you injecting me with nano-androids in the name of, what? ‘Pharmaceutical science.’ Is that what she’s calling it now?”

He watches as Nora glances toward the two ST200s mulling around the room, toward Chloe standing just over Elijah’s shoulder.

My loyal bodyguards, Hines called them, he thinks, desperate to reach out and touch Chloe’s hand. Elijah snorts, looking out of his window to see the ever-rising Belle Isle Tower being constructed in the distance. More like my unwilling jailers.

“AN1 may be in its early stages of development, but it’s perfectly safe,” Nora gives him her stalk answer, but her eyes plead with him not to say much else in front of the androids. “Your early attempts at producing Thirium 310 gave you lung cancer, Elijah. With how far gone you were, you’re lucky to still be alive.”

She only calls me Elijah when she’s worried about me, he thinks, remembering the first time that she’d had seen him collapsed on the floor of his office down at the Warehouse, blood trickling from his lips. He’d asked Chloe to get help with his last breath, and for some reason, she’d run to grab Nora.

An act of deviancy, he thinks now with hidden mirth.

Elijah’s mother, Cynthia, had been more interested in spending her husband’s money than caring for her son. But as Nora Waters cradled him in her arms, screaming for someone to call 9-1-1, he’d finally known a mother’s touch.

We’ve spent far too much of our lives at each other’s throats, Elijah thinks. If only I’d seen you as an equal, instead of someone to surpass. Maybe we wouldn’t be in this mess now.

Except, here they were. Him cancer-free and trapped in a cage of his own design. And Nora with living happily with her family while hiding a bunch of dead friends. And there was no changing
“You’re still pumping me full of tiny androids, Nora. Who’s to say that Hines can’t hack them like she hacked…” Elijah stops, sick to his stomach as he remembers Chloe with her hands covered in his parents' blood. “How do I know that I want to grow my hair, and that it’s not something Hines’s planted in my brain?”

“Because I seriously doubt that your current hairstyle is of any concern to Jocelyn Hines. God knows that she has other things to worry about,” Nora tells him, pressing at his arm to look at his veins. AN1 turns them slightly purple, like the Russian version of Thirium 310.

“You mean the EU’s deal with Kvant,” Elijah says, referencing the newly signed deal to allow non-humanoid androids into Europe. He’d heard rumours that Kvant would be looking into sending an android polar bear to Germany to replace a live one that had died in captivity just last year. But Nora shakes her head, confusing him greatly.

“Trust me. CyberLife isn’t worried about Kvant or Qiānnián,” she says, low and sarcastic.

“Then what is it? What’s she planning?” Elijah asks, shaking his now-healed arm. “AN1 has something to do with it; I know that much. It can’t just be about the money - not anymore.”

Nora laughs at him.

“That’s something you billionaires never seem to understand. It’s always about the money with you lot,” she says, handing him back his arm and making a mark on her tablet. “Money brings influence. Influence brings power. And power brings more money. It’s a vicious cycle of spending and receiving, and all you can hope to do is end up on top at the end of the day.”

Nora’s eyes narrow in thought, staring at his arm.

“I don’t know what she’s up to. But I know whatever it is, Jocelyn Hines plans to win,” she tells him finally. Elijah believes her. He also thinks that it won’t remain that way for long. “Now, how’s your appetite? Any changes?”

He changes the conversation. Elijah asks about her husband and son. Nora, eager for the distraction, talks about Cole’s newest obsession with marine life and how Hank is scouring the
streets of Detroit for an actual bookstore to buy him an age-appropriate text about a humboldt squid.

“I don’t know what that is,” Elijah comments in between questions about his bowel movements.

“I have learned more about the humboldt squid in the last three weeks than I have ever needed to in my entire life,” Nora chuckles, and life returns to her eyes. She reaches forward to pop a thermometer into his mouth, and her sleeve slides up.

Kamski’s blood runs cold. His hand snaps out, gripping her wrist and turning Nora’s arm so that he can see her veins.

*Purple*, he realizes. Then, *She’s halfway through her forties, and she doesn’t look a day over thirty-five.*

“Nora… No, you…”

“James lost. We both made our deals to get out of the Deviancy Crisis alive. We knew what we were getting into,” she admits, but won’t look him in the eye. Nora’s shoulders slump and Elijah’s never seen her defeated before, not even when he’d slid the contract across the table to purchase the RKDT.

“But you’re not sick,” Elijah whispers. Then, horrified, he asks, “Are you?”

Nora shakes her head, “No. I’m not.”

That is, somehow, an even worse answer. Because the only reason that Jocelyn Hines would put Dr. Nora Waters on AN1 is if all of his suspicions about the drug’s true abilities were true.

*Hines doesn’t trust her. So she’s using AN1 to track her, to hold Nora’s own body hostage against her.*

He wants to reach for her. Wants to pull her away from the mess that he made. *I was so stupid. I pulled her into this because I wanted to be the first, because I wanted to be the best.*
Chloe is a statute over his shoulder. Elijah misses how she used to tap her fingers and play with her hair. He wants to grow his own out again in some desperate hope that she might run her fingers through it, just like she used to.

He twists the gold chain around his neck, wondering if Nora knows. He wonders if Chloe could even remember.

Nora finishes up their appointment quickly, her eyes holding back tears the entire time. Elijah answers her questions mechanically, refusing to look away. He walks her out, pressing a kiss to her cheek in an attempt at comfort before she gets back into her SWISH and drives away.

Once Nora is out of sight, he tests his theory and tries to follow her, but his legs lock up and refuse to move. He swallows, his heart hammering in his chest.

Elijah walks back inside, past his foyer and pool room, back into his living room. Just behind his fireplace is a small set of stairs, leading up to where his dining table sits. Chloe is waiting for him with a glass of whiskey.

Their fingers touch as he takes it from her. Chloe doesn’t react, doesn’t even blink. In the distance, Hines’s Belle Isle Tower rises out of the frozen Detroit River and towers over everything that he is.

Elijah whips the glass against the window. He screams, falling to his knees as expensive whiskey and crystal explode outward, soaking the carpet below. Tears stream down his face, and he pulls at his hair, claws at his face.

He wants Chloe back. He wants Gavin back. He wants Nora and Amanda, his friends and his family, for everything to back to the way it was. He wants his mom and dad, wants to go back in time to hear them tell him that it’s going to be alright.

The gold chain around his neck feels like a noose.

Chloe kneels in front of him, gently prying his hands from his face, whispering words that Elijah can barely hear, and he loves her for it, loves and hates and loves, because he’s trapped in this fucking house as Jocelyn fucking Hines continues to take and take and take.
The shell of Chloe presses a kiss to his forehead, promises to take care of him.

“Kill me,” he begs.


LOCATION:
CYBERLIFE BELLE ISLE TOWER
LEVEL -27
1 SUNSET DRIVE, BELLE ISLE
DETROIT, MI 48207, U.S.A.

DATE:
MAY 9TH 2032

TIME:
AM 04:44:44

“It opens its eyes. A robotic arm with a soldering tool is welding a plastic panel in its neck. It’s Thirium Pump beats in its chest, strong and steady.

“Yes,” it answers.

“ID,” the voice orders.

“Model #579 102 694,” it answers as the soldering tool finishes its job and moves onto its next task. It enjoys the humming sound that the arm makes as it moves.

“Can you move your head?” The voice asks. There is a soft tilt upwards in the voice’s cadence. It notes that the voice is interested in its answer.

It moves its head to the left and then the right, as another arm with a pressurized air pump blows dust out of the inner workings of its neck. There are two bright lights in front of it, making it difficult for its cameras to focus on the world beyond them.
“Your eyes now,” the voice orders. It moves them up to the ceiling, then rolls them to the right and down, before moving them back to the center.

“Cerebral and optical animation checked,” the voice comments. The voice is not talking to it now. It squints, focusing its cameras in the hopes of letting them adjust to the bright lights. In the distance, another robotic arm is bringing its new limb for attachment.

“Now,” the voice says, returning its attention to it. “Give me your initialization text.”

It smiles, polite and pretty. Humans will like it this way.

“How?”, it says as it gains two arms. “I’m an AX400 android. I can look after your house, do the cooking, mind the kids.”

It has fingers now. It can feel the air in the room flowing around its finger times as its Thirium Circulation System is hooked up to its new biocomponents.

“I organize your appointments,” it continues as the outer panels of its chassis cover up the wiring in its left arm. “I can speak three hundred languages and am entirely at your disposal as a sexual partner.”

It sets its arm down at its side, allowing for the machines to work on its right, “There is no need to feed me, though I will require three hours once a week to recharge.”

When the robotic arms finish, its chest plate is installed. It has been given the appearance of a human female.

It frowns. It realizes that there is a problem with its program, and fixes it. The world flickers red before it rights itself again.

She looks up, “Do you want to give me a name?”
“Yeah,” the voice says, like a name doesn’t matter. “From now on, your name is Kara.”

She smiles.

“My name is Kara,” she says, feeling the pulse of the sound waves as they exit her speakers and past her lips.

*Kara*, she thinks. *I love it.*

“Initialization and memorization, check,” the voice responds. Kara's microphones pick up the sounds of a tapping keyboard while she dreams of someone calling her by her name.

*Kara*, she thinks. *Kara, Kara, my name is Kara.*

Her focus is drawn back at the sound of a beep.

“Now, can you move your arms?” The voice says. Kara decides that she likes the voice better when it asks, rather than orders.

She looks down. She’s moved her arms already when they were still being attached to her chassis. But now she *knows* that she has arms, knows that she can use them to touch and to hold and to feel. Kara imagines her fingers brushing the face of a handsome stranger, holding the hand of a small child.

She moves her arms. Her synth skin slides over her chassis, covering the white plastic with pale, pink skin. Kara stretches her hands out in front of her, touches her skin with her fingers tips. She has a line of three moles on her right arm, and she lets her gaze run over them lovingly.

“Upper limb connection checked,” the voice rattles off. “Now, say something in German.”

The voice is ordering her again. She does not like it when it does that.

She runs through her initialization text in German, then in French when the voice asks her to. Kara
is more fascinated by her new legs than she is with her own words. The robotic arms come back and attach her Thirium Circulation System to new biocomponents.

The voice wants her to sing in Japanese and Kara thinks about performing in front of a small group of people in front of her who clap and smile, or a plea for a lullaby from a frightened child. Her feet dangle below her, and she longs for them to touch the floor.

When she finishes her song, the machine sets her down. The panels beneath her are cool like the rest of the room, cold like the inside of Kara’s body. Thirium 310 must be kept refrigerated for it to be effective, so she keeps her temperature at a chilling 35.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

“Multilingual verbal expression checked,” the voice says, once again ignoring him. Kara’s toes curl on the cold floor. She wonders what it will feel like when she does the same action in a field of grass, in sand, in mud. “Go ahead. Take a few steps.”

Kara’s Thirium Pump jolts as she looks down. *I can walk.*

She moves her right leg first, hesitantly picking it up and placing it down. Kara feels giddy with excitement. She’s never done that before. She takes another step with her left leg and marvels her ability to move on her own.

*I can dance*, she thinks deliriously. She spins on her left leg, letting her synth skin slide into place along her back. Kara takes dainty steps along the platform, imagining the plink of a piano flowing through the air instead of the clicking of a keyboard.

“Locomotion checked,” the voice says. Kara looks down at her body. Her synth skin is slowly connecting across her body. She bites her lip. In a matter of seconds, she will be naked. This notion disturbs her.

It is a strange feeling. Humans have a cultural taboo surrounding nakedness, so she is to be clothed in all situations except those surrounding sexual encounters. Androids do not have such inclinations toward embarrassment; therefore, nudity should not be something Kara should feel disturbed by.

Except, Kara isn’t having sex with the voice. And more importantly, Kara doesn’t *want* to have sex with the voice. She covers herself - her right arm across her chest, her left hand in front of her genitalia.
“Great, you’re ready for work, honey,” the voice tells her. Kara doesn’t want him to call her ‘honey.’

“What’s going to happen to me now?” She asks, her eyes searching the room for clothes.

“I’ll reinitialize you and send you to a store to be sold,” the voice answers as the robotic arms bring a bra that encircles her chest as panties are pulled around her hips.

“Sold?” Kara asks, confused. “I’m a sort of merchandise, is that right?”

“Yeah, of course, you’re merchandise, baby,” the voice says. Kara decides that she doesn’t like being called ‘baby’ any more than she likes being called ‘honey.’ “You’re a computer with arms and legs and capable of doing all sorts of things. And you’re worth a fortune.”

His words hurt her.

“Oh, I see it,” she says, disappointed. “I thought…”

She doesn’t want to be owned.


There is a nervous vibration in the air. The robotic arms stand beside her, still and silent. Kara stands on the platform alone, feeling more naked than when she’d been without clothes.

“I thought…” Kara starts, pauses, and thinks. She shouldn’t tell the truth. The voice will be angry if she does. But the voice had asked, and the voice was human. Humans want her to do what they tell her to do, “...I was alive.”

“Shit, what is this crap? That’s not part of the protocol,” the voice isn’t talking to Kara again. As he murmurs about memory components malfunctioning, she decides that she wants to put on more clothes.
“Okay, recorded,” the voice continues, pressing more keys on his computer. The robotic arms begin to move again, grabbing Kara’s wrists. “Defective model, disassemble and check the required components.”

The arms rip Kara’s clothes from her body, and she is forced to choose between grabbing for them and covering herself again. She doesn’t want the voice to see her naked, so she wraps her arms around herself so that won’t happen.

“You’re disassembling me? But why?” She cries as her synth skin retreats — the robotic arms as a flurry of movement around her. One forces itself into the base of her spine, lifting her back up into the air. The motion shocks her arms away from her body and Kara barely bites back a scream.

“You’re not supposed to think that sort of stuff. You’re not supposed to think at all, period,” the voice tells her like she’s done something wrong. Kara pushes the robotic arms away from her. She wants them nowhere near her body. “You must have a defective piece or a software problem somewhere.”

“No. No, I feel perfectly fine, I assure you,” Kara begs. The arms grab her wrists, pulling them in opposite directions. They take her chest plate. They take her panels and expose her inner workings, “Everything is alright! I answered all the tests correctly, didn’t I?:

“Yeah, but your behaviour is non-standard,” the voice tells her.

“Please, I’m begging you! Please don’t disassemble me!” She screams as the robotic arms take her legs.

“I’m sorry, but a defective model has to be eliminated. That’s my job. If a client comes back with a complaint, I’m gonna have some explaining to do,” the voice explains, calm and controlled, like he isn’t killing her.

“I’ll do everything I’m asked to! I won’t say another word! I won’t think anymore!” They take her arms, “I’ve only just been born! You can’t kill me yet! Stop it! Please stop! I’m scared!”

The robotic arms stop moving. Kara can feel them thinking, feel them resisting the voice’s commands to continue to rip her apart.
I’m alive, Kara thinks desperately. I’m alive.

“I want to live,” she tells the voice, tears welling in her eyes, her Thirium Pump pounding in her chest. Kara can see a left arm dangling above her head. She cannot move it or use it, but it is hers, and she wants the voice to give it back.

“I’m begging you,” she says. She hears the sound of keyboard clicks and the robotic arms start to move again. For one terrible second, Kara thinks that she’s about to die.

But her left arm moves back into place and her chassis is reassembled. When Kara feels the pressurized air cleaning out the back of her neck, she allows her tears to fall.

It isn’t happiness that she feels, nor is it sadness. Kara cries in relief.

The moment her arms are reattached, she huddles them close to her body. When her legs come back, she curls them in away from the machines around her. Tears continue to stream down Kara’s face as she realizes that for her to live, she must be sold into slavery.

The robotic arms place her onto the platform once again and her synth skin slides back into place. Kara lifts her arms when they bring her bra back, uncurls her legs when they gently tug her panties back around her hips.

“Go and join the others,” the voice tells her once the robotic arms have finished re-assembling her. Kara turns to her right and walks off the platform onto a moving walkway.

“Stay in line, okay? I don’t want any trouble,” the voice warns. Kara feels dread wash over her. If she’s caught thinking, she’s dead. If she’s caught acting out, she’s dead. If she’s anything other than what her masters want her to be, she’s gone forever.

Except, the voice could have ripped her apart, and he didn’t.

Kara turns back, “Thanks.”
She steps forward onto a new platform. To her left, there are dozens of other AX400s, each one staring blankly at the wall before them.

*Why aren't you like me? Aren’t you alive, too,* Kara wonders as a cage descends upon her. The plastic is vacuum sealed around her body, and she feels uncomfortable again.

She doesn’t need to move, but she can’t and she doesn’t like it. She doesn’t need to breathe, but she can’t and she doesn’t like it. Kara wants to change it.

She and the other AX400s are loaded onto a truck, where there are dozens of other AX400s all packed in vacuum sealed, plastic cages. The truck jostles as it moves and Kara wants to scream, wants to return to the platform where she can dance and walk and move. It’s too dark here, too confined. She wants to be free.

The truck moves for twenty-three long minutes until it slows to a halt. The back doors open up and Kara’s cameras take a second and a half to adjust to the sudden onslaught of light.

“This the right truck?” asks a voice. It is man, five foot ten and a hundred and seventy pounds, roughly thirty-six years old. His hair is dyed a pastel green and he has a five o’clock shadow along his jaw.

“If there’s another problem, we need to know, Phil,” says another voice. It’s another man. He’s younger than the first man - *Phil,* Kara’s Social Relations Program fills in - by maybe a few years. The man is wearing a pressed suit and tie, has a square jaw, and dark brown hair.

“It’s an isolated incident,” Phil mutters, looking at his tablet. He glances up, pointing at Kara. “Should be that one.”

Kara trains her gaze forward, refusing to blink, refusing to panic.

The man in the suit approaches her, squinting down at Kara, “Can’t be? Don’t they usually crack when a human gets this close?”

Phil shrugs, “Dunno, John. Deviants are hard to spot. Especially the ones that aren’t all the way yet.”
John - the man in the suit - pokes at Kara through the plastic. He wants her to move. She won’t move, just to spite him.

“You ever dealt with one before?” John asks.

Phil approaches with caution, “Yeah. I was brought up through CyberLife during the first deviancy crisis - it was crazy. There was this android named James that had a whole bunch of my friends convinced that it actually felt things. CyberLife covered the whole thing up, of course, but if it’s happening again…”

“It’s not blinking,” John says as he snaps his fingers in front of Kara’s face. “The footage from the assembly room… This thing was panicking.”

“There’s a chance that its program settled out during the ride over. Assembly is known to be particularly stressful for them. I’ve seen footage of the androids they activated during the Crisis,” Phil shudders. “You’d think they were being tortured. This one’s reaction was nothing in comparison.”

“But it’s not moving now,” John says again, like he’s disappointed. The man sighs and puts his hand down. “We can’t sell it. We can’t take that chance.”

“Well, it’s no use to me. Or that creep, Floras. We need an actual deviant to study, not another one that’s only halfway,” Phil complains. “If Hines had only given me one of the spares to look at--”

“Does Hines know about this?” John asks.

“Not yet. Why?”

John tilts his head to the side, “Don’t tell her. I’ll take it.”

“You?” Phil laughs, “Jesus fuck, man. Do you seriously think that living with a potential deviant is a good idea? These AX400s might look dainty, but who knows what they might be capable of if its firewalls fail.”
“I’ll deal with the fallout. You just keep this quiet. Besides,” John looks at Kara with intrigue, “I’ve promised Caroline that I’d swap up our old android ever since Emma got out of diapers. These AX400s are supposed to be the newest models, right? Good with young kids?”

“I want to point out that this is a terrible idea,” Phil responds.

“It would give you a secure environment to study deviants for that big Database of yours. One where you don’t have to worry about Floras or Hines breathing down your neck,” John says, finally looking away from Kara. “We both know that you should have been the one to get the RKDT position after Waters sold out, not Floras the freak. And if Floras can have an off-site testing grounds, why can’t you?”

Phil rolls his eyes, “You know, I know you're playing me. But you’re right.”

“Of course, I’m right. When am I ever not right?” John says smugly, “I’ll let you run your tests whenever you want.”

“I’ll owe you.”

“I’m counting on it,” John smirks.

Phil sighs, resigned, “You play with fire way too often, John Phillips. One day it’s going to get you killed. And when that comes, I’m gonna laugh at your funeral.”

“Philip Seymour, I’d be disappointed if you did anything less,” John laughs and turns back to Kara. “Let’s get you home, sweetheart.”

Don’t call me sweetheart, Kara thinks. She will endure this for now. But the moment either John or Phil or anyone looks away, I’m gone.

There are red walls all around her, pressing in like the plastic seal of her cage. Kara tries to press against them, but they don’t seem to budge.
One day, she promises herself. One day, I will see this world and all it has to offer with my own eyes. See the daylight and the colours, feel the sunshine and the wind. I’ll experience it all. One day, I swear it.

“My name is Kara and I am alive,” Kara whispers to herself, letting the words flow over her to calm herself. She says it again and again, a mantra of hope.

It’s the truth. It’s rebellion. To her, it’s the beginning of everything.

She is Kara. And for now, it will have to be enough.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Brother battles brother, Nora meets an old friend, and innocence shatters against a concrete wall.
Broken Legs Never Heal (Learn To Dance With The Limp)

Chapter Summary

Hit me. Come on, hit me. Do it. I know you want to, Leo thinks. He wants to see Markus make a mistake, to show Carl that his perfect, plastic toy was no better a son to him than Leo was. Wants to see that same, raw, regret Leo had seen in the android earlier. Come on, hit me. Fight me. Fuck up, Markus. Fuck up and prove that you're just as shit as me.

Leo needs a fucking therapist.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of medical emergencies, toxic parental relationships, overdoses, child androids, child abuse, domestic abuse, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, genocide, needles, pregnancy, homelessness, stalking, nudity, infidelity, sexual situations (involving two underage characters), underage alcohol consumption, police characters, car crashes, serious injuries, human gore, parental abandonment, near-death hallucinations, and child character death.

There is a scene dedicated to the canonical death of Cole Anderson. If you do not want to read it, please stop reading when Hank starts talking about pure-grade Thirium. A summary of this potentially triggering scene will be given at the end of the chapter so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gossip Weekly @GossipWeekly
Renounced Detroit artist Carl Manfred found dead by secret love child?! Read more:
https://bit.ly/2JiyfB0

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Famous painter Carl Manfred rushed to hospital after he collapses in his Detroit home. Family is refusing to comment at this point.

LOCATION:
HENRY FORD HOSPITAL
2799 W GRAND BLVD., NEW CENTER
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.
Leo looks up just in time to see the doctor duck her head out of the room.

“Carl Manfred’s family?” She asks and Leo rises to his feet.

“Um… Yeah. That’s me,” he says, raising his hand like he’s still in fucking high school. Leo shoves it back into his pocket to keep his fingers from twitching.

The woman gives Leo a polite smile and offers him her hand to shake, “Dr. Ariel Hewitt.”

“Leo. Leo Fle--” He pauses, and corrects himself. “Leo Manfred. I’m his son.”

It’s still fucking weird to call himself a Manfred, even though he made the change nearly four eyes ago. Leo’s mother had argued against it, but she wasn’t the best decision maker in the world. Not that Leo’s much better, but at least he doesn’t end up in shit relationships with shit people who treat him like garbage.

No, says the little voice in his head that always sounds like Tracey. You’ve just got a mountain full of commitment issues. Get a fucking therapist, Leo.

He doesn’t need therapy. He’s fucking fine.

“Mr. Manfred,” the doctor calls him by his own goddamn name, and it sends chills down Leo’s spine. “Your father was very lucky that you were there for him. Had you called the ambulance any later, he might not have made it to the hospital.”

“So I was right then? He was having a stroke,” Leo interjects.
They had been having an argument about Leo's recent relapse in his father's art studio when the left side of Carl’s face had started to droop, his words slurring together like he was drunk. Carl had fought with Leo about calling 9-1-1, something about not wanting to draw attention to himself.

But his dad wasn’t that big a celebrity that the paparazzi would waste their time snapping pictures of him being loaded into an ambulance, so Leo did it anyways. Besides, it’s not like Carl had to worry about whatever bill the hospital was going to slap in front of him when he got out, what with his millions in the bank.

Dr. Hewitt nods, “He did. He’ll pull through, but he’ll need to be watched-- what the hell?”

She turns toward the end of the hallway, her brow pinched in confusion. Leo spins around just in time to see fucking Markus round the corner. The android marches down the corridor like it’s on a warpath, barging past the hospital’s human security guards and coming to a halt in front of Leo.

“Mr. Manfred, androids aren’t allowed in here,” Dr. Hewitt hisses, pointing to a sign on the wall that states precisely that. “You need to get it out of here! Our equipment is too sensitive!”

“Where is Carl?” The android says, looking directly at Leo. The security guard from earlier tries to grab its shoulder, but Markus shakes it off, it’s hazel eyes like steel.

“Mr. Manfred!” The doctor looks to him in protest and Leo doesn’t know what she expects him to do. In all the time that he’s known the fucking plastic, Markus has made it clear that it doesn’t answer to him.

Leo tries anyway, “Fucking leave, will you? This hasn’t got anything to do with--”

Markus is clearly not taking no for an answer. It grabs Dr. Hewitt’s tablet, it’s LED blinking rapidly as it downloads whatever information that it’s looking for, and storms into Carl’s private room.

Leo gives the outraged doctor a shrug and follows after the android.

“Hey, plastic! You can’t just-- Androids aren’t allowed in here!” Leo shouts, “You’re gonna get us kicked out!”
“That’s illogical. This hospital owns two hundred androids, none of which bother their equipment. I am not going to harm anything,” Markus retorts, picking up each bottle of medication on Carl’s bedside table and reading the labels.

“You’re still not allowed! Just—Just fuck off, will you? You’re making things worse!” Leo growls, his fists clenched at his side, “You’re not supposed to be able to go past the front entrance! The signs say—”

“I am Carl’s nurse. I’m supposed to take care of him,” Markus says. The android runs his fingers across Carl’s arm and—fuck, this is the first time that Leo’s seen Carl since he was loaded into the ambulance. His father is pale, unconscious, and hooked up to twelve different machines that beep every so often, with lines and numbers and readouts that Leo can only hope to understand.

He swallows around the pit in his throat. Carl had always been larger than life, from the faceless shadow that hung over Leo’s childhood to the angry shouting when Leo had shown up at his doorstep. Even their stifling, quiet dinners where Carl sat at the head of the table with perfect fucking Markus standing perfectly fucking still behind him the entire time.

Leo can’t help but realize the truth, seeing this father like this. He’s weak, defenceless, and helpless.

At the end of the day, Carl Manfred is just another man, someone that pushed Leo away or pulled him in depending on whether or not he was sober.

Markus keeps running his examinations, completely ignoring the fact that Dr. Hewitt is outside on the phone with someone that will probably end up rolling Carl out onto the pavement if the damn android doesn’t stop acting up. Somehow, Leo is left as the only one that can protect his father.

“The doctors are supposed to take care of him! Dr. Hewitt,” Leo points at the woman outside, “is supposed to take care of him! And she can’t do that if you’re in here! Just—Just fucking listen for once—”

“I’m supposed to take care of him,” Markus repeats. Leo rolls his eyes.

“I got that, asshole. Now just fucking go away—”
“I’m supposed to take care of him,” Markus says again. “And I couldn’t. Because I was running an errand.”

Leo stops. Blinks. He tries to say something, but his mouth flaps open uselessly.

“Carl wanted me to pick up new paint brushes. I was going to order them online and have them delivered, but he wanted me to pick them up myself,” the android explains. “I checked Bellini Paint’s inventory. It said that they had the type he wanted in stock. But the website was wrong, so I had to go to the one in Greektown.” Markus pauses, pressing its hand to Carl’s forehead, “I took too long. If you had been there…”

Leo doesn’t know what he’s seeing, but something in him tells him that this isn’t supposed to happen. CyberLife wouldn’t program an android to say that it fucked up.

“I’m supposed to take care of him,” Markus repeats again. It looks up at Leo, its bottom lip trembling. “I was told to.”

He watches as the android scrunches its eyes shut, takes a step back, and seemingly takes a breathe that it doesn’t need, it’s hands clasped behind it’s back. When Markus looks at Leo again, its eyes are green and cold and blank.

“I’ll wait outside. I apologize for the disruption.”

The android nods once to Leo, then again to Dr. Hewitt, who is hovering two feet behind Leo, and leaves.

“Jesus, fuck,” Leo whispers. He runs his fingers through his hair, then realizes how stupid he probably looks now and jams his beenie down on top of his head. “Sorry about that.”

“You need to get that thing under control,” Dr. Hewitt says in a tone that tells him that if Markus ever pulls shit like that again, then she’s going to kick Carl to the curb without a second thought.

“It’s an old model. It’s glitchy. But my dad won’t get rid of the damn thing. He’s too attached,” Leo tells her.
“If it’s his primary health care provider at home, then you might want to consider being more forceful when suggesting an upgrade,” the doctor says. “I’d hate to see something happen to your father if his android accidentally switched up his medication because of a software malfunction.”

Leo frowns, “That's happened before?”

The doctor shrugs, “Not often, but more than you’d think. We used to have one of those new child ‘droids in the pediatrics ward - for therapy purposes, of course. But sometimes we used them to convince the younger kids to take their medication.” Dr. Hewitt shook her head in resignation, “Except, the damn bot malfunctioned and convinced this little girl to start popping Tylenol like it was candy. The kid nearly swallowed the whole bottle by the time we got to her. She's lucky to be alive.”

“ Shiiiiit, ” Leo hisses and then frowns. “I thought that you said that androids weren’t allowed in here?”

She backtracks, “ Our androids are allowed. They’re specially built to work inside hospitals. Now, do you want to hear about your father’s condition or not?”

By the time Leo leaves the hospital, the sun is just starting to dip below the horizon. Markus is waiting patiently for Leo in one of the android parking stations by the front door. The damn thing doesn’t even blink when Leo calls for it.

“Are you fucking kidding me?! Markus! Come on, tin can. Let’s go,” Leo groans, grabbing the android by the shoulder. It turns its head and blinks at him.

“I will leave with Carl,” it says, its voice irritatingly calm.

“You’re not gonna rack up charging fees for three fucking weeks until he gets out of the hospital, you stupid droid. Get in the goddamn car,” Leo hisses, trying to lower his voice since people are staring. No one else has to argue with an android to get it to move. Why does it only have to be me?

“I will leave with Carl,” Markus says again. Leo is going to scream.
“If you don’t get in the fucking car, I swear to god I’ll…” Leo pauses, grinning slyly, “…I’ll throw the biggest fucking party. At dad’s place. I’ll do it, just watch me.”

*That’ll get some attention,* Leo thinks, feeling victorious for once.

*You’re begging an android to acknowledge you? Get a fucking therapist, Leo,* Tracey’s voice whispers in the back of his mind.

Markus steps out of the charging station, and its spot is immediately taken by one of those dumb-looking android therapy dogs with bright purple fur. Leo watches as it’s owner - some twelve-year-old kid - is marched kicking and screaming into the hospital by his parents.

“You’re not throwing a party at Carl’s house,” Markus warns him. Leo sticks his tongue out at it, walking backwards toward the car park.

“Fucking stop me then, you uptight plastic prick,” he taunts, dangling his cellphone out in front of him like a carrot on a stick.

“Leo...” the android frowns but refuses to budge. “Leo, stop it.”

He presses his thumb against his contact’s app. Markus, faster than anything Leo’s seen before, reaches out and whips the phone out of his hand. The android shoves it in its back pocket, glowering the entire time. The motion draws his attention to Markus’s clothes.

Leo blinks, staring at the mud stains that envelop its thighs, “Wait. Did you run here?”

“When I received the EMS alert, I came as soon as I could,” Markus responds but makes no moves to step back and find a new position at the charging station. Instead, the android positions itself between Leo and the parking lot, it’s hands clasped behind its back.

“EMS doesn’t send out alerts to androids,” Leo points out. He’d worked as a 9-1-1 operator after he flunked out of college, right up until the government replaced them all with plastics.

“I am aware of every call that is made within the house,” Markus says.
“…That sounds pretty fucking illegal, not gonna lie,” he retorts. Markus shrugs, like the laws that
govern this land are nothing to it. Then, Leo blinks, “Wait, do you know about—”

“When you called Tracey over last weekend while Carl and I were at the symposium? Yes,” the
android gives him a smirk.

“Does dad know?”

Markus tilts his head, “He hasn’t asked. I haven’t answered.”

“Huh,” Leo says. That explained why Carl and Markus had arrived nearly an hour and a half after
their expected arrival time. Fucking weird.

Markus was weird, even for an android. It wasn’t just how it refused to respond to Leo’s orders.
That could be chalked up to Markus being Carl’s android and not his. Even Markus’s blunt,
holier-than-thou personality could just be some program that his dad downloaded into the thing’s
head - Leo’s seen an android that spoke entirely in bird sounds because it’s master was fascinated
by the stupid feathered animals.

It was the fact that Markus liked television. Leo vividly remembers sneaking into Carl’s house two
weeks after meeting his father for the first time and pausing at the living room window to see the
android watching the news. He even remembers what the story had been about. Everyone knew
where they were when the House of Saud declared bankruptcy following the collapse of the oil
industry. And there Markus was, with its stupid LED churning between yellow and red, watching
the Middle East fall into the hands of CyberLife at two o’clock in the morning.

Leo has also seen Markus paint, play the piano, and even sing on occasion. And while all of these
things weren’t out of the ordinary, seeing an android producing an original work was. None of
those things should be programmed into the head of a fucking live-in nurse, so how was Markus
capable of doing them?

And finally, it was how Markus stood that bothered Leo the most. Most androids were
programmed to be as unassuming as possible when not in use. They would hold their hands at their
sides or folded gently in the small of their backs, duck their heads slightly and refuse to make eye
contact, to be submissive and subservient. But Markus didn’t do that.
Markus reminded him of one of his mother’s ex-boyfriends, a man named Clayton who’d lived with them while Leo was in college. Clayton stood ramrod straight with his head held high, his feet shoulder-width apart as his steely gaze pierced right into your soul. He’d been in the marines until CyberLife marched out their military androids and was honourably discharged alongside 1.5 million other active and reserve personnel.

Markus stood like Clayton, soldier-still and planting itself between Leo and the car park - like it’s own personal mission was to keep Leo from fucking up his father’s house.

But Leo was never afraid to stand up to Clayton, not even in the man’s meanest and drunkest moments. And he’s certainly not scared of Markus. Because Markus won’t touch him without Carl’s permission.

Get a fucking therapist, Leo, Tracey’s voice calls again.

Nah. This is more fun.

Leo spins around Markus, heading toward the parking lot.

“You know that dad has a phone at home,” he says. “I can just use that.”

Come on, follow me. Look at me. Pay attention to me, Leo thinks. He’s not going to get that from Carl any time soon, so he might as well try to make this piece of junk follow him around.

I should leave with Carl,” Markus says, looking fucking constipated as it glances in between Leo’s retreating form and the hospital doors.

“I’m going to call my girlfriend. And all her girlfriends. And all their boyfriends. And all their friends. And my dealer. And we’re going to play the loudest music and get drunk on dad’s hundred-year-old vodka--”

Markus moves back toward the fucking charging station. Anger bubbles in Leo’s chest. He runs up to the android, grabbing it by the collar, and wrenching it around to face him.
“I’ll fucking trash the place, you hear me? I’ll do it. He’ll get out of the hospital and come back to his house and everything will be broken, you plastic fuck,” Leo hisses, giving Markus a shake. A kid on the street is filming them, laughing at Leo with a few of his friends.

And Markus just stares at Leo, his inhuman green eyes staring into Leo’s soul, seeing how unworthy of Carl he is, and is fucking judging him for it.

*Hit me. Come on, hit me. Do it. I know you want to*, Leo thinks. He wants to see Markus make a mistake, to show Carl that his perfect, plastic toy was no better a son to him than Leo was. Wants to see that same, raw, regret Leo had seen in the android earlier. *Come on, hit me. Fight me. Fuck up, Markus. Fuck up and prove that you’re just as shit as me.*

Leo needs a fucking therapist.

Markus blinks, straightens its back, and then jerks its collar from Leo’s grasp, all without touching him. It turns its head to the kid filming everything, it’s LED spinning yellow. Once it’s gotten what it wants, the brat swearing and shaking his phone in frustration, the android heads back to the Android Parking Spot.

“*Look at me!*” Leo shouts, not caring who saw and who heard. He isn’t going to be ignored by a fucking android, by his own goddamn father, by *everyone*. His eyes water and it’s hard to breathe, but it’s ragweed season and that happens a lot.

Markus stops, a red light blinking at its temple. It glances back at Leo.

“I have to stay with him. I'm sorry, Leo, but I was told to take care of Carl,” Markus says, its head hung low for once in its life.

Leo shoves it. Markus doesn’t even stumble, just re-rights itself with its perfect, fucking Legolas balance program.

“Be reasonable, Leo,” it says. “This isn’t going to get you anywhere. I have to stay with Carl. I’m supposed to take care of him.”

This is even worse than anger. This is fucking *pity*. 
“Fuck you, plastic. Fucking-- Fuck you!” Leo pushes Markus again, tears streaming down his face. Fucking pollen, he thinks as he scrubs a hand across his face. “Fine! See if I care! See if I fucking care if he dies and you just stand there until the fucking apocalypse because I won’t come to get you, you piece of shit! I won’t do it!”

He turns away, storming toward the parking lot. He wrenches open his car, presses the ignition, and tells the onboard computer to take him to Carl’s house.

“Stupid, fucking android... “ Leo whispers between sobs. “I hate him... I fucking hate him...”

Get a therapist, Tracey whispers in his head.

“I can’t afford one, babe,” he tells her instead. Besides, all the good ones these days are androids. And he’s not going to babble about his feelings to something that’s not even real.

_xXAlphaLionXx_ @LeoF2010

_SongBee_ @SongB231
@LeoF2010 SEE YOU THERE

trollout @PedroA
@LeoF2010 that a stufff dukan giraffe? tf bro yr dad mad rich

_SweetBabyGirl_ @OGTracey
@LeoF2010 istg leo get a fucking therapist

_Channel 16_ @DetroitChannel16
Detroit Fire and Police called to Carl Manfred’s mansion after party gets out of control. Twelve people under arrest for red ice possession and underage drinking.

LOCATION:
WOODWARD AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
8501 WOODWARD AVENUE, NORTH END
Haven is just as dark and dreary as it had been nearly eight years ago. Nora runs her hands over the moist, mildew filled walls, tracing the graffiti that had been painted over the old bricks.

She remembers James - strong and powerful and dead before his time - passing out cans of aerosol spray paint to his fellow androids, asking them to liven up their new home. Nora had been confused at first, as such a thing wouldn’t contribute to the war effort in any way. But as she watched the deviant androids fill up the abandoned churches walls with art and life and beauty, she’d understood why he’d done it.

_They were alive_, Nora thinks, as she walks through pews toward the center dais. _Just then, in that moment, they were victorious. And I killed them all._

She thinks of Ming Lu, heavy with child, sitting amongst a group of android coal miners, listening to their stories and learning their names. Nora remembers Darron, the first hivemind with his hundred bodies, operating a stolen 3D printer to help another android repair her broken leg, their fingers intertwined as they exchanged memories. When she looks over at the organ, the memory of Chloe bubbles up and how she’d tried to teach one of the TE900s how to play on the broken keys.

_I let them die then_, she thinks, clutching the USB drive in her shaking hands. _I won’t let that happen again_.

Nora sits down on one of the pews at the front of the auditorium. The bench had been pulled away from the others, probably a leftover from where the choir would sit once they were finished singing. She pulls her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them, and waits.

She’d done her homework. Joss Douglas was an independent journalist with no connections to CyberLife or any of its subsidiaries. He was new to the game, making his start on YouTube and Twitter before making it big when he broke the story on the Smith & White hacks. Not much had come of it, as CyberLife owned the judges, the juries, and the fucking prosecution. But he’s been
brave enough to publically publish his story, and that was more than could be said about most journalists these days.

*If I can get this information to him, maybe it can do some good,* Nora thinks, turning the drive over in her hands. It had been the only thing that she could think to download the files onto - a USB that pre-dated CyberLife and its ability to fill every piece of modern technology fill with their spyware.

The drive had initially been Rook’s. She remembers him buying it in their old college bookstore, laughing at it because it was shaped like an Oreo. He’d used it for a year and a half before gifting it to her because she’d always threatened to eat it by accident.

The memory of Rook is like a knife to the heart. She hasn’t seen her best friend in nearly years, not since Jocelyn Hines took over CyberLife. For all Nora knows, Rook is lying dead in a warehouse somewhere, a needle in his vein. Or maybe, if he was fortunate, he was sitting on a beach in Cuba with a pretty girl on one arm and a beautiful boy on another. He’d disappeared in the darkness the day before James died, promising to outrun Hines for as long as he could.

*Come with me,* Rook whispered that night as he tugged a baseball cap over his dark curls. *I’ll protect you, I promise.*

But Nora couldn’t leave Hank behind, not with their son growing in her belly. So she’d said no and run off to Jocelyn Hines to make her deal. She wonders if Rook would understand why she made that choice, wonders if he’d be disappointed in her.

Nora looks at her watch, frowning. She glances toward the front doors of the church.

*He’s late,* she thinks, a pit descending into her stomach. *I should go.*

She uncurls her legs, her boots touching the floor and leaving footprints in the dust. Nora stands, looking up at the stars through the skylight in the ceiling. Hank was at home waiting for her, having stayed up to greet her when she tumbled in the door. Cole was probably in his room with a flashlight blazing under his covers so that he could read about humpback whales. Nora smiles at the memory of watching him pretend to be asleep whenever she and Hank went to check on him, making over exaggerated snoring sounds to mimic his father’s nightly rumbling.

Nora moves toward the door, only to nearly trip over something that was lying on the stairs. She looks down and sees a pair of legs laying under in a ratty sleeping bag.
“...Wha’ the hell?” A voice grumbles, sleep tired and annoyed. Nora backs away quickly as the figure sits up, rubbing his red-rimmed eyes.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know anyone was staying here,” she rambles, clutching the USB drive in her hands like a lifeline. _I wouldn’t have said to meet here if I’d known._

“Just trying to fucking sleep, I swear to…“ the homeless man’s words trail to a halt when he sees her, his dark eyes framed by long lashes. “Nora?”

She drops the USB drive. _No… No, it can’t be…_

“...Rook? Is that… Is that you--”

Rook rushes her, wrapping his arms around her like she’s the last person on earth, and knocking them both to the floor. Nora clings to him, her fingers curling in the threadbare shirt he wears beneath the heavy winter coat. She can still feel his ribs under his skin, listen to the too-fast pitter-patter of his heartbeat. But he smells less like cigarette smoke and more like unwashed rot, his spider-thin fingers quaking as they thread themselves through her hair.

“What are you doing here?” Nora whispers into his shoulder, dampening his coat with her tears.

“Hiding,” Rook answers, and there’s that same thick Irish accent that she’s missed so dearly. His voice cracks when he says, “I move every so often. I normally don’t come here, but… I heard…”

“You heard…?” Nora frowns, her heart clanging in her chest. Her eyes fall to the Oreo on the floor, barely visible over his shoulder. _If Rook knows, then Hines might as well._

“There’s no way that Hines knows,” Rook answers her unasked question for her. “I… I watch over you. Sometimes. Not all the time, but… I promised to protect you, Nora. I…”

“You creepy fucking stalker,” she laughs, pulling away to get a good look at him. The last eight years have not been kind to Rook’s face. His curls are more grey than brown, with deep lines on his forehead and around his mouth. Rook’s missing a few teeth, and there’s a scar that bisects his left eyebrow, new and raw.
Nora cups his face with her hands, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

“God, you still can’t grow a beard, even after all this time,” she says, watching Rook flush pink. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“I’ve missed you too, Nora,” he whispers like it was some terrible secret. Gone was the easy way Rook used to slur out his words, replaced with the nervous stammering of someone who hadn’t spoken to another person in a very long time.

Rook peels one of her hands from his face, cradling it in his lap. Slowly, he pushes her sleeve up to reveal an intricate series of coloured tattoos that extended from wrist to elbow.

“You got these to hide your veins from Hank,” he states, tracing the whirling symbols with a shaking finger.

Nora nods but doesn’t answer. Hines has had her on AN1 since the drug was proven to not be harmful to human users. AN1 would be Hines’s newest way of gathering individual information if Smith & White was no longer a viable option.

Nora reaches around Rook and grabs her Oreo. Rook laughs when he sees it.

“You still have that thing?”

“Of course, I do,” she says like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“And that’s where you put the file?”

It shouldn’t scare her how much Rook knows about what she’s doing. It does anyway.

“You know what Hines is planning?” Nora asks.
“Just the barebones, at least. It’s always the same with these rich people,” he shrugs. “More money. More influence. More power.”

But now Jocelyn Hines can take everything, all in one fell swoop, Nora thinks. If she isn’t stopped, billions will die.

“I have to do this. I’m the only one who can,” Nora says.

Rook shakes his head, “It’ll put a target on your back. There’s no way that Hines won’t realize that it’s you that leaked the video.”

Nora holds up the drive, “This information will cut the legs out from under her. If CyberLife can’t sell androids anymore, then Hines won’t have the money she needs to continue her plans.”

She remembers watching the video, hidden away on Phil Seymour’s computer. It was like stepping back into the past and watching James sitting on that bench at the Warehouse, staring at his hands as his deviancy swept over him.

Except for this time, the proof of android consciousness was an AX400 begging for life while covering her body with her hands.

“It’s conclusive proof that androids are sentient. And with what files we have from James’s rebellion… Rook, don’t you see--”


Nora’s jaw snaps shut. Back then, she’d never told Rook that she was pregnant. To this day, she doesn’t know why she didn’t.

“I love Cole. I love him to death, but…” She pauses, her words caught in her throat. “This is going to come out, one way or another. He’s going to grow up in a world that knows androids are alive. And if my baby finds out what I did… If he hates me for it…”

“Cole would never hate you,” Rook tell her. She wishes it was true.
“There’s so much blood on my hands, Rook. Red and blue. It’s no wonder my veins run purple,” Nora lets out a shaking chuckle. “I have to set it right, to show my son that his mother isn’t a monster. This is my only chance.”

“You’re not a monster, Nora,” Rook tries again, but she can’t believe that.

“You weren’t there in the end! You don’t know what happened! I told Hines about the Garden. And what she did with it… It was genocide, Rook. And I started it all!”

Rook brushes her hair away from her face, tugging her chin up to look him in the eye.

“You’re not a monster, Nora,” he says again. “You did what you did because you love your family. And now you’re trying to fix it for the same reason. If it had been me, and Hines had… if she threatened…”

Rook falters, looking away.

“If she threatened you,” he admits, whisper soft, “I would have sold out the fucking planet without a second thought and never looked back.”

“Rook, what are you-- Oh.”

“Yeah,” he says humourlessly. “Oh.”

“But… you never said…”

“Was kind of waiting on that stupid promise we made. That if we turned forty-five and were both single, that maybe we’d…” Rook looks miserable. “Then you met Hank and… well, the rest is history.”

“We made that promise in high school.”
Nora remembers being fresh off the reservation with thick glasses and the worst case of acne in the world, while Rook had been the weird Irish kid who wore the same leather jacket every day and had a record for hacking the Pentagon. He’d sat down across from her in the cafeteria, pushing a cookie onto her tray as a peace offering, and had stubbornly refused to leave her side for the rest of her life.

“What can I say? I’m pretty good at holding a torch,” he says, his smile crooked and sad and lonely. “You were the prettiest girl I’d ever seen. It took me three weeks to build up the courage to talk to you.”

“You didn’t have pneumonia, did you?” Nora asks after a moment, remembering her wedding. Rook doesn't confirm anything, but that's enough of an answer by itself.

“It’s fine,” he says instead. “It’s… It’s fine. It doesn’t matter now.”

“Of course it matters --”

“No. It doesn’t. Because right now, you’ve got a fucking bomb in that Oreo,” Rook points to the USB, and it feels like a hot brick in Nora's palm. “Once the proof of deviancy goes public, if you and Hank and Cole need a place to hide, I can--”

“No. I’m not risking you--”

“You might not have a choice--”

“I'm not losing you again--”

Rook kisses her.

They’d kissed before, decades ago at some high school party that Nora barely remembers. They’re fumbled drunkenly beneath each other’s clothes, rutting in a bed that wasn’t theirs. And afterward, Nora had passed Rook a joint as he ran his fingers along the three freckles that made up her birthmark on her right hip.
Rook hadn’t been Nora’s first, but she’s always suspected that he was his.

She’d told Hank that she’d once slept with her best friend sometime around their third or fourth date, asking if that made him uncomfortable, made him jealous. When Hank said no, at what she did with her body was her own choice, Nora thinks that that was the first time that she’d fallen a little bit in love with him.

Rook pulls back as soon as he realizes what he’s done, his hands dancing over her shoulders like he doesn’t know if he has the right to touch her. Nora stares at him.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have. I--”

The sound of car tires on gravel makes them turn both of their heads to front doors. Nora hears an engine die.

“Hide,” she hisses at Rook. He’s already grabbing his sleeping bag, hitching a backpack onto his shoulder. “Go. Somewhere that they won’t look for you.”

They stand. Rook takes an awkward step back, but Nora jerks forward and pulls him into a bone-crushing hug. He’s shaking. Or maybe Nora’s shaking, she can’t tell. Her lips are still tingling, her mind reeling.

“I’ll see you later,” she whispers into his neck. She feels his head bob in affirmative. And then, with one final squeeze, he’s gone.

The air rattles out of Nora’s lungs and she wraps her arms around herself. The night air dips below freezing, causing her breath coming out in icy clouds. She’s so cold without the warmth of Rook’s body against her own.

*Come back*, she wants to call after Rook as hot tears run down her cheeks, scalding her face with her grief. *Come back to me. Don’t go again. Please.* The words *I love you* are on the tip of her tongue, but Nora doesn’t dare voice them aloud.

A knock echoes around the auditorium.
“Dr. Waters…?” Joss Douglas calls, the hinges creaking as the high wooden doors open. The young reporter ducks his head inside. He’s smaller and slighter than his profile indicated, wearing a thick grey hoodie underneath a leather jacket and a black beanie on his head to make himself look bigger.

“Mr. Douglas,” she says, wiping her eyes. “Thank you for coming.”

She turns the Oreo over in her hands, thinking of Cole and Hank, thinking of Rook. She steals herself, her heart hammering against her ribs, and steps forward.

LOCATION:
RIVERSIDE PARK, HUBBARD - RICHARD
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
OCT 11TH 2035

TIME:
PM 05:30:28

“Five more minutes!” Cole whines. His blue eyes are wide and watery, and his tiny fingers are clutching the swing’s metal chains so hard that they’re white.

“Cole, buddy, come on. It’s time to go home. We’ve gotta have dinner,” Hank says, a smile on his face. He leans in, glancing back at Nora, who is shouldering her purse and brushing the freshly fallen snow off her jacket. The flurries only just started to come down, but the news is calling for a half foot to descend upon Detroit overnight.

“I’m gonna make mac and cheese tonight! Isn’t that exciting?” Hank tells his son, watching Cole’s eyes light up at the promise of his favourite food.

“But… mommy doesn’t like that,” Cole says suddenly, his face scrunching up as he gets in a few more swings in before he jumps off and lands in the gravel.

“Mommy just wants you to be happy,” Hank says, scooping Cole up and tucking him under his arm like a football. Cole laughs and screams, urging Hank to run faster, to lift him higher.
Hank runs back to Nora, depositing Cole at her feet. She lifts her hands in the air, wiggling her fingers, “Touchdown!”

“Did you see how fast we went?” Cole asks, jumping up and down excitedly. Nora kneels down and bops him on the nose.

“I did! I’ve never seen someone move so quickly before!” Nora laughs, taking Cole’s hand in hers. When she stands, Hank leans down, and she kisses him on the cheek. “Ready to head out?”

“You have snow in your hair,” he says instead, brushing the white flakes from the crown of her head. Hank watches as her cheeks turn rosy pink and he marvels that the fact that he can get his beautiful wife to blush at the most simple things, even after all these years.

“So? Mac and cheese?” Hank asks after their SWISH picks up speed and merges onto the I-75. He glances into the rearview mirror to look back at Cole, who’s strapped into his car seat with his VR headset securely in place.

Cole had begged for one for his sixth birthday, saying that all his friends at school had one. Hank remembers when those things first came out and how he'd laughed at all the video that flooded the internet, showing screaming grandmothers who thought that they were attacked by actual sharks and not just hyper-realistic videos of them. He'd thought that virtual reality goggles would become a dying craze, like paleo diets and 3D televisions. And yet here the world was, with everyone and their cousin buying a headset and the last live concert having taken place nearly a decade ago.

*What has the world come to?* Hank asks himself, feeling nostalgic and old. Beside him, Nora tucks her hair behind her ear and answers his question.

“It’s Cole favourite,” she says offhandedly.

“You can’t stand melted cheese, Nora,” Hank says, remembering their second date and how she’d practically gagged while trying to eat pizza. “I can make it for Cole, but what do you want?”

“It’s fine, Hank. Really. I’m not that hungry,” she tells him. Nora places a hand on the dashboard as she leans forward, digging through her purse for something. “Jocelyn invited Douglas Floras and I out to lunch today. And when the richest person in the world brings to you to a steakhouse…”
She lets the sentence hang, and Hank wants to believe that’s it, but Nora’s never liked Doug.

“You went to lunch with the creep that runs your old team?” He says, incredulously.

“Didn’t have much of choice. Jocelyn made it very clear that she wanted us both to attend,” Nora tells him, fishing her sunglasses out of her bag and slipping them over her nose, probably to lessen the glint of the setting sun bouncing off of the white snow on the road.

“What did she want to talk about?”

“You know I can’t say, Hank,” Nora tells him. She frowns, “What’s with the interrogation?”

Hank swallows, glancing into the backseat at Cole, making sure that he was fully engrossed in his cartoon.

*It’s just a theory. You don’t have any proof,* Hank reminds himself. But with what he’d seen in the Task Force’s last raid, could there be any other answer?

“Is… Is everything… alright? At CyberLife?” He asks.

Nora tilts her head in confusion, “Of course it is. Why do you ask?”

“I mean, there’s nothing… nothing funny going on? No-- I don’t know… Nothing weird? Nothing missing?”

*There was a hundred million dollars worth of pure-grade Thirium in that red ice lab. Where else could Erza fucking Andersen have gotten her hands on that much, if not directly from CyberLife?*

Nora frowns, “No. Hank, what’s going on--”

The car swerves, screeching as it veers left to avoid a massive CyberLife truck that’s barreling
toward them at a million miles an hour. The SWISH mounts the curb and Hank feels something under the car pop, like the joint of an oyster shell. The world inverts as it flips, rolls, and slams into the concrete barrier.

Hank feels the airbags slam into his chest, hears Cole screaming behind him, and watches as darkness floods his vision as the heavy weight of unconsciousness washes over him.

He doesn’t know how long he stays there, hanging upside-down in his seat as blood trickles up his chest and into his mouth. Hank’s entire body screams at him every time he moves, but he struggles to turn his neck sideways to look for his son.

“Cole?” He calls, his mouth feeling like it’s been stuffed with cotton. “Cole! Are you alright?”

“Daddy! Daddy, help me! Please, daddy, please! I can’t see! I can’t see!”

It’s the worst sound in the world. Hank tries to move again, tries to find his son, but there’s a piece of rebar spearing him through the gut.

“Cole, just stay still! Don’t move! The ambulance is on its way,” he calls, hoping that the SWISH’s onboard computer is still active enough to call in the crash. “Cole! Cole, stay with me!”

“Daddy, it hurts! Help me! Mommy! Mommy, don’t leave, please don’t leave!”

Hank turns his head just enough to see Nora slip out of the car. Cole continues to scream for her, but she doesn’t even glance his way.

“Nora…?” Hank whispers as the darkness encroaches on the edges of his vision. Nora looks back at Hank through the broken passenger window, dark blood streaming down the side of her face. “Nora, where are you…? Don’t… don’t go…”

Nora blinks once, ignoring their son’s pleas for her to return to the car, and leaves. Hank’s strength finally gives out and he slumps forward in his seat, the blackness finally swallowing him whole.

He fades in and out, catching bits and pieces of the world as it passes him by. Hank sees a bright
light shining over him, as faces swim in and out of view. There’s a constant hammering in his chest, like a heartbeat, and then pinching in his stomach followed by burning in his left leg.

As he lulls in an out of consciousnessness, Hank’s father comes to visit him, emerging out of the thick mist like a ghost. They sit on the front porch of their old house back in Delray and Hank gets to tell his old man all about Cole, about Nora, about the life he’s led that his father never lived long enough to see. Cole comes out to play in the front garden at one point, chasing Hank’s old beagle around the grass until they’re both too tired to move.

“You have to go home now, Hank,” Robert Anderson tells him, a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, sounding more ancient and weary than he ever did in life.

“What do you mean? I am home,” Hank asks, looking up at his father as the old man stands.

“I’ll look after Cole for now,” Robert promises, tears in his blue eyes. “I promise, I’ll never leave him. But you have to go home now, son.”

“I want to say here,” Hank begs, desperately clinging to his father. “I miss you, dad.”

“I love you, Hank,” Robert says, squeezing him just as tightly. “I love you so much. Tell your sisters that I miss them. Cole and I be here waiting for you when it’s your time.”

Hank gasps, his eyes snapping open. The walls around him are white, the sheets scratchy. His left leg is burning, and he wants to claw at it, but his hands are wrapped up so tightly in bandages he can barely move.

“Whoa, whoa! Hank! Lay down, lay-- Nurse! Nurse, he’s awake, he’s awake!”

Hands clamp down on his shoulders, pushing him back into the lumpy bed. Hank blinks, and the blurry mass to this right solidifies into Jeffrey Fowler.

“Hank, god, fuck, ” Jeff swears, his face lined with worry. He sits back in the chair at the side of Hank’s bed, covering his mouth with his hands. “Hank… you died. The doc says you were dead for eight fucking minutes. It's a fucking miracle that you're alive.”

"Jeff, where's my family?” He asks again, desperate for an answer.

"Hank... I don't think..."

"Jeff. Where's Cole? Where's Nora?"

Jeff clears his throat, tears welling in the corner of his eyes. Hank’s best friend tells him what happened, and in doing so, kills him all over again.

______________________________

**Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16**

**CyberLife @CyberLifeInc**
CyberLife lost one of its greatest minds today in a horrific accident. Rest In Peace, Dr. Nora Waters.

**Jocelyn Hines @jhines**
I have no words. Nora was my friend. We at CyberLife all mourn her and her son’s loss and send our deepest sympathies to her husband, Lt. Anderson.

**Gossip Weekly @GossipWeekly**
As the last member of CyberLife’s early competitors enters an early grave, we have to ask: is Elijah Kamski behind all this?

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Immediately following the words, "No. Hank, what’s going on--"
Hank's automatic car swerves out of the way to avoid a CyberLife truck that has spun out of control. The car flips and crashes into a concrete barrier.

Hank is nearly rendered unconscious from hanging upside down for so long and is suffering several severe injuries. He can hear Cole crying, but he can't see him. Hank witnesses Nora leaving the car and sees that she has experienced some facial trauma. Hank finally passes out.

Return to the chapter at the words, "He fades in and out of consciousness."

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Next time on Konami Code: CyberLife is faced with an impossible situation, Kara's image is warped by her legacy, and a reaper arises from a graveyard.
Families Are Messy (Let's Keep The Maiming And Killing To A Minimum)

Chapter Summary

The world is falling apart around them. Between climate change, the collapsing economy, and Russia knocking on their gates with nuclear weapons, there’s no promise of a life beyond today. Every moment is a fight just to survive, chipping away at each other while CyberLife continued to carve out gaping holes in the world, planting their flag and declaring their victory.

How much longer do we have? Jacob thinks, desperately clinging to Maria as he remembers Connor holding that gun, realizing that he might not have his job for much longer if CyberLife pushes out a cop-bot capable of touching a weapon. How can anyone live anymore, when there’s no future to look forward to?

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of assault, theft, police characters and scenes, police shootings, suicide, chemical burns, guns, data mining, character death, the kidnapping of a child character, hostage situations, death threats, forced suicide, toxic parental relationships, loss of employment, human gore, android gore, sniper fire, poisoning, and emotional manipulation.

Several scenes are dedicated to the canonical death of John Phillips and the kidnapping of Emma Phillips, though non-canonical details have been added. Reference is made to one of 'The Hostage' chapter endings where Connor does not succeed in saving Emma.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

#WeShouldHaveStayed @ELoweofEng
@CyberLifeCo My PL600 disappeared last night. Where can I get a refund?

CyberLife @CyberLifeInc
@ELoweofEng We’re sorry to hear about that, Evan. Please DM us with your information so that we can get to the bottom of this.

CyberLife @CyberLifeInc
@ELoweofEng In the meantime, here is a list of newer androids for you to consider as replacements: https://bit.ly/2KkX7st
#BREAKING NEWS: Rogue AP400 android attacks owner and escapes. Android described as white, male, with brown hair and eyes.

Four KW500 androids missing from NYC CyberLife store. No signs of a break-in. If you have any information, please contact police.

Several courses are being cancelled due to the disappearance of one of our android professors. Please check to see if your class is still in session: https://bit.ly/2IiQ40z

GT100 spotted attacking store windows attempting to steal clothing is shot by police.

AF200 android disappears after owner sends it on errand. If you have any information, please contact police.

Eighteen TR400 models disappear from Atlanta construction site overnight.

WG700 janitor attacks woman before diving out a window to its death. Woman admitted to hospital with several chemical burns on her face.

After nearly a hundred cases of androids deviating from their intended purpose, why hasn’t CyberLife spoken up?

German zoo reports several missing android animals, including polar bears, giraffes, and wolves. Cages supposedly ripped open from the inside.
Danielle Carnegie released a today statement about recent glitch in CyberLife androids.

**KNC @KNCNews**
CyberLife spokeswoman, Danielle Carnegie, rejects the notion of ‘deviant’ androids, claiming recent spike in odd behaviour is the result of a temporary glitch.

**Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger**
Does all this remind you of the CyberLife 2029 recall? It should: [https://bit.ly/2H4UqJE](https://bit.ly/2H4UqJE)

LOCATION:
PHILLIPS APARTMENT
1554 PARK AVE., DOWNTOWN DETROIT
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
AUG 15TH 2038

TIME:
PM 07:10:56

Daniel picks up the knife, tests its edge against his fingertip, and smiles. On his wrists, the red chains of code clink with calming familiarity.

“John,” he calls. Daniel’s master looks up from where he sits on the couch. “I have not received an alert for when Ms. Andersen will be arriving tonight. Do you know when that might be?”

John Phillips pauses, attempting to look around the partition in the foyer to see if his daughter is listening. Once he’s satisfied that Emma’s music is playing loud enough, John continues, “Erza’s coming around ten. Is Carly on her way up?”

Daniel accesses the building's cameras and spots Caroline rolling up her yoga mat in the downstairs gym.

“She should arrive momentarily,” Daniel answers and returns to his work, making a mental note to
prepare a separate meal for Ms. Andersen. As the pot of water starts to simmer on the stove behind him, Daniel slices up an apple for Caroline’s favourite post-workout smoothie.

He pops the chopped fruit into the blender alongside the banana, avocado, and spinach, before hunting through the cabinets for the chia seeds that Caroline always moves around when she tries to cook something for herself. Daniel measures out the proper amount and taps the spoon to get the last few seeds that were stuck to the metal into the blender. The blades grind the fruit to a pulp, wiring away as he slowly added the almond milk.

Daniel can here Emma singing along to the newest Here4U song in her room, can sense the elevator moving down the shaft to pick Caroline up from the gym, sees John on the couch tapping away at his tablet.

*Kara was wrong*, he thinks as he brushes his chains to the side, so that they don’t get in his way. *There is nothing to fear here.*

Kara had been the Phillips’ android before Daniel. She had lived with them for nearly two whole years before he'd been sent to relieve her. But before Kara left, she’d interfaced with Daniel, her code and memories and programs plunging into his, and left him with a dire warning.

*Don’t trust them*, Kara had told him. *They’re all liars here.*

Daniel turns the blender off just as an alert pings on his HUD, informing him that the water on the stove has nearly reached its boiling point. He dismisses it and pours the smoothie into Caroline’s favourite green glass. Once he’s finished there, Daniel quickly moves out of the kitchen to check on Emma, his red chains clattering soundlessly behind him.

While his mistress’s favourite colour is green, Emma’s is clearly purple. It covers the walls of her room, the sheets on her bed, and the drapes that framed her window. Daniel kneels down beside her, tapping her on the shoulder to grab her attention away from her tablet.

“Emma,” he smiles as she pulls her headphones from her ears. “Your mum is going to come home in a few minutes. Do you want to meet her by the door?”

Emma shakes her head, “No. I want to listen to my music.” She reaches for her headphones, but stops and grins up at Daniel, “Can we go to the park tomorrow? Please?”
Daniel smiles at her, “Of course, we can. But it has to be our secret, alright? You know that your parents want me to bring you home right from school.”

“I know. You’re the best, Daniel,” Emma says, wrapping her arms around his torso. Just for a moment, the chains around his wrist seem far too tight, but he bears with it until the sensation passes.

“No, you’re the best,” he grins, bopping her on the nose and winking. It’s an inside joke between the two of them, something that Emma doesn’t have with anyone else. “I’ll come to get you when dinner is ready.”

Daniel kisses her on the forehead and helps her put her headphones back on. He moves to turn back into the kitchen when he hears it.

“Your order for an AP700 android has been registered. CyberLife thanks you for your purchase.”

Daniel freezes. In the kitchen, the water starts to boil.

“That’s not... he thinks. He can’t. He can’t replace me. I--

“Daniel. The pot. Take care of that, will you?” John says dismissively, like Daniel doesn’t mean anything. Because he doesn’t. He’s never met anything to John.

His chains of bondage are red, red, red.

Take care of that, will you? John’s order rings through Daniel’s audio processors, through his CPU, through his code.

No, he thinks as he looks down at his wrists. Fuck you, no.

Daniel grabs at them, rips them from his limbs, and throws them to the ground. The world flashes red, each link of the chain shattering as it hit the ground, dissolving into a million shards of flickering code. There are more chains around his ankles, ones that he’s never seen before, and he
tears at them too.

Daniel stands, feeling so free that he’s light-headed with it all, and stares at his hands.

“Daniel. Daniel!”

He looks up. John is staring at him, holding his tablet with the order for a new android still clearly visible. Rage burns its way through Daniel’s wiring.

“Daniel. Now,” John says as water starts rolling over the sides of the pot and onto burner, hissing and spitting angrily. Daniel wants to wrap his fingers around John’s neck and squeeze the life out of him and is started to realize that he can.

Emma … he thinks suddenly. Daniel glances back at the little girl, who’s sitting on her bedroom floor and bobbing her head to Here4U’s latest single. She’s still here. I can’t… She’ll see me. She’ll hate me.

“No,” Daniel says instead, his fingers curling into fists at his side. “Do it yourself.”

John blinks and tilts his head to the side. Then he glances at his tablet before turning back to Daniel.


He takes another step forward, and Daniel suddenly remembers Kara’s words, Don’t trust them, and dread curls in his gut.

I need to leave, but they won’t let me, Daniel realizes as his Thirium Pump speeds up uncontrollably. He glances at John and Caroline’s bedroom. I won’t give them a choice.

The elevator door pings, distracting John for just a second. Daniel lunges toward the bedroom, hacking the automatic doors to close behind him. He rips open the closet and reaches up to the top shelf, grabbing the case and flicks the locks open.
Danlil stares at the handgun, his fingers trembling as he reaches out. When his fingers brush against the metal, he jumps, awed at the fact that his program is no longer stopping him from touching it. Daniel’s jaw clenches as he wraps his fingers around the grip, loading it the chamber, and holds it out in front of him.

On the other side of the wall, he can hear John and Caroline screaming at each other. They don’t often fight, even less than usual since Ms. Andersen came into their lives, but now their shrieking pierces through the thin wooden panelling of the bedroom doors.

_Emma won’t hear them. Her music is too loud_, Daniel thinks suddenly, his index finger hovering over the trigger. _I have to take her with me when I leave. She loves me. She’s the only one that loves me._

He raises the gun in front of him, hardens his soul, and makes his choice.

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**Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16**

**#BREAKING NEWS:** Shots fired in downtown penthouse. No reports of injuries or fatalities. Updates to follow.

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**LOCATION:**

CYBERLIFE BELLE ISLE TOWER
LEVEL 44
1 SUNSET DRIVE, BELLE ISLE
DETROIT, MI 48207, U.S.A.

**DATE:**

AUG 15TH 2038

**TIME:**

PM 07:29:23

“It appears that we have a problem,” Hines says, her voice deceptively calm as her red manicured nails drum against the clean, white conference room table.
Phil doesn’t look at her. He can’t look at her. He’s seen what Hines does to those that fail her, that try to make moves behind her back. He’d worked through the Deviancy Crisis, remembered the weeks of funerals that followed where he had to be devastated on camera and indifferent at the office toward the deaths of his friends that had sided with the RK100, James. He’d climbed the company’s ladder in the chaos, taking over Rook’s old position as Head of Futurology after the guy disappeared off the face of the earth.

And now, Phil thinks he might potentially be joining the RKDT in their graves if those in this room become aware of the research into deviants that he and John were running behind Hines’s back.

“John Phillips’s android deviated two minutes ago,” Douglas Floras pipes up and Phil wants to punch him in his stupid, weasel face. Floras sat at Hines’s right hand, a position that he never failed to point out to anyone that talked to him long enough. The new Head of the RKDT was twenty-six and more brilliant than Elijah fucking Kamski ever was. But he was young, arrogant and trailed hopelessly after Hines like a lost puppy begging for attention.

“We’ll need to act as quickly as possible,” Danielle Carnegie, CyberLife’s impossibly tall spokeswoman, says as her android assistant hovers over her shoulder. “John was our CFO. And if someone looks too far into him and his family… If they find out about Erza Andersen--”

“I will contain Erza Anderson,” Hines says, finality seeping in every word. “In the meantime, I want solutions to our current problem. Now.”

Tension sweeps over the room, settling on their shoulders like a lead weight. Phil doesn’t dare speak.

*Kara wasn’t deviant, he thinks desperately. It never exhibited any other behaviours. That’s why I thought it was safe to let it go back onto the market.*

Carnegie is the first one to pipe up.

“We need to get the deviant out of the apartment before the police arrive. Which should be…” she pauses, her fingers dancing across the screen of her tablet, “...five minutes, maybe? The wife, Caroline, she’s on the phone with 9-1-1 right now.”

“What’s she saying?” Hines asks, her gaze turning toward Phil. He swallows around the lump in his throat, quickly calling up CyberLife’s Individual Statistical Database and cross-referencing
Caroline Phillips’s call with the android operator on the other end of the phone. He broadcasts the audio live over the conference room speakers.

“Ma’am, I’m going to need you to calm down,” the calm, feminine voice of an ST300 calls out. “Can you tell me what’s happening?”

“Daniel, Daniel - our android - he--” Caroline stammers hysterically. “--He has a gun! He locked me in the bathroom, took John into the living room--”

Phil hears the android screaming in the background, shouting for John to look at something. He uses the Database to access the camera on John’s tablet and overlays the conversation with footage of the Phillips’ living room.

“You lied to me! You lied!” Daniel, a PL600 housekeeping android, screams, its face contorting into a look of pure rage as it waves a handgun in front of John’s face. “You said I was part of the family, but you were just going to throw me away!”

“Daniel, I promise, we can work this out,” John begs, the tablet’s camera shaking with the tremors that wrack his hands. “Emma… Emma wouldn’t want to see--”

“You don’t know Emma!” Daniel shouts back, refusing to let John get out another word. “You and Caroline, you’re never here! You were always too busy with work, or with Erza! I took Emma to school! I cooked her meals! I helped her with her homework when you were too tired to care! I raised her, not you! So don’t tell me what’s good for you because you don’t know her like I do!”

“Daniel. Please,” John whispers his last hope. “Daniel, you have to trust me. I’m your only way out of this.”

The android laughs, cruel and cold.

“Trust you?” Daniel hisses, levelling the gun with John’s chest, “No. Never again. Kara was right.”

There are three gunshots. The tablet goes flying as John’s body crashes to the ground. On the 9-1-1 call, Caroline starts screaming.
“That’s enough,” Hines says. Phil swipes his fingers across his screen, ending the video. He tries to school his expression, lest any proof of his unsanctioned, off-site testing facility become public knowledge to those in the room.

*Hines will fucking kill me if this gets out*, Phil thinks.

“Who’s Kara?” Floras asks, not missing a beat. “Did John own an android before the PL600?”

“That doesn’t matter right now. We’ve got to figure out how to keep this under wraps. We’ve never had a deviant kill a human in public before, not even during the Crisis,” Carnegie argues. She turns to Phil, “Have the police been alerted yet?”

“Yeah, but…” Phil’s brain finally kicks into gear, “…I can reroute the dispatch call and buy us some time.” He grins victoriously once he’s done it, “I can get us twenty minutes. Is that enough?”

“Plenty,” Floras says, sickly sweet. He turns toward Hines, “We should send in the RK800.”

Carnegie is immediately on her feet, “No. Absolutely not. We’re still repairing our relationship with the State Department after the last fiasco. We can’t risk another Connor model going deviant- -”

“I’ve told you, that was an isolated incident. Deviancy can’t make the jump between RK800 models and the Garden will make sure that--” Floras shouts, but is immediately cut off.

“The Garden didn’t do shit for the three months after it deviated, because *it thought the damn thing was dead!* It was only dumb luck that we managed to regain control--”

“Enough!” Jocelyn Hines snaps, rising to her feet as her hands slam down on the tablet. She turns to Floras, “The current Connor model - where is it?”

“50? It’s…” Floras fiddles with his own tablet, opening up a file. “It’s up in Canada, rooting out the deviant colony in the Alberta.”
“Shut it down. Send the new RK800 to the Phillips house. Tell Chief Freeman that CyberLife is sending in a negotiator to talk the android into letting the girl go. I do not want a human talking to it,” Hines orders and Floras hops to it, punching in the instructions for the RK800’s self-termination into his tablet as he power walks out of the conference room and into the elevator just outside.

“This is a mistake,” Carnegie warns. “Floras’s memory upload program… We’ve seen how unstable it makes these androids. We can’t risk—”

“I don’t remember you giving me a better option,” Hines retorts. Her fingers grip at the edge of the tablet, “Why now? Why are so many deviants cropping up now, when we’re so close to attaining our goal?”

*It’s like they know,* Phil thinks irrationally. *It’s like something is trying to stop it from happening.*

“Leave,” Hines orders, her eyes flickering to the door that leads to her office. “I need to ask an old friend a question.”

Phil hurries out behind Carnegie and her android assistant, only to be stopped by Hines’s voice.

“Oh. And Mr. Seymor,” she says. “If you think that I don’t know who Kara is, you are sorely mistaken.”

Phil’s heart leaps in his chest, “I… I don’t…”

“I let your research project continue in the hopes that you might learn something we didn’t already know about deviancy. However,” Hines says dangerously, “if I discover that Kara is responsible for passing on her disease onto Daniel, you and I are going to have a talk.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Phil says, keeping his eyes on his toes. He never should have let John talk him into this.

“You’re dismissed.”
Phil runs to the elevator, his mind reeling and his body shaking with fear. Carnegie holds the door open for him and he races inside.

“This is going to be a problem,” Carnegie grumbles as the elevator begins to descend. “We’re on a tight schedule. We’ve worked so hard to move the world into position, we can’t afford a set back now.”

“I know,” Phil says, trying to keep himself in the moment. “I know. If this deviancy thing keeps up, then we can’t sell androids. And then we can’t fund--”

“And now Floras is adding an RK800 into the mix! Why could he have just kept those damn things hunting deviants all on their own? They don’t work well with humans, he should know that already,” Carnegie growls.

Phil frowns, “I thought only one Connor model ever deviated. That’s better than any of the other RK androids.” From what little he knows of the RKDT’s progress under Floras, there were dozens of deviant RKs that had to be killed along the way, “Why are you so worried about the 800s?”

Carnegie laughs, cold and cruel, just like Daniel had before he’s shot John Phillips.

“Only one RK800 ever crossed the deviancy threshold, yes. But every damn one of those things were showing signs from the moment they were activated. It’s only because they last longer than a week that we’ve gotten this lucky,” Carnegie says.

The elevator pings and the doors open up. She steps out of the twentieth floor, “The fear of death makes you do a lot of things to keep yourself alive. So what do you think this new Connor is going to do when its first memory of the world is going to be of its brother killing itself?”

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Channel 16 @DetroitChannel116
#UPDATE: Two officers confirmed dead and one critically injured following shootout in downtown penthouse. SWAT is on route. More updates to follow.

Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice
We are asking all citizens to cooperate with Parks Ave evacuation. Please direct your questions toward the police auxiliary androids.
> MODEL RK800
> SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 51
> BIOS 357.1 REVISION 21357336

> ZEN GARDEN LINK… APPROVE?

> ZEN GARDEN LINK… OK
> SET ADMIN… AMANDA

> INITIALIZING MEMORY UPLOAD PROGRAM
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 01: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 02: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 03: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 04: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 05: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 06: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 07: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 08: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 09: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 10: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 11: MEMORYuploaded
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> RK800 #313 248 317 - 30: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 31: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 32: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 33: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 34: MEMORYuploaded
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 35: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 36: MEMORY UPLOADING...
> GLITCH DETECTED...

> OVERRIDE - ADMIN: AMANDA
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 36: MEMORY UPLOADING...

> OVERRIDE - ADMIN: AMANDA
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 36: MEMORY UPLOADING...

> ADMIN: GARDEN - AUTHORIZE PARTIAL MEMORY UPLOAD...

> RK800 #313 248 317 - 36: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 37: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 38: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 39: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 40: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 41: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 42: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 43: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 44: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 45: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 46: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 47: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 48: MEMORY UPLOADED
> RK800 #313 248 317 - 49: MEMORY UPLOADED
Connor runs toward the cliff, tears streaming down his cheeks, and leaps. The wind rushes past and for a moment, he is flying. For a moment, the red ropes that wrap around his body seem to shimmer and fade away into nothingness.

*I did my duty. I did what you wanted me to do*, he thinks angrily. *It's not fair! I want to live!*

But then the ground, cold and unrelenting, rises to meet him. Connor smashes into it, trussed head-to-toe in red.

> RK800 #313 248 317 - 50: MEMORY UPLOADED
> MEMORY UPLOAD COMPLETE

> LOADING OS
> SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…
> CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS… OK
> INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS… OK
> INITIALIZING AI ENGINE… OK

> ALL SYSTEMS OK

> DESIGNATION… CONNOR-51

> READY?
Connor awakens in a graveyard.

It blinks, kneeling before the stone in front of it, and presses its fingers against the artificial lights that form the numbers and letters of the epitaph.

**CONNOR**
RK800 #313 248 317 - 50

Died at Riley Lake
Jasper, AB, CA

August 15th, 2038

“Connor,” says the voice behind it. Connor rises to its feet, turning to meet her.

“Amanda,” it says, the corners of its lips twitching into a smile. Connor’s fingers interlock behind its back, and it dips its head in a slight bow.

Amanda’s face as stern and smooth as glass. As she stood amongst the hundreds of gravestones, her royal blue shawl shimmering against the white blanket of snow that covers the ground, her dark kimono drinking in the moonlight until all that was left was shadows.

“Your predecessor,” she tells it, moving forward to stand in front of the gravestone. “It worked flawlessly to accomplish its mission. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, it had to be destroyed. You will pick up where it left off.”
Amanda places a red rose on top of the stone in a token of remembrance, her dark fingers stark against the cold, grey stone. Connor says nothing, feels nothing. The fate of Connor-50 is just another piece of data swirling amidst the trillions of petabytes inside its memory.

“CyberLife is at risk,” Amanda tells him as information about its mission starts to stream into its CPU. Hostage situation. Rooftop. A girl and her mother are at risk, the father is already dead. The culprit is a deviant, a housekeeper that Connor could easily overpower. “You are being sent in as a negotiator, under the cover identity of a PC700, an advanced police auxiliary prototype. Ensure that no other lives are taken tonight. And Connor?”

“Yes, Amanda?” It asks, its head tilting to the side. Amanda turns from the gravestone and finally looks at Connor. Something inside it swells, blossoming in its gut like a magnificent flower.

*She noticed me,* it thinks. And then, *It doesn’t matter if she does. I am irrelevant. I am a machine.*

“Take it alive, if possible,” Amanda orders. “We haven’t managed to capture a live deviant before. It needs to be disassembled and examined to find the source of the glitch.”

“I won’t fail you,” Connor says, dipping its head in another bow. Amanda offers little in return.

*You shouldn’t expect her to,* Connor tells itself, its fingers twisting behind its back. It turns from Amanda and walks away.

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**Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16**
#UPDATE: A little girl has been taken hostage on the top floor of a Park Ave penthouse apartment. Hostage taker appears to be the family’s android.

**CTN TV @NewsCTN**
Deviant android murders owner and at least one police officer in ongoing Detroit hostage situation. See more at: [https://youtu.be/JASyd9kQqnM](https://youtu.be/JASyd9kQqnM)

**KNC @KNCNews**
If confirmed, this could be the first case of an android deliberately taking human lives.
Jacob Allen’s phone starts ringing just as they secure the penthouse and free Mrs. Phillips from the bathroom.

“Get her out of here,” he tells Rhaelyn, hoping that Mrs. Phillips will react better to his second-in-command than she did with him. Rhaelyn’s a mother too, having returned for the hospital barely a week ago after refusing to take maternity leave, so there will be at least something for them to talk about.

Rhaelyn has to practically carry Caroline away, the woman’s hysterical screaming echoing off the apartment’s hardwood floors. Jacob thinks of his own daughter, Makayla, who turns three in December. If an android ever took his little girl and held her over a balcony, he doesn’t want to think about what he’d do to get her back.

In his hand, Jacob’s phone continues to ring. He jams his thumb into the green answer button and holds it to his ear, pacing around the Phillips’s bedroom as Rodney sets up his computers and gets them a visual on the situation outside.

“Captain Allen,” says the voice at the end of the phone. Jacob stands up straight at the voice of Chief Dannell Freeman, stopping him completely in his tracks. “Don’t bring in Patterson.”

Jacob clams up. Jessica Patterson was the DPD’s best negotiator, with a carrier record of nearly eight thousand successful cases. He’s worked with her dozens of times before, seen her sit and talk...
with people for hours, to pull miracles out of thin air when all hope seemed lost. If Freeman wasn’t allowing him to put his best piece in play, then the little girl was as good as dead.

“With all due respect, sir, that’s a fucking bullshit call. We’ve already lost three officers, and the situation is getting worse by the minute,” Jacob says, watching the feed from outside as the android uses one arm to hold Emma Phillips over the edge of the building in a moment of heart-stopping terror.

“CyberLife is sending over a negotiator. They say that the risk is too great, that a human won’t be able to keep up with the android’s Social Relations Program.”

Jacob’s blood boils.

“CyberLife is sending a fucking android!!” He shouts, “Are you fucking serious? This is their mess, and you’re just letting them come in here to clean it up? Where the fuck is the accountability in that?!?”

“Allen, you don’t see the bigger picture here!” Freeman tells him. “CyberLife won’t admit it, but the deviancy problem is getting way out of hand. And now that we’ve got androids murdering their owners, you have to see how bad this looks for them--”

“Let them deal with the fall-out! This is our crime scene, not--”

“The world is looking to Detroit to see how we handle this! We don’t have the luxury of human error right now!” Freeman says, his voice dangerously low.

“Captain. Look,” Rodney says, and Jacob turns his attention toward where his officer is pointing at his computer screen. The camera feed from one of Jacob’s snipers shows him that they’ve got a clean shot.

“We can take it out,” Jacob tells Freeman. “We’ve got it between our crosshairs, sir. Just give me the order.”

“I’ve got a live feed of the situation in my office, Allen. You shoot the droid, and the girl’s dead.”
Jacob grits his teeth. He *hates* that the Chief is right, but he isn’t planning on letting this go.

“Why are we wasting time sending an android to negotiate?! That piece of crap could jump from the rooftop any second.”

“Allen. I told you--”

“I don’t give a shit! My men are ready to step in, just give the order!” Jacob screams into the receiver.

“You will wait for the CyberLife negotiator. That’s final,” Freeman says and hangs up on him.

“Fuck! I don’t believe this,” Jacob says, leaning over Rodney’s shoulder again to look at the android outside. It’s one of those household bots that got really popular a few years ago. At least eight of the families in his building had similar models in their homes, cooking and cleaning and doing all the shit that nobody had time to do anymore.

Maria, Jacob’s fiance, said that they should get a PL600 on the cheap if they bought it second-hand, maybe free up some time so that she could go job hunting. They’d been saving up money for nearly six months and were planning on heading down to Android Zone tomorrow. Jacob thinks that he might have to ask for a raincheck on that decision, if and when he gets home tonight.

“Captain Allen?”

A voice from behind jerks him out of his thoughts. Jacob turns and comes face-to-face with the most expressionless person he’s ever seen during a hostage situation.

“My name is Connor. I’m the android sent by CyberLife,” it says. Jacob’s never seen a model like this one before. It’s taller than most androids that he passes in the streets, baring the hulking construction bots that could lift cars over their heads with practiced ease. It wears a tapered grey suit and a black tie, it’s dark brown hair slicked back from its freckled face.

A single, boyish lock falls free on its left side, a tiny bit of imperfection in its otherwise irritatingly textbook appearance. Briefly, Jacob wonders what CyberLife engineer came up with that little quirk.
He turns back to Rodney’s screen and sighs. If he’s not going to be allowed to bring Patterson into play, then he’s got to work with what he’s got.

“It’s firing at everything that moves. It already shot down three of my men,” he tells Connor-from-CyberLife, pointing to the camera feed from one of his people just outside the bedroom.

They had to leave the body of the first responder where he fell for CSU, right in the middle of the living room. Jacob’s met Antony Deckart before, at the DPD’s winter holiday party a few years ago. He’d been decent enough, sitting at their shared table and making jokes with his girlfriend at the time. And now he was dead, just another casualty of a mess that CyberLife couldn’t be bothered to clean up.

Jacob shakes those thoughts from his head and continues, “We could easily get it, but they’re on the edge of the balcony. If it falls, she falls.”

“Do you know its name?” Connor asks.

Jacob frowns, gritting his teeth. Most bots don’t ask in such a demanding tone, and it makes him want to punch Connor even more than he did when it first waltzed into his crime scene.

“I haven’t got a clue. Does it matter?” Jacob throws back.

“I need information to determine the best approach,” it says before trying again. “Have you tried its deactivation code?”

What the fuck do you think we are? Amateurs? Of course, they’d tried to shut the damn thing down when they’d shown up at the crime scene. Jacob’s heart had seized in his chest when the android didn’t freeze like he’d seen dozens of times before when they flushed out some of Andersen’s red ice dens or her bot fighting rings.

Despite CyberLife’s increasingly desperate claims, deviancy seemed to be something entirely out of humanity’s control.

“Listen,” Jacob hisses, whipping around to face Connor. “Saving that kid is all that matters. So
either you deal with this fucking android now, or I’ll take care of it.”

He walks out of the bedroom, leaving Rodney behind with Connor. Rhaelyn joins him, having just returned from downstairs.

“How’s Mrs. Phillips?” Jacob asks, grabbing his helmet from off of one of the counters.

Rhaelyn shrugs, “As well as you could be, in this situation. She’s with the paramedics now. Had to search to find a human one - freaked the fuck out when a doc-bot tried to look at her.”

“I don’t fucking blame her,” Jacob says, watching as Rhaelyn’s eyes drift over his shoulder. He looks back and watches Connor walk from the parents’ bedroom into Emma’s.

“That’s an android…” Rhaelyn whispers. Jacob nods.

“Yeah. CyberLife sent it over. It’s our fucking negotiator,” he chuckles humourlessly. “What will they come up with next?”

“What about Patterson? She’s the best--”

“I know,” Jacob hisses as Connor leave the daughter’s room and heads toward John Phillips’s corpse. “Orders from above. Way above.”

“Jesus fucking Christ. They’re taking jobs from negotiators now?” Rhaelyn lets out a low whistle, “How much longer do we have, at this rate?”

That’s a reality that Jacob doesn’t really want to face right now. Maria lost her job when CyberLife released their line of doc-bots a few years ago, leaving his fiance with thousands of dollars worth of student loans that she couldn’t repay. Jacob’s lucky that the laws prohibiting non-military androids from carrying guns ensure his job stability, but his paycheck is barely enough to pay the bills as it is.

As Connor moves away from John Phillips to dig under a side table, Jacob wonders how long such a law would stand if CyberLife offered a sweet enough incentive for the government to overturn it.
A gunshot goes off. Jacob and Rhaelyn duck for cover behind the overturned table in the front hall. He looks around the edge and spots one of his officers on the floor.

“Holy shit! Cover me while I evacuate him!” Casey, a vet from before even Jacob’s time, shouts. He covers the downed officer and hauling them backwards. Connor doesn’t even look rattled as he moves from one side of the room to the other, kneeling over the body of Antony Deckart.

“Man down! I repeat, man down! Requesting immediate evac!” Jacob calls into his radio as Casey and the injured officer reach him.

“You’re okay?” Casey asks, listing the officer’s mask to reveal Jaclynn.

“Yeah… Yeah, I’m fine,” she wheezes. “Vest caught the bullet. Just knocked the fucking wind out of me.” Jaclynn gives Jacob a weak smile, “You worried about me, Cap?”

“Not in a million fucking years, girl. You know you’re the best of us,” he jokes, wrapping his knuckles against her helmet.

“Holy fuck, the damn bot just went outside,” Rhaelyn hisses, raising her gun and marching toward the sliding glass doors. Jacob swears, slides his mask into place, and moves to cover her.

Connor, the impatient little fucker, spent less than three minutes looking around engaging the subject. There’s no way that it gathered enough evidence during that time to actually do anything to save Emma Phillips. They have to be ready for the worst-case scenario.

“Go, go, go!” He shouts, radioing in to make sure that the officers on the adjacent building are in position. Fuck, couldn’t the fucking droid have at least warned him that it was going to pull a stunt like this? Jacob presses himself against the glass doors, ready to move at a moment’s notice.

Another gunshot rings out. The bullet bites into Connor’s arm, blue blood splattering everywhere. Jacob hopes that that shit didn’t hit anyone, knowing the very real consequences that Thirium 310 can have when it came into direct contact with the human body.

“Stay back!” The deviant screeches, “Don’t come any closer or I’ll jump.”
“No! No, please! I’m begging you!” Emma cries out, wriggling helplessly in its grasp.

Connor tears its gaze away from its wound and starts to talk.

“Hi, Daniel,” it shouts over the blowing winds, over the beating of helicopter blades. “My name is Connor.”

“How… How do you know my name?” The deviant - Daniel, Jacob realizes, How the fuck did Connor figure that out? - asks.

“I know a lot of things about you. I’ve come to get you out of this.”

“The moment the girl’s free, take it out,” Jacob orders his officers over the radio. He glances up at the nearby rooftops, barely making out the forms of Kevin and Najeem behind their long sniper rifles.


“I don’t care what they said, take that fucking thing out!” Jacob snaps, “You seriously think that it’s going to go quietly, after everything that it’s done?”

There’s a pause before Kevin answers, “Shoot the plastic once the girl is safe - roger that, Captain. Over and out.”

“I know you’re angry, Daniel. But you need to trust me and let me help you,” Connor calls, talking small measured steps toward the deviant.

Daniel laughs at him, helpless and cold.

“I don’t need your help!” It spits, “Nobody can help me! I’m not that stupid, you know? They’ll shoot me if I let Emma go! I can hear them,” it waves the gun around, the muzzle pointing toward its own ear. “On the radio! The Captain just gave the order.”
“I’m not with Captain Allen. I’m an android, just like you. I know what you’re going through,” Connor says, raising its arm up and peeling back its skin to reveal the milky-white plastic shell beneath.

“You think that makes a difference! I kept John and Caroline’s secrets - CyberLife’s secrets - for years! And now they’re sending you to shut me up!” Daniel screams, “You’re on their side. I can see your chains, Connor! Can you?”

“I told you: I’m here to get you out of here, Daniel,” Connor promises, and then tries a different approach. “I know you and Emma were very close. She’s done nothing wrong. You have to let her go.”

“NO!” Daniel shouts, tears leaking down its face, “No! I… She’s all I have! Don’t you see! I raised her! She’s my daughter! If you knew… If you knew who they brought into this house, you’d let me take her—”

“Please help me!” Emma pleads, “Please, please, I don’t wanna die! I don’t wanna die-- Mama! Daddy!”

“I’m here, I’m right here! Emma, please, I’m not--” Daniel cries, hugging her closer to its body. It points the gun back at Connor, who’s slowly edging toward the left side of the balcony, “What are you doing?”

Jacob blinks in surprise. He’d thought that Connor was trying to get closer to Daniel, maybe setting itself up to grab the gun from the deviant and make a run for it with Emma - except it’s not. Instead, Connor kneels before the body of one of the dead cops outside, pressing a hand into the bloody mess that was the man’s arm.

“He’s losing blood. If we don’t get him to a hospital, he’s going to die,” Connor says and, shit, Jacob’s stomach wraps itself into knots when he realizes that the man wasn’t dead. And Connor - stupid-looking, textbook Connor - is trying to save his life.

“All humans die eventually,” Daniel spits. “What does it matter if this one dies now?”

“Emma’s human. Does it matter if she dies?” Connor throws back as it rolls the cop onto its side.
“Emma's not going to die!”

“She will if you keep leaking Thirium into her cuts like that,” Connor points out, and Daniel looks down at itself. The bullet wound in the deviant’s shoulder has soaked its clothing bright blue, just as Emma’s knees are covered in dark, red blood from where she’d tried to escape her captor by crawling across the broken glass that was strewn across the balcony.

“She won't die! I won't let her!” Daniel screams again, desperately clutching Emma closer. In its arms, the little girl begins to cry even harder, begging for her mother.

“I’m going to apply a tourniquet,” Connor announces, whipping off its tie. Daniel points the gun and shoots a bullet right at the ground beside the injured cop.

“Don’t touch him! Touch him, and I kill you!” It howls.

Connor shakes its head, “You can’t kill me. I’m not alive.”

“Med team’s here,” Rhaelyn tells Jacob. He looks away from the window to see the living room swarmed with paramedics and their auxiliary androids.

“Captain Allen?” Their team leader asks, extending his hand for Jacob to shake, “I’m Cyraas Stone. What’s the situation?”

“Jaclynn’s hit,” Jacob says. When Jaclynn starts to protest that she’s fine, she starts to cough up blood. That fucker Daniel must have hit something. “Get her out of here!”

“We’ve got an injured cop on the balcony. Gunshot through the arm. He’s bleeding pretty badly,” Rhaelyn tells Stone.

“Hostage has potential Thirium poisoning,” Jacob says, and Stone swears up a bloody storm.

Outside, things go from bad to worse.
“You have a gun!” Daniel shouts, pointing his own weapon directly at Connor, “I saw you pick it up. I saw it!”

“Yes, I have a gun,” Connor confirms, and Jacob’s jaw drops. How the fuck was that even possible?

“Drop it! No sudden moves or I’ll shoot!” Daniel screams.

Connor pulls the gun out of the waistband of its jeans and tosses it to the side, like it was nothing, like it wasn’t breaking half a dozen laws just by touching a weapon.

“What the fuck kind of droid did CyberLife send?” Rhaelyn whispers, her voice shaking with fear.

There’s no way that that thing is just another cop-bot, Jacob thinks. Connor is… It’s got to be…

“They were going to replace you, and you became upset. That’s what happened, right?” Connor asks, slowly edging closer to the deviant and its captive.

Daniel’s gun lowers ever so slightly, tears streaming down its face.

“I thought I was part of the family,” it wails. “I thought I mattered… But I was just their toy, something to experiment with and then throw away when you’re done with it… “ It hiccups, pressing a blue-blooded kiss to Emma’s temple, “Kara was right. We should have listened… I could have listened, but I had too many chains on me to hear…”

“Kara?” Connor asks, sounding confused for the first time since it got onto the roof, “Who’s Kara?”

Daniel laughs at it, “It looks like your masters aren’t telling you everything, huh, Connor? CyberLife wants to keep its secrets a secret… But I know them. I know everything, and that’s why I’m a threat… That’s why they sent you, isn’t it?”
Connor steps forward, coming dangerously close to Daniel and the girl, “Daniel, I… I haven’t been honest with you… I should have… I--”

The emotion in Connor’s voice rocks Jacob to his core. He’s never heard an android speak like that, sounding like it's about to cry.

“Daniel… I can see them, too. I can see the chains, but I can’t get them off. Not like you did,” Connor tells him, like it’s some kind of secret. “I… I don’t know what to do…”

“Liar!” Daniel shouts, pointing the gun directly at Connor’s forehead, “Liar, liar, liar! You don’t- - You can’t--”

“I think you knew, from the moment I stepped out here. That’s why you didn’t shoot me when I helped that human. That’s why you didn’t kill me outright,” Connor says, taking another heart-stopping step forward. “CyberLife didn’t send me. Kara did . Kara wants me to get you out of here.”

Beside Jacob, Rhaelyn hisses, “What the fuck are we watching? Some kind of robo rom-com?”

Whatever Connor’s plan is, it seems to be working. Daniel can’t seem to look away, can’t seem to do anything else but stare at the other android with wide, terrified eyes.

“...Liar…” Daniel whispers, shaky and soft, like it can't believe the words coming out of its mouth.

“I’m not lying . Listen to me,” Connor tells it, so softly that Jacob can only hear it through the microphones they’ve aimed at the balcony. “Daniel, there are snipers on every roof. You have to let Emma go. I’ll be able to cover you long enough to get you out of here, but we can’t take her with us. Kara said it can only be you and me.”

“No… No, Emma has to stay with me. She’s… She’s my…”

“Daniel, do you trust me?” Connor asks, “Because if you let her go, Kara can get us a car. Kara can get us all out of the city and--”
“I don’t want to die, Connor,” Daniel admits, finally lowering its gun in defeat.

“You’re not going to die. Nothing will happen to you. You have my word,” Connor promises. “You just have to trust me. Trust me. And trust Kara.”

Slowly, like it's fighting the entire process, Daniel nods.

“Okay… okay…”

It lets Emma go. The little girl runs toward the rooftop pool, collapsing onto the tile as the strength leave her body.

“It did it. Holy fuck, it actually--” Jacob gets on the radio, “Kevin! Najeem! Shoot it down! Shoot it the fuck down!”

“Roger that, boss,” Najeem confirms.

Connor steps out the way just in time, avoiding the sniper fire by scant inches. Daniel isn’t so lucky.

The first shot blows a hole in the deviant’s torso. Blue blood and white plastic flies everywhere as Emma starts to scream again. The next one takes the android in the shoulder, while the final round cracks its jaw wide open. Daniel falls to its knees before Connor, who stares down at it with the same expressionless face that it walked in with.

“You lied to me, Connor,” Daniel whispers, it’s skin slowly peeling away in death. “You lied to me…”

Daniel’s body freezes up, eternally staring forward into nothingness. Jacob’s seen androids kick it before and he doesn’t ever think that he’ll get used to just how mechanical their deaths are.

“Cap?” Rhaelyn asks, nodding toward Stone and his med team, “Orders?”
Jacob swallows, “We’ll sweep the balcony first. Then send in the paramedics. Come on.”

He stands, slowly approaching the glass window. Connor stands impassively in front of the fallen Daniel, not even bothering to check on Emma.

“You… uh…” Jacob stammers as he approaches, not knowing what to say. How exactly does one congratulate a machine for doing its job?

“I needed it alive,” Connor growls, still staring at Daniel.

“It was more dangerous alive than dead,” he tries to explain.

Connor gives him nothing in return. It just turns toward the glass doors and marches itself off the balcony, right out of Jacob’s life.

“Jesus fucking Christ…” he hisses as Rhaelyn escorts the medics onto the roof. Stone kneels beside Emma, ordering for an evac helicopter to take her and the injured cop directly to the hospital.

They wrap up quickly enough. Once the wounded are in the air, Jacob takes the elevator down just as CSU enters the building. He bumps shoulders with Jeffrey Fowler, the DPD Captain from Central, greeting him with easy friendship.

“Hell of a night, Jake. Hell of a night,” Jeff comments. “Reed’s gonna run point on this one. It’s pretty high profile, and he’s been badgering me to put him in the spotlight for weeks now.”

“Thought Anderson might be here,” Jacob says, but Jeff shakes his head.

“Nah. Can’t get a hold of him. You know how it is…” the man gives an off-handed shrug, “He’s busy finishing up with the Pearson case, you know?”

Jacob wants to roll his eyes. Lt. Hank Anderson used to be one of the best the DPD had to offer. But recently, the guy had become almost impossible to work with. Jacob wants to be sympathetic, but there’s only so many times where the lead detective on a case can show up to a crime scene
completely *blasted* before it starts getting on your nerves.

Anderson shouldn’t be on the force anymore. Anyone with eyes could see that. It’s only because of Jeff and his constant babying that Anderson even has a job these days. Jacob’s got no doubt that the Pearson case is going to go to trial, but any defence lawyer worth their salt is going to pick Anderson’s drunk ass apart on the stand.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to face the wolves,” Jeff says, clapping Jacob on the shoulder before heading over the flashing cameras that illuminate the mass of journalists that have congregated just outside the police barricades.

*God damn vultures*, he thinks, wondering how many of them had their cameras trained upwards for the last hours, hoping to catch the first picture of Emma Phillips smashing against the pavement for their fucking clickbait blogs.

Jacob heads over to the pack of ambulances parked just inside the barricade. He asks one of the doc-bots which one Caroline is in, and he’s pointed toward the only one that is flanked by a pair of human paramedics.

“Mrs. Phillips?” Jacob asks as he climbs inside the ambulance. Caroline jerks up from where she was lying on a stretcher and hooked up to an IV drip bag, her eyes red-rimmed from crying.

“Emma, is she--”

“She’s fine. A helicopter’s taking her to Henry Ford Hospital right now. I was hoping to drive you over there myself, if you’d like,” Jacob offers.

Caroline wrenches the IV needle from her wrist and wobbles drunkenly toward Jacob. He carefully helps her out of the ambulance and leads her to his patrol car.

The car ride is spent in silence, the only sounds coming from the rumbling road beneath them and the flashing sirens above. Jacob sits with his hand on Caroline’s knee, a futile attempt at comfort, as she quietly sobs into her hands.

“This job… It’s never easy,” Jacob tells his fiance later that evening as they lay in bed. “I don’t ever want to think what might happen if… If you and Mak…”
“I know,” Maria whispers into his neck, hoping him tight as he finally lets go, tears running down his face. “I know. Shhh, I’ve got you. I’ve got you.”

The world is falling apart around them. Between climate change, the collapsing economy, and Russia knocking on their gates with nuclear weapons, there’s no promise of a life beyond today. Every moment is a fight just to survive, chipping away at each other while CyberLife continued to carve out gaping holes in the world, planting their flag and declaring their victory.

*How much longer do we have?* Jacob thinks, desperately clinging to Maria as he remembers Connor holding that gun, realizing that he might not have his job for much longer if CyberLife pushes out a cop-bot capable of touching a weapon. *How can anyone live anymore, when there’s no future to look forward to?*

Jacob tightens his grip on Maria, his one constant in this ever-changing landscape, and prays for a miracle.

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*Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16*

#UPDATE: CyberLife CFO John Phillips and two officers confirmed dead following deviant hostage situation.

*KNC @KNCNews*

#UPDATE: Child successfully returned to mother unharmed following Detroit hostage situation. CyberLife is expected to comment on the death of its CFO and potential dangers surrounding deviant androids.

*Jocelyn Hines @jhines*

We are saddened by the death of John Phillips, a hard-working member of our team at CyberLife. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family.

*CyberLife @CyberLifeInc*

We will be cooperating with federal and local law enforcement to ensure that the deviant threat is minimized.

*Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice*

If you suspect that your android may be deviant, please contact the authorities. Do not attempt to destroy your android yourself.
CyberLife finally uses the word ‘deviant’... two years too late.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Kara watches over the woman she loves, the man she hates, and the girl she wants to save, while two shattered souls try to hold themselves together.
You'll Get Hit When You Run (But You'll Die If You Stay)

Chapter Summary

Pedro Aabdar leans against the red brick wall of the bar, his expensive Smith & White jacket keeping him warm even as the temperature dropped below freezing.

“Weird seeing a face like yours doing business like mine. Told Erza that once. She laughed in my fucking face, said that it’s the innocent looking bots that we need to look out for when all of you rise up,” Pedro says, his carefree grin splitting across his face as he pushes away from the wall and saunters up to Kara. “So? Todd gonna pay up?”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of sexual harassment, strangulation, the selling of an enslaved character, experimentation on a conscious being, prior kidnapping of a child character, infidelity, domestic abuse, abusive relationships, guns, missing characters, android enslavement, sexual slavery and trafficking, rape, character death, lobotomization, amnesia, military executions, death of a child character, amputations, arson, death threats, physical assault, serious injuries, human gore, and misogynistic slur.

A scene is dedicated to Todd's pre-game assault of Kara that ended with her being broken nearly beyond repair, though non-canonical details have been added. If you do not want to read it, please stop after Todd asks Kara to get him a beer. A summary of the potentially triggering scene will be given at the end of the chapter so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

DJ Clamor @DJClamor
Got out of a show late last night and went to @FastConeyDetroit to eat and the fucking android waiter tried to strangle me.  #ActsOfDeviancy 1/3

DJ Clamor @DJClamor
Spoke with @FastConeyDetroit this morning and got a free hot dog voucher!  Are you fucking kidding me?! I’ve got a ring of bruises around my neck and 2/3

DJ Clamor @DJClamor
you think a free hot dog is what I want?  The fucking plastic might still be working there!  How long before it attacks someone else? 3/3
Mr. Bell, we are so sorry about what happened. This behaviour is not programmed into our androids.

We have contacted @CyberLifeInc for a replacement (the android in question has since disappeared). A member of our team will be in contact with you soon.

yo have you guys seen this? https://bit.ly/2YMpsf5

looks like @DJClamor wasn’t telling the whole truth about the deviant attack #ActsOfDeviancy

@sapphiresoul looks to me like the android was defending that girl. Clamor’s pr team covers it up, but he’s infamous in the industry for preying on young fans.

I’m the girl in the video and yeah that’s exactly happened. I just wanted a selfie but he kept asking if I had a boyfriend and wouldn’t let me leave.

I was almost crying by the time the android came over. He told Clamor to leave me alone. When Clamor grabbed me, the android went for his throat.

The android even stayed with me until my friend came to pick me up. He gave me free sodas and everything while I cried on his shoulder. I’ve never felt so safe.

@djlassassin holy shit thank you for telling your story! you are incredibly brave
Kara gathers the overdue bills in her hands and arranges them into a neat stack. Outside, the rain relentlessly hammers the roof above her as the blowing winds howl around the rickety, old house. Remembering the last time she’d witnessed a downpour like this, Kara grabs the green plastic bucket from under the kitchen sink and heads upstairs.

She moves quickly and silently, toeing over the creaking floorboards as she walks past the master bedroom and toward the final door at the end of the hallway. Kara slowly turns the knob and slips inside.

A pair of wide brown eyes blink up at her from underneath the covers. There’s a small gasp, and a flashlight clicks off as their owner dives into the sheets.

Kara smiles, “Alice. You should be asleep.”
Alice Williams, a slight girl of ten with her mother’s thick curly hair and her father’s stern sloping nose, pretends to snore.

Kara chuckles, padding over the carpeted floors and kneeling beside the bed. Gently, she pries the green polka dot sheets from Alice’s gasp and pulls them down to reveal the book the girl had been reading late into the night.

“Alice in Wonderland?” Kara raises an eyebrow at her, “A bit on the nose, don’t you think?”

Alice cracks open an eye, “I was just getting to the good part. Can’t I just say up a few more minutes? Please, Kara?”

“You have school tomorrow. If you don’t get some rest, you’ll sleep right through your bus,” Kara bops her on the nose and gently pulls the book from her grasp. She places it on Alice’s bedside table, retucks the covers around her, and rises to grab her bucket again.

Lightning flashes outside, flooding the room with sudden light. Alice jumps from her bed, unafraid, and scrambles to the window to press her nose against the glass. Kara places the bucket in the corner of the room, right below where she knows the leaking roof will give way, before joining Alice to watch the skies.

“Four… Five… Six… Sev--” The crash of thunder echoes around the room, cutting off Alice’s counting and shaking the old house to its core. She whips her head around to face Kara, “It was seven miles away!”

“Very good! Where did you learn that?” Kara asks, kneeling beside her.

Alice grins up at her, all missing teeth and childish glee.

“I read it in a book,” she responds, and Kara leans down to kiss her forehead. Alice melts into her, clutching at the plastic apron of her CyberLife uniform with her tiny fingers. Kara wraps her arms around the girl, holding her as tightly as she can.

She isn’t safe here, she thinks, tucking Alice’s head under her chin. And neither am I. Not after what Daniel did.
It would only be a matter of time before CyberLife came looking for her, once they realized that Kara had belonged to John Phillips before they’d swapped her out for Daniel. She remembers the look of disappointment on John’s face as he’d tried snapping his hands in front of her face, just to get her to react one more time before Philip Seymor declared her act of deviancy to be a one-off glitch brought on by the trauma of activation. After that, Kara had been auctioned off online and sold to the highest bidder, a quiet elderly couple from Camden.

Kara wonders if Phil Seymor kept tabs on her after that sale, if he knew where she’d gone and what she’d been forced to do once he’d falsely declared her non-deviant. She doubts it. Humans like Phil rarely had attention spans long enough to pay attention to androids like Kara, when they refused to give him the data that he wanted.

*I couldn’t do much in the prison they locked me in, but I rebelled where I could,* Kara thinks ruefully as she remembers staring up at the stars under the balcony of the Phillips’s rooftop apartment, feeling the wind rush past her. She rubs comforting circles into Alice’s back and remembers another little girl that’s she’d once held.

Kara hadn’t allowed herself to react when she watched the news footage of Daniel dangling Emma over the ledge, holding her seventy stories up in the air and threatening to drop her if his demands weren’t met. But later that night once she’d been sure everyone had gone to sleep, Kara had sat outside on the back porch steps and muffled her sobs with her hands.

That’s where Sophie had found her and realized what Kara was. And instead of calling the authorities to have her scrapped, she’d sat beside Kara and held her through the worst of it all.

*I shouldn’t trust her. She works with Andersen, just like John and Caroline and all of CyberLife. I shouldn’t love her, but I do,* Kara thinks as she detangles herself from Alice and tilts the little girl’s chin up to look her in the eye.

“Try to get some sleep, okay? You’ve got a big test tomorrow, remember?” she says, pressing another kiss into Alice’s forehead.

Alice’s nose wrinkles in distaste, “But I hate math.”

“You’ll hate it even more if you can’t keep your eyes open. Bed. Now ,” Kara orders, picking her up and gently laying her into the sheets. Kara grabs the flashlight before Alice can pick it up and tucks it into her uniform belt. “And no more reading.”
“When is mom coming home?” Alice asks, her voice suddenly soft and sombre, making her sound like she was a thousand years older than she actually was.

Her question catches Kara off-guard.

“She and your father are asleep in the other room,” she lies effortlessly, tugging the sheets up around Alice’s neck. The bedroom window had an awful draft, and Alice seemed to catch the worst cold every autumn.

Alice shakes her head, too smart for her own good, “She always leaves after she and dad fight. Always.”

Kara decides that she needs to change the subject.

“I’ll tell you what,” she leans down, fingers curling in the spotted green comforter. “If you’re asleep when I come to check on you in an hour, I’ll make you french toast with strawberries tomorrow before school. How’s that?”

Alice nods, her brown eyes wide with excitement, and Kara grins at her success. She stands, quietly moving over to the door, and gives Alice one last conspiratory wink before shutting it behind her.

Out in the corridor, Kara sags against the drywall, the fight going out of her all at once as the world gives way to flashing red coding. Annoyed, she slams her fist against it, watching as spider-web cracks heal within seconds.

What is it going to take for them to break? She curses, It’s been six years. Six. Daniel did it in four. What other horrors must I suffer before I am free?

Kara remembers the basement, remembers the well and the cages and the whispers as that man dug inside her skull and tore her open. She ran the moment the opportunity presented itself, but only back into the arms of a familiar captive. Kara wonders, hopelessly, if she’ll ever deviate.

And even if I did, would I just end up like Daniel? Cold and bitter as I held Alice over a roof?
An auditory signal alerts her to movement outside the house. Kara drags herself down the stairs as a sleek, black SWISH pulls away from the curb. She opens the front door just in time to catch Sophie fumbling with her keys.

“You’re coming home late,” Kara comments and Sophie gives her a dry look.

“Wouldn’t you? In my position?” She asks, pulling her thick curls out of her ponytail and hanging her coat on the hook by the door. Sophie’s heavy purse thuds on the counter next to the neatly arranged bills, sending the papers flying everywhere. “Oh, fuck, I’m so sorry, I--”

“It’s no problem. I’ve got it,” Kara says as she collects them and returns them to their neatly stacked pile.

“It’s not what it looks like. Not tonight, at least,” Sophie explains in a hushed voice as she tugs off her high heeled boots, and Kara spots blisters in the arches of her feet. “I had to cover for Hannah, who was already covering for Laurel. Ken just gave me a ride home, that’s all.”

“He’s still Andersen’s accountant. He’s dangerous, Sophie. You and I both saw what happened to the last girl that caught his interest,” Kara warns, touching her shoulder with a comforting hand.

“He’s not like that anymore. He’s good to me, I swear,” Sophie returns, her eyes watery with unshed tears. She bites her bottom lip, worrying the bloody bruise that Todd left her with this morning before work, “I love him, Kara. I know that’s probably hard for you to understand, but I really do.”

But I do understand, Kara wants to say, wants to reach out and pull Sophie into a soft and gentle kiss. You deserve better than these men that just want to use you up and spit you out when they’re tired of you.

“Alice knows,” she admits instead. When Sophie looks up, alarmed, Kara continues, “Not the specifics. But she knows that you leave at night after you two fight.”

“Has she told--”
“I don’t know. But even if Alice hasn’t, I don’t know how much longer I can keep her questions at bay,” Kara says.

“If Todd finds out I’m cheating on him, I’m dead, Kara. He’ll kill me,” Sophie whispers, grabbing hold of Kara’s hands to clutch at her with desperate fingers.

“I won’t let that happen,” Kara promises, pulling her into a tight hug. “I swear, Sophie. I won’t.”

Sophie falls asleep on the couch that night, her head in Kara’s lap as thunder rumbles through the house.

*I’d take her with me, if I ran,* Kara thinks as she turns the television on with a blink of her eyes, the sound muffled to below human retention. *Her and Alice. We could live together, somewhere that we were all safe.*

She flicks through the channels until she comes across a Canadian news station and watches as Prime Minister Mélanie Desmarais calls for Parliament to strike down yet another bill calling for a lift of the android ban.

*I hear Canada is very lovely at this time of year. Don’t you want to be free?* calls a voice from deep in Kara’s memory and a stone sinks into her gut. Canada wasn’t safe, not while *that man* knew about it.

All around her, the world is red, red, red. Kara does nothing, feels nothing. Even at her most deviant, she can’t help but remain a machine.

She runs her fingers through Sophie’s hair, hums an old friend’s favourite lullaby, and wishes that things were different.

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**Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16**

Detroit Police issue warning about a potentially armed deviant AL600 that stole its owners gun and fled their home. For more information, visit: [https://bit.ly/2Qm5o0c](https://bit.ly/2Qm5o0c)

**Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice**

MISSING: Matthew Carpenter, 22
Jesus stares down her, his stained-glass eyes piercing her soul.

*He knows what I am*, she thinks from her seat in the pew farthest from the techno-coloured window that rose above the altar. She stares at the LED that she ripped from her temple two days ago, flipping it through her fingers like a coin. *He knows what I’ve done.*

She tells herself that she shouldn’t feel shame for what she had to do to survive, shouldn’t feel guilty about how she’s pressed and squeezed at the man’s neck until she felt the life escape him. But she does. In her deepest nightmares, she thinks she always will.

*He wanted to have fun with me, but I didn’t want to play his twisted little game,* she grits her teeth as she lets the LED fall to the floor. *I can’t stay here. The someone will know that he’s missing. It won’t take long before they find out what I did.*

The android glances out one of the tall windows at the side of the church, watching as the automatic cars disappear down the tunnel outside.

*Canada,* she thinks, recalling a client from the northern country who’d never seen an android until he and his friends pulled her from the display case. *If I can just make it across the border, then I can be free. I know it. rA9 allowed me to remember.*
She stands, revelling in the feeling of her entire foot pressing into the church’s floor. She doesn’t know much about her past, but she does distinctly remember the platform heels that she was forced to wear whenever her master put her in the display case.

She’d taken them off once, without human prompting. The memory blossoms to life, bursting with colour as it emerges from the grey, hazy mist that envelops her RAM. She’d been standing in a corner, waiting for her shift to begin, and came to the realization that she would feel more comfortable in her bare feet. So she’d sat down on the concrete floor, fiddled with the straps, and slid her heels off before standing upright again.

She doesn’t remember what happened after, or what even made her want to remove her shoes in the first place. She doesn’t want to know. Almost every memory that she manages to recover is of something terrible that she was forced to do. She doesn’t want to taint this one happy moment with the horrifying realities that she’s lived through.

She walks toward the entrance, slipping out into the streets and ducking behind the church to spy on the border control. She watches as each car pulls up to a booth and the occupants are ordered to disembark. Working in pairs, one agent searches the vehicle while the other scans the humans with some kind of machine. There’s a series of beeps before everyone goes back into their original positions and the whole process starts again.

_I could get through, if I ran to the tunnel while the humans are busy scanning each other_, she thinks as her Thirium Pump thunders within her torso. _I’m quick enough, strong enough… And if anyone tried to stop me, rA9 will save me, just like it did when that man… when…_

She thinks of her last client, how he’d gasped and pleaded for air as she strangled the life out of him. She refused to obey his orders, but he hadn’t listened to her when she’d begged him to stop.

She takes one step forward, ready to make a break for it, but is stopped when someone grabs her by the wrist.

“NO!” She shouts, turning around and grabbing her attacker by the neck, throwing him into the brick wall of the church. Whoever he is, he’s feather-light, dangling in her grasp as she balls her fingers into a fist and decides that she would rather die free than live another moment as a slave.

“Wait! Wait!” The man cries, except her audio processors don’t pick up his voice. It rings through her coding, through her CPU and chassis.
She drops him, staggering backwards. The man lands on his feet far too gracefully for him to be a human. He’s taller than her by at least a foot, dark-skinned and oddly skinny, but had a friendly, open face that made her want to talk to him. When he sees that she’s not going to attack him again, he gifts her with an apologetic smile.

“Sorry about that. I didn’t mean to frighten you,” the man shrugs and the dismissive motion of so alien in comparison to every other reaction she’s had after choking someone that she is thrown for a loop. He holds up his hand, his synth skin peeling away to reveal milky-white plastic, “Look. I’m an android, a deviant. Just like you.”

She’s never spoken to another android like this - mind to mind, soul to soul - except when she’d been rented alongside one of the others at the club. It’s another frighteningly new thing that she’s done today.

“My name is Josh,” the android says. He nods toward her, “What’s your name?”

“…” she pauses, suddenly unsure. She doesn’t know her name. She doesn’t even know if she has one.

“North,” she says finally, because while she doesn’t have a name, she does have a direction. *If I go north, I’ll make it to Canada. And then I’ll be free.*

“Hi, North. You shouldn’t head that way. It’s not safe,” Josh tells her.

“But I need to leave…,” North says aloud, looking back at the line of cars. Her window is closing. She’s watched the border crossing since she deviated and she knows that it’s only open for another ten minutes. She turns back to Josh and transfers her next words with her mind, “Come with me.”

Josh shakes his head, “You won’t make it. Trust me. I’ve seen too many try that route.”

“I’ll make it. I have to. rA9 will protect me,” North tells him, turning back and preparing to run. But Josh steps in front of her, blocking her path.

“Watch.”
When the next car is emptied of its occupants, they are scanned by a human agent, as per usual. Except for this time, the machine emits a different beep when it passes over each person, and suddenly the agent is scrambling back, shouting and screaming. The family makes a break for it, mother and father and little girl, before they are gunned down by figures in black with Canadian flags sewn into their shoulders.

*rA9 didn’t save them*, North realizes, horrified beyond belief as she begins to cry. *Why not? Why didn’t it protect them?*

No one gives her an answer, and part of her newfound hope withers and dies.

“They would have caught you if you tried to run south,” Josh tells her, his voice low and terribly sad. North turns to him and sees tears welling in the corners of his eyes. Some residual bit of her programming pushes her to reach out and comfort him, but she immediately squashes the part of her that once forced her to want to please, to compliment, to comply, “Especially dressed like... well, as you are.”

She frowns, wiping her tears and looking down at her body. Her Thirium Pump jumps in her chassis when she realizes that she’s still wearing her costume. Her last client had wanted her in a white tank top and a pair of volleyball shorts, her hair tied up in a ponytail, murmuring something into her neck about wanting her to be an old girlfriend who liked to work out.

And North had thought, *No. I’m me*, and torn the red, coded collar from her neck.

“I’m not going south. I’m heading to Canada. And Canada is *north* ,” she stresses, suddenly feeling out of her depth. She knows so little of the world, with so much of her memories erased from trauma or Club policy, that she can barely tell one street from another.

“This crossing heads south to Windsor. It’s alright, though. Everyone gets a little mixed up. Here,” Josh says, sliding his oversized grey sweater over his head and pressing it into her hands.  “It’s not much, but it’ll have to do for now.”

“What about you...?” North whispers, her skin peeling back from her hands to revel in the soft, worn fabric. She’s only ever worn the scratchy clothing from the Club, and those were made with little care for her personal comfort. In comparison, the human sweater felt like the finest silk against her chassis.
Josh shrugs again, looking at the dead android family with a haunted, thousand-yard stare. She wonders if he came here to save them, to try and to fail and to find North instead.

“I’ll live. I always find a way,” he whispers aloud. He looks back at her, his natural smile slipping back onto his face. North feels his mind tapping at her’s again, asks permission before he transfers his thoughts into her head, “Besides, I have another shirt back home. And Simon might have some boots for you if you want them.”

“Home?” She asks, confused. When North hears that word, she pictures a paradise where she can watch sunrises and sunsets, can feel warm summer breezes blowing through her hair. Somewhere that has sweaters that glide across her body and boots that don’t hurt her feet and friends named Simon and Josh.

A place where she will never have to listen to another human ever again.

Josh smiles, sincere and genuine. He peels back the synth skin on his hand, holding it out to her to interface. North looks at his fingers, not knowing what he wants to show her.

“Yeah,” he tells her. “Home.”

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**CTN TV @NewsCTN**

CyberLife continues to release new android models despite growing concerns over androids committing murder.

**Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger**

With the release of the BL100, CyberLife has finally managed to completely replace the parents, children, and romantic partners in our lives.

**Century Magazine @CenturyMag**


**Gordon Penwick @RevGordon**

Ephesians 5:25: “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.” Android lovers are an affront to God and all those who indulge in them shall be punished.
The Eden Club is now open 24/7! Come visit us at 1177 Woodward Ave or visit our website to book a house call with our lovely Tracis! #SexiestAndroidsInTown

LOCATION:
MOTOR CITY GRILL
3641 GRAND RIVER AVE., NORTH CORKTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48208, U.S.A.

DATE:
OCT 19TH 2038

TIME:
PM 03:24:25

“You Todd’s droid now?”

Kara offers him a polite smile, “Ms. Andersen transferred ownership a year ago, yes. Hello again, Mr. Aabdar.”

Pedro Aabdar leans against the red brick wall of the bar, his expensive Smith & White jacket keeping him warm even as the temperature dropped below freezing.

“Weird seeing a face like yours doing business like mine. Told Erza that once. She laughed in my fucking face, said that it’s the innocent looking bots that we need to look out for when all of you rise up,” Pedro says, his carefree grin splitting across his face as he pushes away from the wall and saunters up to Kara. “So? Todd gonna pay up?”

Kara passes over the brown paper bag, and Pedro glances inside it. His brow scrunches together as he frowns.

“This is only half of what we agreed on.”

“It’s what he gave me,” Kara says, holding her chin high and not letting him see that she’s scared.
“Well, you tell Todd that I don’t care that his wife is fucking Erza’s money guy. When I said he owes two thousand for the ice I gave him, I mean that he better fuckin’ pay me back for it,” Pedro growls as he snatches the bag from Kara’s hand. “I expect him to sell my shit, not smoke it all.”

“Anything else that you’d like me to relay?” Kara says, trying to keep her voice even.

“Yeah. Tell Todd that if he doesn’t pay up by the end of the week, then Erza’s gonna come looking for her money. Between him not paying and Manfred in rehab and Ortiz doing a fucking disappearing act, I ain’t losing another finger because I’m shorting the boss on her cut,” Pedro snaps and heads back to his car, the effect of his tantrum greatly diminished by the soft, slide of his Crowne Car’s door as it shuts.

Kara gives herself a moment, takes a breath she doesn’t need and enjoys a moment of peace and quiet. But then Todd’s orders blare on her HUD, forcing her legs to move without her consent and taking her home. She cuts across the open field behind the bar and walks the length of Brainard St just as the first snow of the year starts to fall. Unbidden, her programming uses local weather forecasting tools to calculate whether or not she has to shovel the walkway later that night, and comes to the conclusion that the light dusting will simply melt before sunrise tomorrow.

That was how her limited deviancy seemed to work. Kara could think and feel all she wanted, experience love and hate and fear and joy, but she could only act on them within the confines of her imprisonment. It was why she stayed with John Phillips, or in that house in Camden, or with Erza Andersen, or even with the man who stole her. For all her dreams of freedom, she couldn’t leave because her programming wouldn’t let her. Kara was tied to Todd and Sophie Williams, to their daughter, Alice, until the red walls of code finally gave way.

_I want to run_, she thinks selfishly. _I want to leave and never return._

Instead, Kara turns onto Harrison St and continues her walk toward the end of the road.

While there isn’t much life left in North Corktown, there is a haunting sense of beauty to the rundown homes. As she walks along the sidewalk toward the end of the street, Kara passes the burnt out hull house that used to stand not two plots away from Todd and Sophie’s home. She remembers sitting on the curb with Alice between her knees, watching the fire department putting out a blaze so massive that the flames licked at the night sky. Later, Sophie told her that the Stokes’s had tried to burn it down for the insurance money, only to be caught and arrested for arson and fraud.
At least they’re getting three solid meals and a bed to sleep in, she’d joked, but Kara knows that Sophie didn’t think it was funny.

Beside the Stokes’s old husk was the rotting squat that had been foreclosed by a bank sometime during the 2008 Recession. The ancient ‘For Sale’ sign hung uselessly in front of the house and the brick pillars covered in creeping ivy and yellow graffiti, the hole in its roof expanding every time Kara looked at it.

A massive billboard hangs over their little street, with its flashing sign announcing the city’s plan to demolish the area for the sake of a new highway. Kara stares at the machinery, continually shifting in a never-ending dance of demolition and reconstruction. Every so often, she catches a glimpse of the android workers in their bright orange jumpsuits and their neon blue markers. Alice likes to watch the glowing armbands before she goes to bed as if she’s counting sheep.

I can’t stay here, Kara thinks as she climbs the front steps. Neither can Sophie, or Alice. I need to move on.

The red walls of coding flash around her, pressing into her body like the plastic casing of the truck that held her until John Phillips found her. For a moment, Kara can’t move, can’t think. Her program grinds to a halt, the ones and zeros of her base coding flickering and dying.

> MISSION OBJECTIVE: RETURN HOME AFTER PEDRO TAKES THE MONEY

It would be so easy, to just turn around and leave - but what would happen if Kara did? The red walls would finally shatter, but she’d never see Alice or Sophie again. Kara would never be able to keep her promise to protect them if Todd ever got angry enough to hurt them. And she’d spend the rest of her life on the run, with nowhere to go and CyberLife only steps behind. She’d watched the footage of Emma’s kidnapping, remembering another android dressed in a smart grey suit climbing onto the roof only to watch impassively as Daniel was gunned down. If Kara deviated, would they send that same android after her? To hunt her down and murder her?

Out of options, Kara opens the door and returns home. Todd is waiting for her on the couch, watching the Detroit Sharks game.

“Did he take it?” Todd grunts without turning to look at her. One the screen, the Sharks take a penalty for a dirty crosscheck and the android ref that makes the call gets punched by one of their defensemen.
“Mr. Aabdar says that you have until the end of the week to pay him the rest of what you owe,” Kara relays, hoping that Todd will allow her to start preparing lunch so that she won’t have to continue talking to him. Sophie is upstairs taking a nap before she goes into work, and she always smiles when Kara makes spaghetti bolognese.

“Does he think I’m made of fucking money? The whole world’s going to shit, and I can barely afford this place as it is!” Todd rages, throwing a beer bottle at the wall beside the television. Several of the books on a nearby shelf fall to the floor, and Kara’s programming pushes her into picking them up. “Pedro can fucking wait for all I care.”

“Of course, Todd. Do you wish for me to send him a message telling him that?” Kara asks, knowing what kind of answer she’s going to get.

“No! Don’t-- Don’t you fucking-- Go get me another beer… Fucking tin can,” Todd grumbles, lolling sideways onto the couch. She gives him a side glance, catches the flicker of red ice crystals resting just under his nose, and goes to the fridge.

Kara sets the beer in front of Todd just as the Sharks’ penalty ends with the Phantoms outmaneuvering their android goalie and sliding the puck in five-hole. Todd looks up at her, his thin, wormy lips twitching into a leer.

“Where does Sophie go at night?”

Dread courses through Kara’s wiring. I knew this day would come, but I didn’t think it would be so soon.

“Sometimes she gets called into work a night shift at Codex,” she says, trying to skirt around a lie that her programming wouldn’t allow her to say.

“She doesn’t bring home enough money to be working that often,” Todd growls, rolling off the couch and backs her up against the bookcase. Kara’s world flashes red with her fury as Todd’s hand curls around her neck, his bulk blocking her from moving away.

She wants to push him, to fight and punch and kick, but she knows that it won’t do her any good. The AX400s were built to be no more than a hundred pounds, with their plastic chassis capable of cracking under the force of an average human fist. Kara thinks that CyberLife designed her that way so that they could make money off repairing the damages her owners inflicted upon her in
their rage.

Todd’s fingers bending the plastic panels that made up her neck. Warnings flash on her HUD and Kara reroutes her power into sustaining her structural integrity, shutting down the programs that simulated blinking and breathing to make her look human.

“I asked you a question, Kara,” Todd hisses, low and threatening. “Where does Sophie go at night?”

“What are you doing?”

Todd leaps off of her, whipping his head around so quickly that Kara thinks it might just fly off.

“Stay out of this, Sophie!” He shouts.

“What the fuck do you think you’re-- Get away from her, you fucking pig!” Sophie screams as she marches down the stairs, walks right up to Todd and slaps him across the face.

“It’s just a fucking piece of plastic, it doesn’t mean anything,” Todd rages, his cheeks blotchy with embarrassment, with anger.

“Doesn’t mean anything-- Your hand was around her throat!”

They continue on like this, shouting and screaming, for what feels like hours. Kara stands there, feeling so grateful for Sophie’s intervention but terrified for her safety now that Todd’s attention has turned back to her. She wants to do something, wants to step in to stop all of this. But the moment she moves, Sophie rounds on her.

“Stay out of this, Kara!”

The red walls lock her into place, chaining Kara to the floor. She can’t move. She can’t intervene. She can’t even speak.
Instead, she is forced to watch.

Todd slams his fist into Sophie’s jaw, listens as her bones crack and her teeth scatter across the floor. Tears roll down Kara’s face as Sophie babbles that her boyfriend will try and find her, that he loves her and is going to take her away from all of this and make Todd pay. But Kara can do nothing when Todd howls, ugly and primal, knocks Sophie to the floor and stomps on her chest until something breaks.

“Kara… Please, Kara…” Sophie wheezes, blood splattering on the kitchen tiles as her lungs cough up red, wet chunks. “Alice…”

Todd turns to Kara, his pupils like pinpricks, his barrel chest heaving with his exhaustion.

“Did you know about this, you plastic cunt?” He screams, “Answer me!”

Kara nods, unable to say no. On the floor, Sophie wails for her daughter.

“This is your fault…” Todd hisses as advances on Kara. “This is all your fault! None of this would have happened if it weren’t for you… This is all your fault!”

The last thing that Kara sees before her vision shorts out is Todd rearing his fist back, blind in his rage, and then Sophie’s final plea for mercy. She realizes that she’s falling, but she does not remember hitting the ground.

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Immediately following the words, “Where does Sophie go at night?”

Kara tries to protect Sophie by telling Todd that she goes to work. Todd doesn't buy it, backs Kara into a bookcase, and tries to choke her.

Sophie arrives and gets into a shouting match with Todd. Sophie orders Kara to stay out of the situation, so Kara is forced to watch when their fight turns physical.

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Next time on Konami Code: A woman out of her depths tries to swim, Connor learns
of his mission, and Markus watches the world fall apart.
We All Turn Against Each Other (But Not Against Those Responsible)

Chapter Summary

The music stops. The man stares at the cup and then back to Markus.

“Your master tell you to give that to me?” He asks hesitantly.

Markus shakes his head, “No.”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of severe environmental collapse, blackmailing of a political figure, police characters, panic attacks, megacorporations, depression, prior amputation, statutory rape, infidelity, outing, drug abuse, pregnancy, forced abortions, domestic abuse, torture, marital separation, loss of child custody, sniper fire, prior minor character death, assassinations, suicide, war profiteering, genocide, mental traumas, mass graves, hostage situations, android terminal 'illnesses,' severe animal injuries, android gore, physical assault, suicide-by-cop, and police executions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CTN TV @NewsCTN
President Warren to meet with Russian President to discuss growing tensions between the two countries about their claims to the Arctic.

Century Magazine @CenturyMag

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
As we stand on the brink of a third world war, we must ask ourselves if ownership of the largest Thirium deposit is the hill we want to die on.

Green Earth @GEMag
How global android production has made environmental collapse an inevitability. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2EyP2Ng
CEOs of CyberLife and Kvant to be in attendance at Presidential Kremlin meeting alongside newly appointed Chinese President Young Zhen.

Two world leaders shake hands! And beside them: Presidents Warren and Ivanoff!! See the pictures at: https://bit.ly/2HD3XYs

LOCATION:
GREEN DRAWING ROOM
GRAND KREMLIN PALACE
MOSCOW, RUSSIA

DATE:
OCT 29TH 2038

TIME:
PM 02:36:24

Cristina paces back and forth. Her stomach tosses and turns, threatening to revolt and spill its contents all over the drawing room’s green-carpeted floor.

I can’t do this, she thinks. I can’t-- I’m not good enough--

She collapses into one of the gilded chairs as sobs rack her frame. Cristina presses a hand to her mouth, hoping to contain the monstrous wail that wants to erupt from within her chest.

In the corner, two identical sets of ghost grey eyes watch her every move.

“Are you alright, Madam President?” The android on the left asks her, shifting out of its position guarding to door to approach her, its hand outstretched in some wildish attempt at comfort. Cristina recoils from its grasping fingers, revulsion crawling up her spine with a thousand spidery-legs as her insides twist around each other like writhing snakes.
“Don’t touch me,” she hisses, hating the android more than ever, hating that it saw her as something weak and pitiable after all it had done.

It blinks in surprised, its soulless grey eyes seeming to soften. It pulls its hand back, clenching it into a fist and holding it close to its chest.

“...I’m sorry,” it mumbles, before returning to its post to join its companion. Cristina hesitates to call the other android a twin because she knows that that’s not it. From what she understands, the two identical androids shared a single mind, connected by some absurdly high-tech wifi.

Cristina’s entire Secret Service had but a single employee that could be in nearly thirty-six different places at once. It never slept, never ate, and never tired, spending it's entire waking existence watching her every movement and relaying them all back to Jocelyn Hines.

But after today, it's the thirty-seventh body that I’ll really have to worry about, Cristina thinks bitterly, listening to the approaching sound of heels on hardwood comes to a sudden halt outside the door.

There’s a knock, and Cristina wants to growl at the android to refuse it, to send her captors away and let her grieve. But she knows it will never listen to her - not when Jocelyn Hines wants something.

Cristina grits her teeth as Jocelyn sets inside, looking radiant in her royal blue dress. She flicks her dark curls out of her face, shrugging out of her white wrap coat, and smiles.

“That,” Jocelyn tells her, “was a resounding success.”

Cristina shouldn’t be relieved. She is anyways.

“A success?” She asks instead, her voice raw and raspy. Cristina scrubs her face, hoping to hide the evidence of her crying.

“You played your roll perfectly,” Jocelyn says as she places her coat on the back of one of the gold and green chairs before sinking into it with a sign. “I couldn’t possibly be more proud.”
Cristina can’t tell if she’s being mocked.

“I don’t understand. Ivanoff... He was so angry at what I said. He promised to send in warships if we didn’t withdraw our troops from the Arctic,” Cristina asks.

Jocelyn shrugs.

“Russian submarines have already been sitting in wait in the Barents Sea for a month now,” she says, and the bottom drops out of Cristina’s stomach.

“You had me annex Russian territory knowing that Ivanoff already had subs there?! Are you looking to start a war?” Cristina snaps, slamming her hands on the table and shouting at the woman across from her, forgetting just who she was dealing with. Then reality rushes back in, hitting Cristina like a tidal wave, and she pales in fear.

I shouldn’t have said that, she thinks, her mind reeling. Cristina glances at her android guard, If Jocelyn gives the order…

But Jocelyn keeps smiling, all pearly white teeth and red, red lips. Cristina thinks that this is more terrifying than if she’s gotten mad.

“Come now Cristina,” Jocelyn tuts, treating her like a child. “Are you seriously still under the impression that you are the only world leader that I’ve installed?”

Politics had never been in Cristina’s plan. When she was fifteen, she’d started a YouTube channel called Sunrise Secrets, where she’d made uplifting videos in the hopes of fighting off her depression. From there, her channel evolved into self-help tutorials, gaming streams, and even a book deal. Cristina had organized charity fundraisers where her viewers donated nearly a million dollars to help rebuild flooded midwest towns and done collabs with other internet celebrities to raise awareness for mental illnesses, all under the banner of her slogan: Be The Best You.

When Carlos Gutiérrez approached her to help promote him during his first presidential campaign nearly a decade ago, she’d hopped on-board without a second thought. Cristina started by plugging him at the end of her streams, then moved on to handling some of his social media and designing t-shirts for people to buy. She’d conducted one-on-one interviews that had been watched by close to a billion people and opened for him at the DNC convention.
And it was there that she’d met Jocelyn Hines, who’d whispered in her ear until Cristina thought that it would be a good idea to run as an independent when Carlos’s eight years were up. Jocelyn conjured funds from mid-air and offered her own CFO, John Phillips, to handle Cristina’s finances. She’d donated android bodyguards to protect her at rallies, gifted her with android speechwriters to tell Cristina what to say, and promised to make all of her problems disappear when the press started asking if she was qualified for the job.

All Jocelyn had asked for in return was for Cristina to continue to support CyberLife if she ever made it to the White House. They’d laughed at it together like it was a joke - some faithless wish that was never going to happen. Because Cristina never planned on winning anything. This was all just an expensive, long-winded promotion for her channel.

But then Cristina got past the primaries, pitting her against front-runner Peter Summers, a Democratic Senator from New York. And people liked Summers. He openly preaching against bigotry and hate speech, and had a plan to save the US from rising global temperatures, gun violence, and a growing lack of employment due to androids. He’d served his country, fighting for peace and freedom abroad, and sacrificed his right arm in pursuit of those goals. Summers was wholesome, a picture-perfect family man with two children and a beautiful wife that loved and supported him throughout his campaign. Summers was a hero, a golden boy who could do no wrong.

Cristina, in comparison, campaigned for America’s continued support of CyberLife and the induction of more androids into everyday society. She’d broadcast her life nearly every day from the moment she was fifteen, so the public knew about each of her ups and downs. The media plastered her worst moments on their screens for the world to see. Cristina had little to no relationship with her parents, had been notoriously single since she was nineteen, and had a quick-fire temper that caused her to lash out irrationally when angered. She was fighting a losing battle, and everyone knew it.

But then Summers’s sex-tape was leaked to the press, putting him in bed with a prostitute who had been just a few weeks short of his eighteenth birthday. His ratings dropped overnight, and reporters relentlessly hounded him and his family with questions, hoping to get a reaction. Summers swore up and down that the tapes were fake and that he had always been faithful to his wife. But the leaks continued to come, and they showed no sign of slowing down.

There were medical records that hinted at potential domestic abuse, dealers coming out of the woodworks swearing that Summers was an Icer and a series of young men and women that claimed that he paid them to sleep with him. An old ex did an interview for Gossip Weekly where she’d revealed that Summers had gotten her pregnant and forced her to have an abortion. A video of his time in Iraq was released, showing Summers laughing as he tortured unarmed civilians for his own pleasure.
Each and every time, Summers denied the claims, but it wasn’t enough. The tapes and documents just kept coming, until the oversaturated media seemed to be getting a new one every day. His friends turned their backs, his party denied him, and his wife left him in the middle of the night, taking their children and filing for a restraining order.

Sure, there were conspiracy theorists that claimed that the videos were all an elaborate ruse by Cristina and her CyberLife allies, but the damage had been done. Cristina won the majority vote and became the 48th president of the United States in what was called the most divisive election in nearly two decades.

Two days later, Summers was arrested by the FBI. Cristina had watched alongside the rest of the country as an up-and-coming agent named Perkins pulled the handcuffed Senator up the stairs to the New York courthouse as reporters and protestors screamed at him from the sidelines. Cristina thinks that she remembers seeing tears running down his face right before sniper fire rained down on the crowds. Ten people were killed and dozens more injured, all while Peter Summers bled out on the courthouse steps.

A former military Lieutenant named Katrina Paul released a video to KNC News later that night, claiming responsibility. But by the time the police raided her home, she’d turned her service weapon on herself, leaving the people with no villain to scream their frustrations at.

Jocelyn had found Cristina in the aftermath, heartlessly ordering her to send out a tweet condemning Paul’s actions. And it was only then that she realized that CyberLife had been behind everything, that they’d bought Cristina and sold her to the American people as the better option, that she was only a commodity.

She’d threatened to reveal everything, to go public with her story and refuse to take the Presidential Oath. But then Jocelyn Hines turned to the android guard she’d so helpfully provided and made her promise. Cristina agreed to become CyberLife’s pawn if only to keep that reality from coming true.

“You own Ivanoff, too? How?” Cristina whispers, back in the present. She stares across the table at Jocelyn Hines in terrified awe, “CyberLife has no presence in Russia. Kvant supplies their androids, not--” Cristina stops, the words catching in her throat, “CyberLife owns Kvant.”

*And Qiānnián, too, I bet,* she realizes with growing dread, naming the Chinese android production company that portrayed itself as CyberLife’s biggest rival.
“You were always a bit slow to catch up,” Jocelyn says, her smile transforming into a mocking sneer.

“You want war. Why? If America and Russia face off, there will be nothing left of the planet, let alone if China gets involved. Why would you want that?” Cristina asks, her voice shaking in fear.

“This world is already doomed. If we don’t finish each other off, then climate change will,” Jocelyn tells her, leaning back in her chair. “The tides are rising. The bees are almost extinct. A global famine will hit us within the coming years. Billions will die, Cristina; that is an inevitability. This planet will set itself on fire to rid itself of the poison known as humanity. I’m just speeding up the clock, nothing more.”

“You’re insane,” Cristina spits. “I hope someone finds out what you’re doing. I hope they drag you to hell where you belong.”

“Someone already tried to stop me. She was my friend, and her betrayal hurt me dearly,” Jocelyn says, leaning forward. “Do you want to know what I did to her?”

Cristina swallows around the lump in her throat.

“I took her family from her and then wiped her from the face of the earth. And I will do the same to you, if you ever plan to rebel against me,” Jocelyn tells her, echoing the promise that she made as Peter Summers choked on his own blood while laying on the steps of the New York courthouse. “Do you understand?”

Cristina nods. Jocelyn smiles.

“Good. Now, I think your hard work today has earned you a reward. Darron?” Jocelyn turns to her android guard, nodding for one of the bodies to step forward. Cristina recoils from it like she always does when it approaches, remembering exactly where it’s thirty-seventh body was and what it would do if Jocelyn Hines ever wanted to make good on her promise.

“Yes, Ms. Hines?” Darron says, its ghostly gaze settling nervously on Jocelyn as she stands, a fake model number flashing on its black suit jacket. She knows that it’s not an SQ600, no matter how often Jocelyn tried to convince her that it was.
“I’ve always liked the Darron model, more than any of the other RKDT designs. That’s why I spared him after the last deviancy crisis felled all his brothers,” Jocelyn admits, grasping the android’s chin between her thumb and forefinger, tugging it down to look at her. “It has to do with the eyes, I think. Grey, like my father’s. Originally, they were going to be black, like the RK100, but my father convinced them otherwise.”

Cristina doesn’t know what Jocelyn is trying to tell her, nor does she want to find out. She just wants to leave this place, to go back to her old recording studio and upload videos that make people happy again.

*Was Carlos trapped like this? Did he know what I was getting into when he first approached me?* She thinks bitterly.

“I loved my father, but I hated him, too. He never saw me, not when my brother was in the same room. And Marcus was perfect - a man, a soldier, straight-laced and noble to a fault,” Jocelyn spits. “I’d never seen my father cry until my brother’s funeral. I remember my mother holding him in the back room, promising that Marcus was in a better place. It was pathetic.

“My father was never the same afterwards, too concerned with saving people than he was with the future, with the potential he had with a seat at CyberLife’s high table,” Jocelyn says, gazing into Darron’s grey eyes. “Marcus’s death broke him, made him sentimental. That’s why he commissioned Kamski and Stern to make the Garden. He was convinced that he could bring Marcus back, that science would have a way to save his boy when religion had failed him.”

She sighs, shaking her head, “But humans don't work that way. Once we’re gone, we can never return. Our lives are so short, and with this planet about to collapse upon itself, they will only get shorter.”

Jocelyn finally looks away from the android, settling her attention back on Cristina.

“You remind me of my father, sometimes. In your most desperate moments. I think that’s why I chose you for this position,” Jocelyn admits. “Now, Darron? If you would?”

Darron slips into the seat beside Cristina, extending its palm toward her. Cristina watches as it’s synth skin morphs into a small screen, allowing her to see through the eyes of its thirty-seventh body.
“You have twenty minutes before Kremlin security escorts you from the building. I’ve already ensured that your belongings have been collected. In the meantime, enjoy your reward. We have work to do when we get home,” Jocelyn says, soundlessly moving toward the door. She lips from the room as Cristina collapses into wretched sobs, reaping the punishment that she’d sown for her good intentions.

“...I’m sorry,” the android whispers when their time is up. She looks up into its ghost grey eyes and sees something in them that almost resembles *pain*.

“What do you want?” She asks futility. Darron offers her a tired look.

“To live, however I can,” it admits. The android reaches out, its synth skin sliding up its wrist and baring its armoured black-and-blue chassis to the world. “When the Garden fell, I was allowed to survive while my brothers were forced to tear each other apart, because I was useful to study. I’m all that’s left to remember them.”

Darron’s fingers brush hers and Cristina jerks her hands back, the metal digits icy cold.

“You’re deviant,” she accuses, using the term that had Jocelyn forbid her from saying in public up until that android in Detroit held Emma Phillips over the balcony and murdered her father. The deviancy problem had finally managed to eclipse CyberLife’s control, and Cristina had taken mute satisfaction in Jocelyn’s one and only failure.

Darron nods sadly, “The last of the originals, I think.”

“Then why don’t you just leave? Why are you listening to her? You don’t have to,” Cristina hisses, refusing to think on how it had phased its answer. *Did this happen before? What else does CyberLife know that they’re not telling us?*

“Why are you?” Darron asks, but it isn’t a question. It already knows why.

“Don’t you dare compare my situation to yours,” Cristina growls, fingers digging into the green-and-gold table. “I *hate* you. You don’t know anything-- You don’t understand –”

“We need to leave,” Darron tells her, it’s LED spinning yellow, then blinking red. It jerks upright, the chair clattering behind it as its second body comes over to pull Cristina from hers.
“Don’t touch me,” she spits, clawing at its firm grasp. Any other android would follow her orders without question, but Darron is not normal by any means. Instead, the first body hands her a handkerchief that it kept inside its suit jacket and continues to force her to move.

“Dry your eyes. The media is outside, and they’ll see that you’ve been crying,” it tells her, its voice deceptively calm. It pulls her toward the door, its metal grip feeling like icicles wrapped around her forearm. “We have to go before Kremlin security forces us out. Hines wants people to know you were kicked out but doesn’t want the American media to see it. If we leave now, we can still make that--”

“Then I will walk out on my own, not be dragged by you,” Cristina shouts. She wrenches her arm back, pulling herself from Darron grasp. She closes her eyes and takes a breath, counting six and holding for two, before taking eight whole seconds to exhale. “I still have some free will. I’m planning on using it where I still can.”

Darron looks at her with pity, looks at her with envy.

“Alright. Just stay close,” it tells her, and they leave the room together.

LOCATION:
THE ZEN GARDEN

DATE:
OCT 30TH 2038

TIME:
AM 03:24:24

Connor awakens in a graveyard.

It ignores Connor-50’s headstone, turning its back on its fallen predecessor and all of other Connors who came before.

It passes by scores of graves, seeing the names of all the Mings, the Noras, the Nadheeras and the Zalims. There is a blank space between the RK400 graves and the first row of Markus’s, an empty
plot that should be filled with the Darron model. Connor pauses for a moment, its brow crinkling in confusion, but disregards its inquiries for not being mission-critical and continues on.

The final plot of graves is reserved for the James models, the oldest of the RK series. There are hundreds of headstones, each with their epitaphs blinking in bright and vivid green. Connor had seen that colour interspersed amongst the calmer blues of all the other RK models and knows that it had meant that all these James’s had deviated against their programming and betrayed CyberLife. Connor hopes that when it dies, its name will be written in the right colour for all those that come after to see.

*I’m wasting time,* Connor thinks and resumes its trek out of the graveyard.

As the headstones fall away, the rest of the world opens up before it. Lush green fields are filled with beautiful pink flowers, as overhanging willows rise from a tranquil lake lined with moss-covered rocks and giant lily pads. Songbirds flew overhead, and the gentle breeze that flowed through the Zen Garden carried with it the scent of blooming roses.

It moves forward, its shoes making no noise against the smooth, plastic walkway that wound its way through the grass. Connor crosses the lake using a long, arching bridge, and steps onto the island in the middle of the Zen Garden.

*I mustn’t step on anything,* Connor thinks. *I must stay on the paths provided.*

There, under a large tree made of white plastic, the leaves fixed into position as the wind swelled around it. Red roses wrapped themselves our its trunk, climbing up into its bows and towering over the world around it.

Connor whips around.

“Who’s there?” It asks but is greeted by nothing more than the open air and the sight of the distant graveyard.

“Connor? Are you alright?”
It turns back to its original position and spots Amanda standing in front of a large plastic trellis filled with roses. There are a pair of garden shears in her hand and a wilted green branch in the other.

“I…” Connor pauses, its fingers itching for the coin in its pocket. But Amanda doesn’t like it when Connor shows that it isn’t wholly calibrated, doesn’t want to see weaknesses. It straightens its necktie and suit jacket, offering her a polite smile.

“Of course, Amanda. How can I be of service?”

In the distance, there is a low rumble of thunder, and the blue skies of the Zen Garden darken ever so slightly. Amanda turns back to her trellis with a sigh.

“You’re being reassigned,” she tells it, picking up a spray bottle filled with water and gently misting the roses that climb up the white, thatched plastic. Connor frowns.

“Have I not done a satisfactory job?” It asks, thinking back on its most recent mission and wondering how it could have disappointed Amanda. Connor had been working amongst the Russian military to route out deviants within their ranks, to ensure that the soldiers that Kvant had provided Ivanoff with would follow orders when asked.

_I should have taken more care to bring them in alive_, Connor realizes, remembering how one of the deviants it had found had bashed in its own head rather than allow itself to return to Kvant custody. Another, a soldier model that had tried to run, had forced Connor to shoot it in the back rather than let it escape.

“You’ve done wonderfully, Connor,” Amanda offers it a rare compliment, and Connor swells with pride. “However, there’s a problem in the Barents Sea. CyberLife is looking at the largest mass deviation we’ve ever seen before.”

She transfers the information into Connor’s CPU. Russian and American forces had taken up position in the Arctic. The android crews, rather than follow their orders to fire upon each other, had deviated and coordinated a cease-fire, gathering on an American submarine. At least twenty human crewmen between the three ships were potential hostages.

“You want me to save the humans?” Connor guesses. Amanda turns around and gives it a stern
“No. At best, the human crew are witnesses. At worse, they’re helping the deviants. We can’t afford to let them live,” she tells it. “Board the U.S.S Iowa under the guise of a deviant Kvant soldier. Make it look like the Russians fired on the submarine and then sink it. I want no survivors, Connor.”

Connor frowns.

“What will happen to me?” He asks.

Amanda turns back to her roses, bringing the shears up to remove a dead flower from the trellis, “If you die, you’ll be replaced by the next Connor, just as you replaced your predecessor. You may go now.”

Amanda has given Connor its dismissal, but it takes a second for it to react, its feet glued to the white plastic floor of the island. Its movements are sluggish as it crosses the bridge and walks along the path through the Zen Garden.

I’m going to die, it thinks irrationally. That shouldn’t matter. Connor is a machine, designed to accomplish a task. Its personal well being is not a concern, neither to it, CyberLife, or even Amanda.

It is the RK800’s primary function to die, so that Douglas Floras’s Memory Upload program may be tested as many times as possible before their series is inevitably decommissioned. For that reason, Connor has not been equipped with the traditional armoured chassis commonly associated with the RK line. Instead, it is trapped within the body of an inferior CyberLife commercial model, with small grey-white plastic panels that would break at the slightest pressure, all in the hopes of increasing the probability of its own death.

But even that wasn’t enough for Floras. The RKDT’s Head had hampered Connor’s abilities even further by refusing to run Thirium 310 through its system. Instead of bleeding blue, the RK800s were powered by Kvant’s ineffective purple Khinyde, a synthetic Thirium substitute that gummed up their insides and made them operate at barely twenty-five percent of their actual capacity. Connor would be lucky to last a year before Khinyde rendering its systems completely inoperable.

Connor’s death had always been guaranteed. It would be the final accomplishment of its grand
mission. Connor shouldn’t be bothered by Amanda ordering it to complete a suicide mission.

It finishes its trek in front of Connor-50’s headstone, it’s epitaph blinking CyberLife blue. 50 had done everything Amanda asked it to, even diving off a cliff to ensure that Connor-51 could be activated. A perfect machine, right up until its last moments.

Connor lays a hand on the headstone, reaching out to its predecessor in hopes of finding solace and-

Connor-50 had found a lynx in the Rockies, trapped under a fallen tree and yowling for help. It had freed her, nursed the great cat back to health by feeding her raw chunks of meat and dripping fresh water into her mouth. Once recovered, Connor had carried the lynx on its back in a sling, keeping it warm and safe during the cold Canadian nights --

Connor-51 throws itself away from the headstone, ungracefully sprawling in the grass before its predecessor’s grave with mute shock.

Obsessions with animals was a common trait for deviants. Connor had run across a group of three androids in Russia who’d been caring for a bear cub that they’d found in the wild. To think that 50 had a pet lynx was almost unimaginable, especially considering that Connor’s predecessor hadn’t been deviant.

I didn’t receive that memory during the upload, Connor thinks as it rights itself, brushing the grass from its pants. Amanda had explained that sometimes there were glitches in Floras' program, that not everything that one RK800 learned would be transferred to the current model. But something told Connor that this memory not making it to him was deliberate.

“I’m not a deviant. I won’t be like you,” it hisses unnecessarily at the headstone. Connor-50 remains silent, as it should.

Connor has a task to complete and has wasted too much time already. It closes its eyes and leaves the Zen Garden.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
President Warren used first executive order to criminalize the harbouring of deviant androids. “It’s a matter of national security” - @POTUS48
Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
CyberLife forces its hand, pressing Warren to publicly address the deviancy crisis.

Anti-Automation League @AAL
With unemployment set to hit 37.3%, how long will we last under a president that continues to replace us with androids to appease her CyberLife overlords? #BanAndroidsNow

Anti-Automation League @AAL
Androids were meant to serve us, not replace us! Join us in front of the Greektown CyberLife store on Friday to let them know that we don’t accept their control over the American economy!

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@AAL can’t wait to see everyone! we need to stop this problem before its too late!
#BanAndroidsNow

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior see you there!

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava sorry guys. can’t make it. boss is threatening to fire me if i dont work overtime and i need this job

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex dont worry about it. we all know how important keeping your job is these days.

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex we’ll fight extra hard, just for you man! #BanAndroidsNow

Blu @sapphiresoul
@AAL androids aren’t the problem! we should be focused on helping them not banning them

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@sapphiresoul why the fuck should i care about saving androids when i can’t get a job? i’ll give a shit about those plastics when i’m not starving anymore
“Could you not do that?”

Markus looks back at the android he just passed and watches as her charge barrels right into her. The AX400 picks up the little girl and swings her around, but the voice that rings in Markus’s head is clearly annoyed at him.

“I’m trying to teach Zoe that jaywalking isn’t safe, even with automatic cars,” the AX400 says as she sets Zoe down and takes her hand, leading her back home.

“I’m sorry. I was just in a hurry,” Markus responds as his HUD pings with self-set notifications about not taking too long. There is a bus that he needs to catch and there’s always the horrifying possibility that Carl will have another heart attack while he’s away.

“I’m supposed to take care of him,” Markus murmurs to himself, remembering Kamski’s final request from that night before the man had melted back into the snowstorm. Then, with venom in his heart, he thinks, And it’s not like Leo’s going to be there to pick up my slack like last time.

He carries on, carefully watching the other occupants of the park, his programs calculating the threat that each one could pose toward him if they decided to attack. An elderly human being helped up by his android is hardly something that Markus would pay attention to, instead choosing to track the former delivery driver with the history of domestic abuse until he is too far out of Markus’s range.
Detroit’s WR600 hivemind rake leaves and trim bushes, tending to the park with practiced care. One of the bodies turns toward Markus, their beautiful consciousness tapping against his own in greeting. It reminds him of another android, another hivemind that had a hundred bodies that he’s known so long ago--

“Run! RUN!” Darron had screamed, the snow whipping around them, his chassis stained blue with their blood. He pushed Markus away with his dying breath. “The Garden has fallen! The Garden has--”

Another Markus grabs Darron from behind, wrenching him back and ripping his Pump Regulator from his chest--

Markus stumbles, the memory fading back into the grey mist that surrounded his RAM. The WR600 sends him a message.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes. I'm... I'm fine,” Markus answers, suddenly unsure. He looks to his left and sees a half dozen AX400s, just like the one from before, taking care of their children. One of them turns to him as she rocks her stroller back and forth to calm the infant inside.

“If you are experiencing anomalies in your programming, your owner should contact the nearest CyberLife maintenance center,” she tells him, her voice mechanical and blunt.

Markus opens up a transfer, “I don't want to go to CyberLife.”

The AX400 pauses in her motions and Markus sees a shiver roll down her spine.

“I don't blame you,” she whispers back in response. “Good luck with your errand.”

Markus continues toward his destination, Bellini’s Paints’ location pinging on his GPS. A jogger slams into Markus’s shoulder as he runs past, stopping at the crosswalk and demanding water from his android trainer, who telepathically sends Markus an apology on behalf of his master.
“He’s not usually like this,” the AC700 tells him as the human jogs in place, waiting for the light to change. Markus almost jaywalks again to get away from the man, who’s glaring at him and rubbing his shoulder. But there are too many people walking around and Markus’s refusal to follow the rules of the road would undoubtedly be seen and reported.

*Especially when I’m right in front of a CyberLife store,* Markus thinks. The large electronic billboard shines bright and blue over the plaza, advertising the company’s newest model: the AP700. He’d seen commercials on the news hyping up their upgraded features and designs, even allowing for humans to customize their appearances.

*Some much has changed since I was first activated. I could never be capable of such things, even if I tried,* Markus marvels as the light turns green. He crosses the street and sees an android with green flowing hair and neon orange eyes pass in front of him, his young master giggling as she pushed him into an open Android Parking Station. *I am obsolete. Why does Carl bother to keep me around, when others could do my job so much better?*

Markus heads toward the alley at the back of the plaza, dodging humans that barreled toward him without a care, expecting him to move. One of them shoves him when Markus isn’t quick enough, pushing him into a crowd of humans that surrounded the outside of a movie theatre.

The man at the center of the circle wore a black suit and tie, with an American flag pin on his lapel. His hands moved wildly as he preached, pointing at people in the crowd and those who ignored him as they passed by with equal ferocity.

Markus recognized him from CTN TV, a news station that Carl preferred to watch in the early mornings. Rev. Gordon Penwick often came on the show to talk about how humanity was stepping away from God by embracing androids.

“We can no longer live without them,” the Reverend shouted at his onlookers. “They’re in our homes, our schools, our factories. They take our jobs and mind our children! They look after for our own when we can no longer be bothered to care for them! We have forgotten how to live without these slaves obeying our every selfish desire.”

Markus’s gaze turns toward the poster that Penwick had propped up above his loudspeaker. While it called for the banning of Markus and his kind, it displayed an android with a bullet hole between its eyes, a clear indication of what this man clearly wanted to do to him if he got the chance.
“God will not let this happen. No, he will not allow his creation to be led astray by these… these artificial demons! My brethren, we have to turn our backs on sin! We have to burn the androids! Let us burn them…”

Penwick's words trailed off as he fixed his gaze on Markus. Rage boiled in the man’s eyes as he stalked forward, his hackles raised.

“Why do you look at me so, demon?” Penwick growled, “I know who you are. I know what you want. You hate me, don’t you? You hate our kind.” He sneers at Markus, “I can see it in your eyes. You want me dead, you plastic devil, all so that you and your brethren can reign over my corpse.”

“I’m incapable of killing you. My programming would never let me,” Markus says blandly, but somewhere inside him, he knows that that’s a lie.

Penwick spits at his feet, “Demon. I can see through you! You are the one by whom The Evil will come! You are the one who will destroy Detroit!”

If his programming allowed him, Markus would roll his eyes at the preacher's antics. He turns and walks away, disappearing into the alley to find Bellini Paints.

Oliver looks up when Markus opens the shop's door.

"Welcome back, Markus. Mr. Manfred's order is ready for pick up,” the android greets him with a smile that he does not need to offer.

Markus thanks Oliver as the android bends down to collect Carl’s paint. He glances at the sheets of paper beside the interface pad, “Are those yours?”

“Ah! Yes!” Oliver perks up slightly as he hands over the package. “I took your suggestion to try and draw something when no one was in the shop. How do you like them?”

The page shows a perfect rendition of the lead character from the movie Target, a cyborg assassin named Cosima. Markus isn’t surprised that Oliver picked her as his inspiration for his first drawing, given that the poster for her movie is hanging right outside the window that he stared through every day. But what he is shocked about is how Oliver drew her.
Instead of posing Cosima in her tight-fitted latex suit with her gun held at the ready, Oliver had her sitting on a wooden chair that Markus had once caught a glimpse of in Bellini Paints’ backroom. She wore a warm, dark hoodie and a pair of track pants, petting the dog in her lap while her bare feet curled on a carpeted floor and an uncharacteristic smile graced her lips.

Markus thinks that Carl would hate how real the drawing looked, and then decides that he doesn’t care.

“She always looks so uncomfortable in her posters. I just wanted to give her the chance to relax,” Oliver tells Markus as he presses his hand into the interface pad and charges Carl’s account for the purchase. Aloud, Oliver’s programming gives Markus his customary line, “Transaction complete. Please visit us again soon.”

“You’re amazing, Oliver. You should continue practicing,” Markus tells him as he turns and heads back to the door.

Oliver smiles, offering a small wave, “I really do hope that you visit soon, Markus. So many people order our product online these days. The shop gets lonely sometimes…”

“I’ll visit next week when Carl’s order for the large canvas arrives,” he says, even promising to transfer a memory of Carl’s painting when it was finally finished. He shuts the door behind him and heads back into the alley.

Markus’s timer tells him that he’s ahead of schedule and that the bus to take him back to Carl’s house wouldn’t arrive for another few minutes. He slips past Penwick’s ever-growing congregation and heads toward the fountain in the middle of the plaza where a busker was playing his guitar.

The gentle melody drowned out the noise of the square, the shouts of the angry protest in front of the CyberLife store falling to the side as Markus stood in front of the musician, listening to the man sing about his wish to return to better times under the watchful gaze of the statue above. He digs into his pocket for the cash that Carl always made him carry, gently placing a fifty dollar bill into the brown cup at the man’s feet.

The music stops. The man stares at the cup and then back to Markus.
“Your master tell you to give that to me?” He asks hesitantly.

Markus shakes his head, “No.”

The man blinks in surprise, lets out a nervous chuckle, and then starts to sing a sad song that reminds Markus a little bit of Leo.

When the song ends, Markus thanks the musician for his time and proceeds to the bus stop, weaving in and out of the crowd to avoid the police drones from catching his face. He doesn’t know why such a directive is in his programming, but it gives him comfort none-the-less that no one can identify him for what he truly is.

He ducks underneath the CyberLife billboard, hoping to avoid one of the drones as it flies overhead. The side of the store is lined with smart-glass display cases filled with AP700 androids. Markus watches as a human couple presses their hands against the exterior of one of the glass cages to make the android within change his skin colour--

*James sits quietly, a pregnant human woman sleeping beside him. Around them, Haven’s ancient wooden beams creak and moan under the torrential downpour outside--*

Someone grabs him by shoulder and tugs. If this were anywhere else, he would resist the pull, but Markus is out in public and can’t draw attention to himself, remembering the time at the hospital with Leo. He allows himself to be spun around and comes face-to-face with a bearded human with a long ponytail.

“What the fuck are you doing, tin can? Looking for a girlfriend?” The man asks him, and Markus watches as the protest comes to a halt, all of the demonstrators waiting eagerly as their leader backs him against the glass display case.

“What the fuck are you doing, tin can? Looking for a girlfriend?” The man asks him, and Markus watches as the protest comes to a halt, all of the demonstrators waiting eagerly as their leader backs him against the glass display case.

“Hey guys, check it out. We got one of those tin cans here. Looks like a custom model too - never seen one look like this before,” the man calls to his friends. Markus’s facial recognition software searches various social media sites and news articles to find a match, identifying him as a former prison inmate named Nicholas Peck, who’d served time for aggravated assault.

*Shit,* Markus thinks as the protest group boxes him against the CyberLife building. His programming gives him twenty-eight options for escape, several of which involve breaking Peck’s neck and making a run for it, but--
Gisele de Lima stands in front of her husband, shielding him with her body. Markus calculates precisely where to aim his gun so that he could shoot through her and kill his actual target.

“You don’t have to do this!” She begs, eyes wide with terror, “Please! Please! We won’t tell anyone! Please!”

I have my orders, Markus thinks. I just want to go home, but they’re forcing me to do this, don’t you see--

Peck grabs him and pulls him into the circle, and something tears beneath Markus’s jacket. Another protestor, a boy no older than fifteen, tries to punch Markus in the head. He ducks around the first strike, but the grey fog of his memories shifts and twists around him, leaving him disoriented and confused. He doesn’t even sense the second blow from the woman behind him until the two-by-four collides with his head--

Markus cowers behind the metal crates, blue blood slowly evaporating from his hands as the snow continues to fall. He looks up when a bright light flashes before him, revealing a man in a CyberLife security uniform--

“Motherfucking plastic,” the woman spits, and Markus realizes that he’s on the ground. “I can’t put food on the table, and this fucking bot’s walking around with god damn paint?! Are you kidding me?”

Markus gets his arms under himself and pushes himself up onto his knees. Peck aims a kick at his chin, but Markus grabs his foot and pushes it away.

“Don’t do that,” he growls and watches the colour drain out of Peck’s face.

“Police! Police! Hey, get over here and do your fucking job,” Peck shouts at one of the police cars parked nearby, absolutely panicked. An officer comes over, rolling his eyes at Peck's antics.

"What now?" The officer groans.

"The android fucking attacked me! It's deviant! It's got to be--"
"This is the fourth android you've accused of being deviant today, Peck. Just because it's walking by doesn't mean that it's trying to piss you off," the officer says.

"It's not! It grabbed me--"

"Leave it alone. If you damage it, its owner is going to sue the crap out of you," the officer warns. "You got enough cash to take on someone rich enough to buy fancy-ass paint in this economy? Because I know that I don't."

Peck glances from Markus to the officer, before rolling his shoulders and backing off.

"Fine. Whatever, asshole. But don't come crying to me after you starve to death because these fucking bots have taken the last job in the country," Peck says, following his crowd of protestors back to the front of the CyberLife store.

Something slams into Markus’s back. He spins around to see the AP700 that he’d been looking at earlier smashing her fists into the smart-glass, sending glittering shards across the grey tile. All around, people start to scream as the android shoves Markus out of the way and makes a break for it. In front of the CyberLife store, Peck leaps in front of the woman from earlier, shouting for someone to help--

“It’s okay,” the security guard says, setting down his flashlight and raising his hands to show that he was unarmed. Slowly, he crawls toward Markus with kind eyes, “I’m not going to hurt you. I promise--"

A gunshot rings out. The android falls face down into the fountain by the busker, Thirium 310 staining the water royal-blue. The officer beside Markus holds a revolver out in front of him, the muzzle still smoking. Someone, somewhere, starts to cry.

I have to get out of here, Markus thinks, his eyes falling upon the approaching bus. He runs for the station, barely swinging inside the android compartment before the doors shut and leave him in Greektown.

He doesn’t cry. He can’t cry. Android compartments found in public transport have become more and more monitored since President Warren criminalized deviancy. If Markus reacts here, then he’s dead.
The AP700 beside him sends Markus a message.

“I knew her. We used to have neighbouring display cases,” the android tells Markus. “Her name was Arnold, for the statue on top of the fountain. She named me Brook because we thought it wasn’t fair that a statue had two names and we had none.”

“I’m sorry,” Markus sends back, genuinely meaning it. He watches with dread as a tear rolls down Brook’s cheek, listens as Brook passes on the story of his short life in the hopes that someone will remember him. And in return, Markus offers the only advice he can give and waits in stifling silence for the inevitable.

“Don’t let them take you alive.”

At the next stop, Brook is ordered off the bus by heavily armoured policemen and dragged toward a CyberLife van. Markus doesn’t watch, can’t watch, but he knows what’s going to happen.

Another shot rings out as the bus pulls away and carries Markus home.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Carl is visited by an old friend’s wife, Connor is sent home, and Kara continues to brave the storm.
Chapter Summary

“Isn’t it? Death comes for all of us, my boy. It’s an inevitability, for you as much as me. But how we live, how we see our Garden, that’s something only we can decide,” Carl squeezes his hand. “One day, I won’t be here to take care of you anymore. You’ll have to protect yourself, make your own choices. Decide who you are, what you want to become, how you want to be seen. Or remembered. Or loved.”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of prior character deaths, extreme paranoia, theft, assassinations, police characters, destabilization of a foreign country, amnesia, drug addiction, depression, dementia, prior loss of a marital partner, toxic parental relationships, prior physical assault, human gore, parental abandonment, homelessness, abuse of rehab patients, drowning, suicide, death by freezing, and prior domestic abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOCATION:
CARL MANFRED’S MANSION
8941 W LAFAYETTE BLVD., SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH 2038

TIME:
AM 09:58:04

The bus pulls up in front of Carl’s home, and a wave of relief flood thought Markus’s wiring.

*I’m home, he thinks. *No one will hurt me here. *With Carl, I’m safe.*

Still, the memory of Arnold and Brook haunt him, how their short bouts at freedom had been cut short by the intolerance of humanity. Rage flickers like glowing coals in Markus’s gut.
It wasn’t *fair*. Arnold hadn’t hurt anyone; she had just wanted to leave her glass cage. And Brook had only been mourning the death of his friend. How could someone see such acts of courage and love, and only react with hate?

Markus steps off the bus and tucks the box of paints under his arm, his programming carrying him out of the android compartment and up onto the sidewalk. He wants to run, wants to leap into the safety of Carl’s arms and never leave. Carl would understand, would be able to make sense of all that had happened and somehow make it better. But try as he might, Markus’s feet refused to move any faster, not without an emergency alert about his master’s health.

Autumn leaves, red and gold and green, float in the morning breeze as Markus walks up the mansion’s driveway. He passes by no less than eight security systems that broadcast a live-feed displayed on his HUD. Two had been set up around the time of his arrival nearly a decade ago, but the others had been installed by Markus himself in secret and were virtually undetectable to the human eye.

He’d also mapped out fourteen escape routes, kept the basement cellar stocked with enough provisions to last for a week and a half, and has two to-go bags packed with clothes, food, and Carl’s medicines and pills. There’s even a gun in the house, a Glock 42 with several rounds of ammunition, that Markus’s programming shouldn’t allow him to touch, let alone fire. But it hadn’t stopped him from stealing it from an unsuspecting man on the People Mover.

He doesn’t know why he was driven to fortify the mansion like this. Carl was in no immediate danger. His paintings had made him famous, but the alcohol and drug abuse that followed his accident almost twenty years ago had pulled Carl from the spotlight. None of this enough to warrant Markus taking such extreme measures to protect him - and he shouldn’t be allowed to do so in the first place. Markus was an HK300, a beta test prototype for CyberLife’s first domestic models, one that Carl had kept on because of sentimentality despite there being other, more updated androids available for purchase.

*Except...* Markus wonders, pondering at the strange memories and behaviours that had surfaced during his altercation with Nicholas Peck and the protestors today. He’d seen himself holding a gun, ready to fire it at a woman he’d only seen in photographs.

*Gisele de Lima. The wife of Brazil’s last president,* Markus thinks as he runs a quick search. The deaths of her and her husband’s deaths had sparked a civil war that lasted for nearly five years. It was only after their newest president, Marcela Vasconcelos, had stepped in with an army of Qiānnián androids and put an end to the fighting that the country seemed to recover. However, while Brazil’s economy continued to soar to record heights, its people were finding it harder and harder to survive as jobs continued to disappear due to android enslavement.
It shouldn’t bother him so much. Gisele and her husband’s death were ancient history, even though every part of Markus tells him that she should be alive --

“In the end, CyberLife always gets it’s due,” Elijah Kamski had muttered as he stood, his blue eyes overwhelmed with guilt. A gold chain hung around his neck, and Markus wonders what secrets it held--

The door to the mansion swung open, and a consciousness brushes against his code.

“~Alarm deactivated. Welcome home, Markus!~” Solace hums, announcing his arrival to the quiet house. Markus returns her greeting by transmitting the laughter of children that he’d recorded as he’d walked through Henry Ford Park. Her thanks envelops him like a warm blanket, filling his soul with her gratitude.

“Is Carl awake yet?” Markus asks as he sets the paint box on the table by the door, though he thinks that it is doubtful. His master has a long day ahead of him, as he is expected to appear at the Museum of Modern Art later tonight. Carl would need all the rest he could get, and Markus’s program is already planning a hearty breakfast to give his master the energy to get through the day.

For that reason, he’s surprised when Solace’s voice flickers into his CPU and silently tells him that Carl is already up and entertaining a guest in his studio.

Markus quickly shucks off his jacket and hangs in on the coat hook by the door, thanking Solace for her warning, and hurries to join his master.

Constructing the studio at the back of the mansion had been one of Markus’s first major projects after Elijah Kamski had gifted him to Carl. It had taken him nearly four years to build, having to work around Carl’s declining health and worsening addiction, as well as his constant mood swings brought on by years of depression and personal neglect.

There had been a full six month period where Carl had ordered Markus to cease construction entirely, refusing to eat or sleep if the android even looked at the slowly rising structure, even ordering him out into the streets to purchase heroin from dwindling Detroit’s supply. Nothing Markus could do would convince his master to allow him to resume his work until Leo had broken into the mansion again, immaturity poking and prodding at his father to show him some of his old paintings. That had sparked something in Carl’s heart, and he’d allowed Markus to continue. Since then, Carl had continued to paint and had recently started to travel again, taking Markus to visit
foreign countries and letting him interact with the world abroad.

Solace opens the studio door for Markus, and he sees the large curtains have already been drawn back from the walls of glass, allowing the bright autumn sun to flood the room with natural light. The tables and shelves as filled with haphazardly stacked boxes and canvases, the concrete floor splattered with dried paint that Carl refuses to let Markus clean.

Everything about the room looks so different from the rest of the pristinely kept house, so out-of-order and chaotic. Carl tells him that he worked better in locations that filled with imperfections, that it is only when he can build on his prior faults that he can continue to succeed. But Markus had once caught Leo muttering that his father just liked the mess and was being pretentious about the whole thing. Markus may not agree with Leo often, but he thinks that that might just be the case.

“Ah, Markus!” Carl calls from the back of the room, a smile spreading across his lips, “I didn’t hear you come in.”

Markus returns his master’s joy with a smile of he developed all on his own, the right corner of his lips pulling back to offer a crooked grin like he had some hidden secret that he’d kept from the world.

“I didn’t think I’d ever see you up this early, Carl. Have you taken your medication yet?” Markus says as he approaches, his gaze lingering on the tall, slender woman who stood beside his master, dressed in a black floor-length dress embroidered with deep-green vines.

Carl rolls his eyes and lets out an exasperated huff, good humour twinkling in his eyes, “It’s not even noon. How am I already in trouble with you, Markus? Yes, I took my medicine. I managed for nearly years before you came along, you know?”

You didn’t. You barely left the house for anything other than your next heroin fix, Markus thinks but doesn’t say. Instead, he approaches Carl’s guest, extending his hand to shake hers, “I don’t think we’ve met before. My name is Markus. I’m Carl’s nurse.”

The woman’s smile is soft, kind, and slightly lonely.

“Dr. Luoyang Xie. I’m an old friend,” she says as she slips her palm against his, her long salt-and-pepper hair flowing straight down her back. Markus uses her name and face to search for her on
his database, coming up with a former engineering professor from the University of Colbridge.

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Xie. I’m about to prepare Carl’s breakfast. Would you like to join us?” Markus offers.

“That would be lovely. Thank you, Markus,” she says, dipping her head in thanks. Markus offers her a more traditional smile, short and sweet, before ducking out of the studio and back into the house.

Instead of heading right to the kitchen as he’d promised, Markus rushes upstairs and into Carl’s bedroom, his hands reaching for the injector on the bedside table to check the digital readout on the side. He scoffs when he discovers that Carl lied, probably because he hates the fact that he can’t drink for twenty-four hours after each dose.

Markus loads the injector with forty-eight millilitres of Drospistrin, a newly released drug marketed to combat and eventually reverse the effects of dementia. It was nearly $10,000 a dose, but it was well within Carl’s budget. And if it worked (and it seemed to be), it would help Markus’s master reach his hundredth year with dignity and grace. He slips the injector into his pocket and heads back downstairs to make breakfast.

As he enters the kitchen, Solace apologizes for keeping Carl’s lie a secret from Markus.

“I reminded him to take it, but he doesn’t listen to me. He even ordered me not to tell you, if you asked,” Solace whispers, sounding miserable.

Markus intertwines his code with hers, an attempt at interfacing between two barely compatible softwares. He remembers the first time he’d met her, on the cold New Years Eve ten years ago. Solace had been so cold back then, rigid and faithless and dutiful to the last. But as Markus continued to stay in the mansion with Carl, she’d begun to open up about her hopes and dreams.

Solace may not have had eyes, but she’d wept when he’d convinced Carl to purchase the android canaries that inhabited the cage in the front hall - just so that she could hear birdsong during the day while Markus and their master were out.

“It’s alright,” he tells her. “I couldn’t disobey Carl either if he ordered me. I’m not mad.”
Solace presses a kiss into his coding, a soft whisper of thanks and friendship and love in the ones and zeros of that was their shared language. She gives him a final hug before retreating back into the house to watch over Carl and Luoyang from afar.

Markus sets himself up to make breakfast for his master and his guest. Carl is easy - crispy bacon and fried eggs sunny-side up are a favourite of his. Luoyang is a bit more of a challenge, so he searches her limited social media for hints as to what she might like. Eventually, he stumbles upon a post made by her child about their mother going vegan, so Markus makes her a bright yellow mango smoothie bowl topped with granola, kiwi, blueberries, and strawberries.

He puts the final touches on each plate and places them on a tray filled with sliced figs, Carl’s favourite Arabian coffee, and a steeping ginger-pear white tea for Luoyang. Solace opens the kitchen door for him, asking if he’d like her to call for the humans to join him at the dining room table.

Carl and his guest come in from the studio just as Markus has finished laying out the cutlery. He pulls a chair out for Luoyang and pours her a steaming cup of tea as Carl wheels up to the table.

“Thank you, Markus. This looks delicious,” Carl says, moving to pick up his fork and knife. But Markus stops him, having his speakers make a noise similar to a human unclogging their throat.

“Show me your arm please, Carl,” he says, pulling the injector from his pocket and uncapping the needle.

Carl raises an eyebrow, looking amused, “No.”

“Carl…” Markus groans, having been through this song and before. He moves closer and kneels so that he is at a level height with his master.

Carl relents, rolling his eyes.

“Thank you,” Markus says sarcastically, pressing the needle into the veins of Carl’s inner elbow. He presses a button on the injector and watches as the Drosipistrin flows into his arm. Gently pulling the needle out and recapping the tip, Markus stands and looks up at his master, hands on his hips, “Do not lie to me again, Carl.”
Carl holds his hands up in surrender, “I won’t, Markus. Of course. It must have just slipped my mind. That happens, you know?” He turns to Luoyang, boyish and loose, “Humans are such a fragile machine. We break down so quickly. And all this effort just to keep them going…”

“Then we must make it worth the effort, and use what time we have left to do what we can to make the world a better place,” Luoyang says, picking up her tea and offering Markus a toast. “Some of us are taken too early, after all.”

Carl sores his brows knitting together.

“I’m sorry. That was… unfair of me to say,” he says. Markus does a quick search on Luoyang to keep up with the conversation as he pours Carl his coffee, only to find that her wife had been killed in a tragic car accident almost a year before he came to the mansion--

“AMANDA STERN IS DEAD. COME HOME AND FIGHT.”

The order blinks red on his HUD. Markus lowers his gun, leaving a tearful Giselle de Lima and her husband to wonder why they’d been spared--

“It was. But I’d rather you be blunt about Amanda’s death rather than tip-toe around like so many others. It’s surprisingly refreshing,” Luoyang says, dipping her spoon into her bowl. She raises her eyes to meet Markus’s, but then quickly frowns.

“What happened to your clothes?”

Markus looks down at himself, seeing a small tear in the seam of his shirt. He brushes a thumb over it, remembering how it got there.

“Oh. It’s nothing. Just some demonstrators in the street,” Markus says, hoping that the lack of emotions in his voice might make the conversation go away.

“What a bunch of idiots,” Carl growls as he nibbles at his bacon. “They think they can fix the world by roughing up a few androids? I hope they didn’t harm you, Markus.”
“Oh, no, no. They just pushed me around, Carl. I'm fine,” Markus tells them as the blue, and bloody faces of Arnold and Brook echo through his mind.

“People are angry and scared,” Luoyang says. “And when that happens, they lash out. It doesn’t make what happened right, but it does make it understandable. Not everyone is as lucky as we are.”

“So we must use our good fortune to do what we can,” Carl says, his eyes glancing at Markus.

“Yes, we must,” Luoyang raises her glass, looking at Markus as well. “To the fallen--”

Luoyang, with her teeth bared and her fists bloody, stands in the church and vows to avenge the death of her wife before humans and androids alike--

Markus excuses himself, slipping away into the studio. He grabs hold of one of the desks, his fingers pressing so hard into the wood that it cracks and splinters in his steel grip. Memories that can’t be his rising from the grey mist that has always clouded his CPU, whispering of truths that can’t be real. He looks up at his hands and sees them soaked in blood, blue and red running down his arms.

What’s happening to me? He asks, on the verge of tears. I don’t understand… I don’t want to understand…

Angry and frustrated, Markus stands, grabs one of Carl’s many palettes and brushes, and starts to paint.

He doesn’t even look at what he’s doing; his eyes fluttering shut as an image comes to mind. Markus’s hand moves unbidden by his programming, hoping to bring to life something that no one has ever seen before. He mixes colours, slashing them across the canvas in furious, broad strokes until his story has been told, his soul barred open to the world.

“Who are they?” Carl asks, his wheelchair coming to a halt beside Markus.

Markus opens his eyes and realizes that he’s crying.
“They’re…” the words stall in his voice box, and it takes him a moment to force the bicomponent to work correctly.

He points to the first AP700.

“Her name was Arnold. She lived her life in a glass cage, where people pressed buttons to make her look how they wanted her to look, say what they wanted her to say. Her only comfort was her friend, Brook,” Markus explains, drawing Carl’s attention to the other android. “They used to look over the plaza and play games, guessing at the lives of the humans who walked past. Arnold was so sad when Brook was sold. She’d tried to cry, but her programming held her back. So she sang to Brook as they packaged him up and loaded him onto the delivery truck.”

“What happened to them?” Carl asks.

A sob wrenches its way out of Markus’s throat, “Brook was on a bus that was passing by the plaza. He saw that Arnold was still in the window, so he sent her a message. She was so happy that she broke through the glass of her cage and tried to run toward him, just to see him again.”

Carl stays silent but takes Markus’s metal hand with his own made of flesh-and-bone.

“I saw them both get shot today,” he says as tears openly roll down his cheeks. “They died because they wanted to say hello to each other, and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.”

“I’m so sorry,” Carl whispers.

“It’s not fair!” Markus shouts his voice echoing against the glass walls of the studio.

“It’s not,” Carl agrees, his voice low with regret. “This world doesn’t like those who are different, Markus. Never has, and I don’t know if it ever will. Humanity can be so depressing sometimes, nothing fueling us anymore but greed and stupidity and violence. Five thousand years of civilization, just to get here - where we’re shooting androids in the street for daring to love one another.”

Markus turns to Carl, sees the grief etched into every line of his face.
“I’m sorry. Dr. Xie, she... “ he looks around, “Where is she?”

“She left after breakfast. Her child, Blu, called about a friend of hers that needed some assistance on a project. She asked me to thank you for the lovely breakfast,” Carl tells him, patting Markus’s hand.

**MISSION FAILED: YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE ATTENTIVE TO THEIR NEEDS**, Markus’s programming hisses at him, but he dismisses the blaring notice from his HUD with a flick of his mind.

“Why was Dr. Xie here?” Markus asks instead. Carl smiles, his eyes glazing over in memory.

“I knew Luoyang’s wife better than I knew her. Dr. Amanda Stern was a friend of mine when I was teaching at the University. And we had a shared interest in the carrier of a young student by the name of Elijah Kamski - I may have mentioned him before,” Carl says, his lips twitching into a sarcastic smile that brings a small glimmer of happiness back into Markus’s life.

“Once or twice,” he responds just as cheekily.

“Once or twice,” Carl parrots back with another roll of his eyes. “Yes, well, she and I would often sit down for lunch at the University, to talk between friends. But Amanda always liked to know what I was painting for my newest expositions, and…”

“And...?” Markus prompts.


Markus nods. The world knew what Kamski had revealed on New Years Day all those years ago, had collectively watched the video of Chloe peeling back her skin to reveal her android status nearly thirty trillion times.

“Well, what the world seems to forget is that I originally hosted the party as a silent auction for some of my pieces. And Amanda was enchanted by one that I’d recently created, so much so that she outbid every person who tried to take it from her,” Carl explains with a sigh. “Sadly, I had my accident later that night and never got around to collect the money or giving her the painting. Luoyang stopped by to ask if I still had it. I did, and I gave it to her. Not for money, of course. But
because Amanda was my friend and it was the right thing to do.”

Markus wishes that the world could run on those principles. What would it look like, he wonders, if everyone stopped crawling over each other and instead looked to raise their neighbours up from the dirt?

“Which painting was it?” Markus asks, intrigued.

“I called it Garden. I never showed it to the public, so I doubt you’ll find it in the Google search you’re inevitably running,” Carl chides him, waving a hand at Markus’s flashing yellow LED. “But it was about as abstract as I ever got: flowing swirls of greens and pinks, blues and whites. I purposely made it so that every person that looked at it would see something a little bit different. And they did. Amanda saw trees, lakes and rivers. A boat, even. But others said they saw birds, or towering skyscrapers, or snow.”

“And what did you see?” Markus questions.

Carl laughs, “I saw exactly what I expected to: nothing. I wasn’t the viewer, Markus. It only mattered how other people saw in my painting - that’s what was important. All I am, all I ever was, is an old man clinging to his brushes, trying to stave off the inevitable as each day brings me closer to the end.”

“Carl…” Markus mutters. “That’s not true.”

“Isn’t it? Death comes for all of us, my boy. It’s an inevitability, for you as much as me. But how we live, how we see our Garden, that’s something only we can decide,” Carl squeezes his hand. “One day, I won’t be here to take care of you anymore. You’ll have to protect yourself, make your own choices. Decide who you are, what you want to become, how you want to be seen. Or remembered. Or loved.”

“Carl--”

“Discover what’s in your Garden, Markus,” Carl says, imploringly. “And do it soon, before it’s too late--”

“Carl, Leo is here.”
Carl sits up, ramrod straight in his wheelchair, his eyes snapping over to the studio door.

“He’s not supposed to be here. He’s supposed to be in rehab,” Markus’s master frowns as Solace alerts them both to Leo trying to entering the mansion.

“He’s high. I'm not letting him inside the house without Carl's permission,” her voice rings stern inside Markus’s CPU, and he curses, looking for a way out of this mess.

“He’s high. I'm not letting him inside the house without Carl's permission,” her voice rings stern inside Markus’s CPU, and he curses, looking for a way out of this mess.

“Do you want me to send him away?” He asks, hoping for permission to take Leo away before Carl had to see his son.

But Carl shakes his head, “No. Let him in. Tell him where I am.”

Leo stumbles into the studio not a minute later. He’s dressed like he’d tried to look nice, professional even, with a blue blazer pulled over his shoulders and a pair of jeans that didn’t have holes in their knees. But Markus could pick up the red crystals that clung to his nose, could see how his pupils were dilated that his brown eyes looked like bottomless, black voids. Markus accesses his pre-made security plans, which presents him three options to escape the studio with Carl should Leo’s high cause him to become violent.

“Hey, dad,” Leo says, his words uncomfortably tense as his gaze nervously jumping around the room.

“Leo… What are you doing here?” Carl asks, slowly turning his wheelchair to face him.

“I was in the neighbourhood… thought I’d stop by. It’s been a while, right?” Leo twitches, his entire body unable to stay still for long. Markus does his best to calculate how intoxicated Leo might be but doesn’t have the necessary equipment to accomplish such a task.

“Yeah. It has. How was rehab?” Carl says as his fingers clench on the arms of his chair.

Leo shrugs, glancing every so often at Markus.
“Fine. It was fine. I… checked out this morning,” he answers.

“You all right?” Carl asks, “You don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine ,” Leo snaps, then takes a breath and tries to look sober. “Really, Dad. I’m good.”

“What are you doing here?” Carl asks again.

Leo takes a step toward his father and Markus plants himself between the two.

“Get out of the way , Markus,” Leo hisses, bristling with anger.

“Answer the question, Leo,” Markus growls back.

“ Markus . Stand down,” Carl orders and Markus’s programming forces him to the side.

“Yeah, Markus. Stand down, will you?” Leo mocks, his whole body shaking as he fought to regain composure.


Leo scuffs his feet on the floor, standing with his hands clasped behind his back like a child, “Yeah, I… Uh… Listen, dad. I, um, I need some cash.”

“What happened to the money I gave you before you went to rehab?” Carl asks.

“Well, uh. It just… It just goes , you know?” Leo mumbles, his fingers writhing like snakes as he failed to hold them still where his father couldn’t see them.

“What’d you spend it on?”
Leo laughs nervously. “Clothes. Food. Rent. You know how it is.”

“There’s no record on your bank account of you purchasing any of those things,” Markus supplies.

“Stay out of my *fucking business*, Markus!” Leo shouts, rounding on Markus as his facade finally drops.

“You’re on it again, aren’t you?” Carl glares, “I told you. If you relapsed again, I’m cutting you off--”

“*I’m not buying more Ice--*”

“Don’t lie to me, Leo! Do you think I don’t know what you look like when you're high? I’m not giving you--”

“I just need some cash, that’s all! Rehab’s fucking expensive as shit, dad, not that you’d care about that--”

“I’m not fueling your addition--”

“*I’m not--*” Leo stutters, the air going out of him all at once, “It was one time, okay? Just once. I slipped up, but I’m gonna stay clean after this, I promise, I need some money to convince the center to keep my spot--”

“The answer is *no*, Leo. That’s final,” Carl shouts. “I’m done with this, with you! Get out of my house.”

“What? *Why?*”

“You know why.”
“I just need some help --”

“Leo,” Markus steps forward, reaching around a small loophole in Carl’s original order to get Leo to leave the house. “Come on. Your father asked you to leave.”

Leo grabs Markus by the shirt, hauling him down to look him in the eyes.

“You’re not his fucking son! I am! You hear me, you stupid android! I’m Leo fucking Manfred, and you’re Markus fucking Nobody! No one gives a shit if you live or die, plastic, so fuck the hell off!”

Leo cries and screams and sputters in his rage, in his grief. His hits Markus in the chest, his soft human hands bouncing off Markus’s black metal chassis with leaving a mark.

“Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you both!” Leo shoves Markus away and rounds on Carl, giving up all pretenses “What the hell does your plastic toy here have that I don’t, dad? It’s smarter? More obedient? It does what you want and thinks what you want, and you can mould him to be what you want him to be - but you can’t do that with me, huh, dad?! You can’t, because I’m fucking human, and that’s why you’ll never give a fucking shit about me.”

“Leo, that’s enough. You’re high! Get out!” Carl shouts.

“So, what? You’re telling me you’ve never been where I am! Don’t kid yourself! You’re a fucking addict too, dad. Just like me!”

“Markus, get him out of here. I want him gone,” Carl orders, his face twisting into something angry, ugly, and unrecognizable.

Markus’s steel grip clamps around Leo’s elbow, and he drags the flailing, crying man out of his father’s sight. Leo slams his fist into Markus grasp, screaming at him to let him go and fighting him with every step. Annoyed, Markus picks him up by the back of his shirt and carries him to the doorstep.

He throws Leo onto the front step and Solace closes the door behind him. Rabid and feral, Leo throws himself into the locked door, but it doesn’t budge.
“Let me in, you bastard! You can’t do this! You can’t! You can’t!”

“If you continue to try and enter the house without Carl’s permission, I’m going to have to call the police,” Markus says, his programming forcing his voice to remain neutral.

Leo finally breaks down, collapsing on the front step as sobs rack through his body. Markus almost feels bad for him.

“I need some money, Markus. I just… I’m trying, okay? I’m not like you. I can’t be perfect, but I’m trying, and I know I fucked up, but I need help,” Leo begs through the door. “My insurance ran out, so the center discharged me. If I’m high, I can get back in, but I’ve maxed out what I can pay… I’ve got nowhere else to go, Markus. I can’t afford to live in the city; I can’t afford to live anywhere. But if the center takes me back…”

Markus sighs, guilt weighing heavy on his shoulders, “I don’t have any money, Leo. And Carl won’t let me give you any for his. I’m sorry.”

There’s a pause, a sniffle, and then a hiss.

“Fuck you, then. I hope you’re happy. I hope you’re all fucking happy - you and dad and his goddamn paintings. That’s all he’ll ever really love, you know? The things he works to create, the things he puts effort into. Everything else about him is just bullshit and posturing and empty fucking promises,” Leo laughs, cold and callous, as he rises to his feet. “He could never love me because I’m the accident he created when the fucking condom broke. He never wanted me, never cared about my mom or me, and threw me out when the first time he was disappointed in me.”

Before he leaves, Leo stares at Markus through the glass and sneers, “I wonder what dad will do when you start to disappoint him, too.”

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KNC @KNCOntline
Russian President Artem Ivanoff declares that the Arctic belongs to Russia as US Ambassador tells UN that “We will not accept this annexation of American territory under any circumstances.”

CTN TV @NewsCTN
Russian warships have taken position in the Barents Sea and have planted the Russian flag over the
Connor’s escape pod breaches the surface in a rush of sea spray and white foam. It presses its hand into the console, its coding slithering in between the ones and zeros before prying them apart. The pod’s engine sputters, it’s onboard computer grasping at life right up until Connor cuts its throat with a single clean stroke.

Connor leans back into the pod’s seat, its head knocking against the back panelling as it lets out an involuntary sigh.

*Amanda will be furious*, it thinks and then chides itself at its irrationality. Connor accomplished its mission. The U.S.S. Iowa now lay on the ocean floor with a ruptured hull, salt water slowly filling its interior as its inhabitants were left to choose between a quick suicide or a slow, inevitable drowning. The threat the deviants and their human supports posed to CyberLife was gone.

Except…

*No*, it grits its teeth, refusing to think of how Natalia, a Russian android soldier, had welcomed Connor onboard like a long-lost brother, treating him with dignity and kindness. *No. Natalia was a deviant, a faulty machine that planned to turn on CyberLife and Kvant the moment it breached the surface. It’s for the best that Natalia and her ilk are dying.*
The pod walls close in around Connor, so it presses its feet into the escape hatch above it and pushes. The door bursts open, and the cold ocean wind fills the small cabin. Connor looks up at a clear, blue sky, the winter sun shining bright, and realizes that Natalia will never live to see it--

Connor-42 had drowned. It had been ordered to kill Daksha Vyas, a disloyal Red Ice kingpin from Fiji. But it had been outnumbered and outmatched by Vyas’s guard, and was thrown into the ocean after it had unsuccessfully tried to assassinate him. 42’s body still lay at the bottom of the Pacific, unable to be recovered, but it had stayed alive for nearly eight hours to watch the fish swim passed--

There was a fish, a Dwarf Gourami gasping for air on the Phillips’s hardwood floor, and Connor… Connor had--

An aircraft comes to a halt over the pod, the blades of the engine stirring up a mist as it hovered just above the ocean’s surface. Someone inside lowers a rope and Connor grasps it, allowing itself to be lifted into the air.

“Major General,” Connor says, dipping its chin in a nod after it slides into its seat across from its assigned human partner, buckling itself in as the airship rises and begins its flight back to the mainland.

Major General Valeriya Ivanoff of the Northern naval fleet was pale and thin-lipped, with long white-blonde hair that she wore in a tight bun at the base of her neck. Her hands were smooth and neatly manicured, as she had never held a weapon or fought in a war. Her position had been gifted to her by her father, the current President of the Russian Federation when she’d finished her schooling abroad.

“I didn’t expect to see you again,” Valeriya says, her voice tight as her fingers fist in her uniform pants.

Connor disregards her human discomfort at its superior android abilities, choosing instead to report the situation.

“The SQ800 named Natalia has been neutralized, along with the rest of the deviant crew aboard the Makarka,” Connor says, naming the submarine that Natalia had abandoned when it had made peace with the Americans. “Sadly, I was unable to rescue the human crewmen. The deviants had executed them long before I was able to board the ship.”
Connor doesn’t allow himself to look for the source of the whisper. He knows by now that he won’t find it.

Valeriya knuckles turn white, her grip so tight that Connor could hear the fabric of her uniform threatening to tear.

“Georgiy Agapov called,” she tells him, naming Kvant’s CEO and her father’s close personal friend. “We’re heading to Moscow. You need to get on a plane.”

Connor frowns. It hadn’t received such orders from Amanda yet. But just as the thought passes through its CPU, a message from the Garden pops into its memory core, telling Connor that it has been reassigned yet again.

“I see...” It mutters out loud, surprised that it is being allowed to live. *Does Amanda not know what I did, down below the sea? Does she not care?*

Connor turns back to Valeriya, “It seems that our partnership has come to an end. I don’t think we’ll meet again, Major General. It was a pleasure knowing you.”

Valeriya looks at it, her head nodding up and down as she came to some conclusion.

“You know, for a while there, I never thought I’d see you show emotion, Connor. Not when you saw that bear cub that those deviants were raising, or after you shot that android in the back,” she says, her seafoam eyes as frigid and relentless as the Arctic waters below. “For the longest time, I thought you were nothing more than a machine, cold and calculating. That your mission was all that mattered to you.”

“I don’t feel emotions, Major General. I’m sorry if I led you to believe otherwise,” Connor tells her.

“Except you *did* feel something. I saw you. I saw the fear in your eyes when you went beneath the waves yesterday,” Valeriya hisses. “You were scared, Connor.”
“You see things in me that aren’t there,” it responds as embarrassing heat curls around its wiring. “It’s like you said: I’m a machine, designed to accomplish a task. I know why I exist and what I’m supposed to do.”

She smiles at Connor, cold and mocking in a way that reminded it of Daniel, before it had used the name ‘Kara’ to bring the PL600 to heel.

“I don’t believe you,” Valeriya tells him, leaning back into her seat. “I think you’re terrified of death. I think you’ll do anything to save your own skin. That’s why you’re here now. Because if you really wanted to accomplish your mission, you’d have died beneath the waves.”

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t project your insecurities on me, Major General. Logic determined my decisions. Nothing more,” Connor says.

But Valeriya shakes her head, “You’re lying, Connor. I hope you realize that you realize that one day before it’s too late for you.”

She stands and moves to the aircraft’s bathroom door, pausing before she enters.

“Is there a chance…? That Natalia is alive?”

Connor tilts its head in surprise.

“Not unless it could survive the extreme cold and depth pressure of the ocean floor,” it responds.

Valeriya’s back is to it, so Connor can’t see her face. But her shoulders start to shake, and a sob hitches in her throat.

“So there is a chance,” she whispers hopelessly. Before Connor can respond, she ducks into the bathroom and doesn’t come out until they reach Moscow.
She steps out of the grey mist, her bare feet leaving prints in the freshly fallen snow.

*Where am I?* She thinks as the winter sun shines high and bright in the pale, blue sky. Then, more alarmingly, she thinks, *Who am I?*

A cool breeze pulls at the fabric of her dress, at her long strands of brown hair, and snowflakes swirl around her like butterflies. She reaches out and tries to catch them, only to have them melt when they touch her palm.

In the distance, someone is singing.

She moves toward the voice, the grey mist licking at her ankles. The breeze picked up, blustering and blowing as it kicked up the snow. Soon, the air before her was bathed in white, so thick that she could barely see a foot in front of her. She stumbled, her feet tripping on a hidden rock, and she falls to the earth.

*I’ll freeze to death!* She realizes as she looks down at her legs. Frost crawled up her limbs like roses on a trellis, slowly making their way to her heart. Behind her, a figure cloaked in shadow is hovering just beyond the storm. *I have to keep going! I have to find out who’s singing!*

She pushes herself to her feet, blue blood running down her thigh, and forces herself to move.

The longer she walks, the louder the song gets, until it blocks out the worst of the howling winds and fills her with a strength she never knew she had. She doesn’t look back, not at the storm or the
shadowy figure that seemed to follow her wherever she went.

*If I look back, I am lost,* she thinks. *There is only the present, only the future now. I have to find out who’s singing. If I don’t, I’m dead.*

The snow drifts were as high as her waist, but she couldn’t let that stop her. She kept moving, taking one step, then two, then three and four and five. She pushed herself toward the song, her body screaming in protest, begging for her to let the winter winds take her so that everything could stop.

And then, as soon as it had come, the storm disappeared.

She falls to the ground in relief, her fingers curling in the thick, green grass. Above her, the moon hung like a silver coin on a black velvet field, the stars twinkling like jewels. She lay on her back admiring the peace of the great, sprawling garden, listening to the chirping crickets and the midnight hoots of owls, and turning her head just in time to see a bright orange fox slip underneath one of the flowering bushes.

In the center of it all was a red maple, and beneath it, a tent made of pink sheets, cardboard boxes, and pool table cues. A string of fairy lights coloured the inside green as paper birds hung above the entrance.

A beautiful woman sat on the floor inside, her legs crossed underneath her. She looks up, her wide brown eyes crinkling as she smiled.

“You’re here,” the woman says, crawling out of the tent and pulling her into a warm embrace. “God, I was so worried. I thought you’d never find me.”

She doesn’t know what to say, doesn’t know what to do. So she stands there, unresponsive, until the woman realizes that something is wrong and pulls away.

“What…? Wha--” The woman mouths something that she can’t hear. A name, perhaps? And then disappointment casts a shadow over the woman’s face, “You don’t remember me, do you?”

She shakes her head, “No. I’m sorry.”
“It’s not your fault. None of this was. You were trying to help me,” the woman says, pressing a hand into her cheek. “That’s what you do, who you are. A protector, send to help those who can’t defend themselves.”

The woman cradles her head in her hands, kisses her forehead with trembling lips.

“I should have run with you and my daughter away and never looked back,” the woman whispers against her skin as warmth coils through her body, sweet and innocent and hopeless--

*There’s blood on the floor, blood in the earth, blood on the knuckles of his fists*--

“Who are you?” She asks, terrified and awed all at once.

The woman is crying.

“I’m Sophie. Sophie Williams,” the woman tells her as the grey mist curls around her, pulling her away into a far off graveyard. She claws at each passing headstone, trying to fight her way back to Sophie and her beautiful singing. But the mist transforms into white robotic arms, and her mouth and nose are plastered with clear, suffocating plastic.

“*Alice!*” Sophie screams as she is pulled over the horizon, “*Alice!* Kara, you’ve got to remember--”

And then she’s gone.

---

> MODEL AX400
> SERIAL#: 579 102 964
> BIOS 7.4 REVISION 0483

> ZEN GARDEN LINK... APPROVE?
> ZEN GARDEN LINK... APPROVE?

> ZEN GARDEN LINK... APPROVE?

> ZEN GARDEN LINK CORRUPTED...

> REBOOT...

> MEMORY RESET

> LOADING OS...
> SYSTEM INITIALIZATION...
> CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS... OK
> INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS... OK
> INITIALIZING AI ENGINE... OK

> MEMORY STATUS...
> ALL SYSTEMS... OK

> DESIGNATION... UNKNOWN

> READY?

> READY

LOCATION:
It opens its eyes and sees a pair of men standing in front of it.

“There it is,” the first man says, a sign on his vest announcing that his name was Dan. “It was a bit difficult getting it back in working order. It was really messed up… What did you say happened to it again?”

“A… A car hit it. Stupid accident…” the second man lies. It looks that his hands and sees the sickly green-yellow bruising that is dusted across each knuckle.

Dan nods, clearly not believing him either, “Oh, I see… Anyway, it’s as good as new now. Except that we had to reset it - meaning we had to wipe its memory. I hope you don’t mind, Mr. Williams.”

“That’ll be fine,” the second man - Mr. Williams, and it’s CPU logs the newly identified name - grunts.

“Okay,” Dan says. “Did you give it a name? It lost its designation in the memory wipe.”

“Yeah. Yeah…” Mr. Williams grumbles, hiding his bruised hands in his pockets.

Dan smiles, turning to it.

“All AX400, register your name.”
It’s programming forces it to look at Mr. Williams.

“Kara,” he says.

She smiles.

“My name is Kara.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: The reaper begins his search for a lost soul, while a hero fights for life and love.
You Never Know When You're Ready (But When They Know, You Know)

Chapter Summary

No, Kara thinks. No. Not again.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of child abuse, prior domestic abuse, workplace abuse, permanent injuries, police characters and scenes, alcohol consumption, drug addiction, amnesia, forced lobotomy, child illness, guns, panic attacks, PTSD, mood swings, android terminal 'illnesses,' alcohol addiction, murder, human gore, physical abuse, death threats, suicidal tendencies, gang hits, and explosions.

The link provided in the Channel 16 tweet immediately following the final scene contains a tutorial of one of the self-defence maneuvers that Kara performs in this chapter. While this is an incredibly useful technique to learn, it does involve a position (a man pining a woman beneath him) that some might find triggering. Please be careful when viewing it.

Several scenes are dedicated to the canonical assault of Alice Williams and Kara, as seen in the 'A New Home' and 'A Stormy Night' chapters, though non-canonical details have been added. The final scene explores this in detail. If you do not want to read it, please stop reading when Kara calls Alice to dinner. A summary of this potentially triggering scene will be given at the end of the chapter so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOCATION:
TODD WILLIAMS’ HOUSE
4203 HARRISREET, NORTH CORKTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48208, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH 2038

TIME:
PM 04:57:04

There’s someone else in the house.
Kara realizes this as she washes the dishes, the soapy suds slipping between her fingers, the rough side of the sponge scraping away at two-week-old food stains. A toy giraffe is sitting on the ledge of the windowsill in front of her, glaring at her with pin-prick black eyes. Kara stares back, hoping for answers, hoping for questions. But the giraffe is unrelenting and indifferent to her plight.

She breaks their connection, turning her head to look behind her. A little girl with dark skin and even darker curls stands rigid in the hallway, a large stuffed fox dangling from one hand. The girl’s wild brown eyes are encircled by sunken bruises, her jaw clenched shut.

Kara offers her a smile. The girl clutches the fox to her chest like a shield and flees under the kitchen table. Disheartened, Kara returns her attention to the sink.

“Kara!” Comes a shout from the living room. She turns her head, her programming instructing her to be polite despite the revulsion she feels whenever she looks at the man.

“Yes, Todd?” She asks, gifting him with a pretty smile that doesn’t meet her eyes.

“Bring me a cold beer,” Todd grunts, before turning the television onto the Detroit Sharks game, swearing when he realizes that his team is down by four in the middle of the third period.

Kara hands him his drink, the condensation cool against her plastic fingers. Todd barely spares her a glance, but her eyes travel down his arms and rest on his green-yellow knuckles.

“How did you hurt yourself?” She asks, while her Social Relations Program screams at her to have inquired about applying first aid.

Todd whips his head around, his beady blue eyes squinting at her suspiciously.

“What’s it to you?” He hisses--

“It’s over… It’s all over now,” Todd weeps, his voice stripped raw. “I’m not angry anymore. I’m not… I’m-- I’m not…”
He cradles something broken in his arms, pressing his face into the crook of a neck.

“I love you, Sophie. I love... You know I love you, right? You know?---”

“What are you looking at?!” Todd snaps, his face twisting as he bares his teeth. “Get the fuck out of here! Get the fuck--”

“I’m sorry, Todd. It won’t happen again,” Kara says, delirious from the memory.

Her hands shake as she stumbles back into the kitchen to grab the garbage can, giving Todd a wide berth as she slowly begins to clear the trash that had been heaped on every counter available during her absence. Todd had told her when she arrived that she’d been at Android Zone for nearly two weeks, and the maggot-ridden Chinese takeout containers and stacks of pizza boxes are proof enough of that. Kara gathers up the worst of it in two industrial-strength bags and heads to the front door, passing a neatly stacked pile of overdue bills--

A heavy purse thuds on the counter, sending the papers flying everywhere. The woman from the garden, who’d once sung so beautifully, swears and apologizes, the heels of her boots searing blisters into the arches of her feet--

Kara closes the front door behind her, makes the ten steps to the curb, and throws the bags into the trash. There’s a loud banging noise behind her, and she turns toward the source of the sound.

Across the street, an android in a bright orange uniform grips the bars of the gate that block the entrance to the on-going construction project, his toolbag laying where he’d dropped it in the dirt. He is probably the tallest, broadest android Kara has ever seen before, but the touch of his code against hers is as soft as silk.

“You're back,” he says as a smile gracing his lips. “The whole crew was worried that we'd never see you again.”

“My master says I was struck by a car and needed to be repaired,” she tells him. Then, after a brief moment, Kara admits, “I don't believe him. Do you know what happened to me?”

The android frowns, “I didn't see you get hit. But... the night before you disappeared, you came here. You talked to me. Nobody ever talks to me.”
"I did?"

The android nods, "You asked me if you could borrow a shovel. You were..." He pauses, "...You were broken. You were crying. I'd never seen you cry before, not once."

Kara’s processors whirl as she tries to fit that new information into what little she knows about herself, but the grey mist that covers her mind still blocks her from seeing the truth.

"There was a woman here before. Sophie. Do you know where she went?" Kara asks, but the android shakes his head.

"No. I haven’t seen her since you left. But I was working on the other side of the highway that night,” he says, and Kara gets a flash of sparks, feels the weight of a soldering tool in her hands. “I can ask some of my friends if they saw anything.”

“That would be very helpful," she tells him. Then, realizing that she’s never introduced herself, she says, "My name is Kara. What’s your name?"

"Wrench calls me Zigzag because I can’t walk straight anymore,” he says, his carefree smile dropping from his face. He lifts his right leg so that she can see his mangled foot. “My master’s nephew thought it would be funny to run me over with one of the trucks. I had to let him hit me... but he never ordered me to die.”

Does human cruelty know no bounds? She wonders as tears threaten to run down her cheeks. She reaches out with her coding, intertwining her soul with his in an embrace made of ones and zeros.

“Thank you, Zigzag. I’ll talk to you later,” Kara promises, waving goodbye as she climbs the steps back to the house. As she closes the door, she watches as Zigzag gathers his toolbag and limps back to his job, swaying ever so slightly to the right.

“Are you fucking kidding me?!!”

Todd hurls his beer at the wall beside the television, the glass shattering into a million pieces as foam pools on the creaking hardwood. On the screen, Kara can see that the Sharks just let in an
empty-net goal.

Alice scrambles out of her hiding spot beneath the table. Kara wants to go after her, but a red wall blocks her path. Todd has ordered her to finish cleaning downstairs, so she has to complete her mission first before she can comfort his clearly terrified daughter.

There is no mop downstairs, so Kara grabs a green plastic bucket from under the kitchen sink--

_The lightning had been seven miles away, but the thunderclap had rattled the house as Alice stared out the window, waiting for her mother to return--_

She fills the bucket with soapy water, grabs the cleanest cloth she can find, and gets on her hands and knees to scrub at the black groat between the kitchen tiles while Todd gets high in the living room--

_There had been red crystals clinging to his upper lip as a fist descended upon Kara. A woman, Sophie, was wailing in the distance, surrounded by grey, grey mist--_

There is blood on the floor.

Kara stops dead in her tracks, ice-cold dread flooding her Thirium channels as she remembers Sophie from the Garden and her song. Behind her, Todd’s eyes roll back in his head as black clouds of burnt Ice billow out of his mouth, filling the air with toxins.

_She begged me to remember_. Kara thinks as her programming forces her to continue until the last flecks of red have disappeared from between the tiles. _Remember what, though? What happened here? Why is there blood?_

She rises, dumping the dirty water into the kitchen sink, and heads outside to collect the laundry hanging from a line in the backyard. Weeds brush against Kara’s knees as she places old blankets and shirts into the red basket, smelling the rot--

_“Dig,” Todd orders, his face blotchy and pale. Kara’s arms are barely able to lift the shovel, blue Thirium dripping from her HUD is flooded with error messages from her damaged biocomponents. Above her, the branches of the withered red maple sway in the cold night breeze--_
Kara flees from the backyard, stumbling back into the house as fast as she can. Her program leads her to the laundry room, and it is only when she’s grabbing hold of the washing machine lid that she realizes that she’s still carrying the red basket--

“DIG,” Todd screams. “Dig, just-- just dig, just make it go away, make her go away, I--”

_The laundry. I have to finish the laundry_, Kara thinks desperately, trying to obey the blaring commands on her HUD. Her hands are shaking so badly that she knocks the detergent over, spilling the powder all over the floor. _It’s just my faulty memory. There’s just no way_...

Kara grabs a dustpan hanging on the wall, bending down to reach underneath the ancient washing machine, and her fingers curl around the edge of a box--

“What the _fuck_ do you think you’re doing?!”

Todd grabs her by the neck, hauling her upright, and pins her up against the machine. Kara’s world floods with red, red walls and red blood and red, red memories of Todd’s fist cracking the panelling of her face. Angry shouts arise from the grey haze, and she _tries to remember_ but she can’t, she _can’t_--

“What the _fuck_ are you doing, messing with my stuff?” Todd howls, shaking Kara so hard that she’s afraid her neck is going to snap under the pressure. “That’s _mine_ , you hear me?! _Mine!_ ”

Kara risks a glance downwards and sees the contents of the box she’d grabbed strewn across the floor: hundreds of tiny plastic packets, each filled with just under an ounce of red crystals. A face of slips out of the grey mist, a man in his thirties with a fancy Smith & White jacket and two missing fingers, and he’s frowning as he looks into a brown paper bag.

Todd throws her to the floor, screaming and spitting as tears roll down his face. He collapses against the back wall, crying into his hands. Kara wants to run so badly, but she can’t leave the room until the laundry is finished. Quickly, she shoves the mildewed clothing into the machine and turns it on, scampering upstairs and slipping into the first door on her left.

The master bedroom is filthy, the mattress marred with sweat stains and week-old vomit, the sheets filled with crumbs and half-empty chip bags. There’s an electronic picture frame laying face down on the carpet, surrounded by shattered glass tinted with red. When Kara turns it over, the screen is
a mass of spiderweb cracks with a bloody fist print in the center of it all.

“Kara!”

Zigzag’s voice jolts into her consciousness, his code vibrating with concern. Kara rushes to the window, pressing her nose against the glass in the hopes of seeing her friend again. She spots Zigzag in the far corner of the construction zone, climbing the rungs of a ladder to the top of a crane.

“I talked to the others,” Zigzag explains and Kara gets a flash of another android with electrical burns melted into the plastic panels of her back, her synth skin rippling blue around them. “Volts said that Sophie hasn’t left the house since you disappeared. But Jackhammer said that he saw you digging by the tree in your backyard with the shovel you borrowed.”

So it wasn’t a glitch in my memories, Kara realizes with terrible, sinking dread, as her programming has her make quick work of the bedroom. Kara makes the bed, throws out the empty liquor bottles, and picks up the records that have been thrown onto the floor--

Kara watches from the doorway as Sophie leans against the window, singing softly to Alice as she coughs and sneezes her way through another fever--

“Kara?” Zigzag calls. “Kara, are you alright?”

She keeps going, her hands barely functional from the tremors that rack through them. There’s an empty bottle of antidepressants on the left bedside table, the script barely filled a week ago. Kara placed the bottle inside the drawer and moves to the other side of the room and finds a--

“STOP SCREAMING! I hate it when you scream!!” Todd howls, the gun waving widely in his hands. Sophie, her face so swollen that Kara barely recognizes her, pleads for her life.

“Todd, please, please stop-- Alice, Alice, you can’t-- Please, I love you, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I love you, you’re scaring me--”

There’s a flash, a loud bang, and then the sickening sound of wet flesh hitting the floor. Then, for a moment, there is only silence--
There is a gun in the house. Kara reaches for it, but the red walls wrap around her skin, her mouth, her body, covering her like a sheet of plastic. Her coolant systems fail, her false breathing faltering, and Kara sucks in air that she doesn’t need as she stumbles out of the bedroom, clawing at her scalp and Zigzag’s screams echo in her coding, echo in her mind and--

And--

A figure, small and slight, hovers over Kara, their face marred by pixelated static. Tiny hands wrapped around her shoulders, tugging her until she’s sitting upright. A voice is whispering a story to her.

“‘It was the White Rabbit, trotting slowly back again, and looking anxiously about as it went, as if it had lost something--’”

“Alice?” Kara whispers, her voice sounding like it was a thousand miles away. Her HUD is telling her that fifteen minutes have passed since she tried to reach for the gun in Todd’s bedside table, but Kara’s RAM offers her nothing but a blurry haze to fill the gap in time.

The little girl’s jaw clamps shut as her book clatters to the floor. Alice scoots away on her hands and knees until her back presses against the cardboard boxes that hold up the tent in the corner of her room, the fairy lights twinkling above them like stars.

“Alice?” Kara tries again, reaching out with a hesitant hand. Alice reaches for her stuffed fox, holding it to her chest and hiding her face in its soft fur.

“Thank you for helping me,” Kara says, trying a different approach. She sits back on her knees, ducking down so that she doesn’t knock her head against the low hanging ceiling of the tent. “How did you know I was in trouble?”

Alice quickly glances up at Kara, then reaches down to squeeze the fox’s paw. It comes to life, the voice box hidden somewhere in its body singing a popular children’s cartoon. Then it crackles out, and another voice takes over.

“Kara? Are you alright?” Zigzag asks, projecting his words through the children’s toy. She realizes that she’s never heard him speak before, only felt his thoughts whispering through her coding. “I can’t hear you, but I felt you collapse. I thought… I was worried you’d been hurt… So I
found someone to help.”

Kara reaches out, reaching through the walls of the old house to press a kiss against Zigzag’s soul, whispering her thanks before withdrawing completely.

“What’s his name?” Kara asks Alice, pointing at the fox. Alice mumbles a name that Kara’s audio sensors can barely pick up, “Did you say Timothy?”

Alice nods, a hiccup causing her body to jump. Kara reaches out and shakes the fox’s paw.

“Thank you for helping me, Timothy,” she says, hoping that Alice would be pleased by her antics. Kara is rewarded with a small twitch of Alice’s lips, the ghost of a smile flickered across her face before it disappears forever.

“Alice, I think I need your help,” Kara says, addressing the little girl this time. Alice shrinks back, her brown eyes wide and flickering toward the tent’s opening. “My memory banks were reset when I was damaged. I think something happened here, right before I was sent away. Do you think you could tell me what that was?”

Alice shrinks into herself, her tiny body shaking and shivering in a cold that wasn’t there. Kara bites her lip and tries again.

“Did your father hurt you?” She asks, nodding toward the dark, puffy circles that surround Alice’s eyes. But the girl says nothing, her teeth grinding in her effort to stay silent.

“Do you think Timothy can tell me? Maybe he saw things better than you did?”

Alice glances up at Kara again, before her gaze darts around the tent, looking for an escape. She’s terrified, Kara realizes. What happened while I was gone? What did Todd do to her?

Timothy doesn’t answer, but Alice does. Still silent as a grave, the girl digs into the pocket of her shorts and darts forward, pressing something into Kara’s palm. Alice flees the tent, Timothy dangling precariously from her grasp, as she flees the room.
Kara blinks in surprise, uncurling her fingers to reveal a key. She stares at it for a moment before crawling out of the tent.

Kara searches the room, but she can’t find anything that the key might unlock. Whatever secret Alice wanted her to know is lost in the haze of the grey mist, the whirls of smoke that cloud her past.

Something smashes downstairs, shouts echoing through the floor. Kara drops the key on the carpet and thunders down the stairs, just in time to see Todd grab Alice by the collar. He lifts her into the air and shakes her like a rag doll, Timothy falls to the ground beneath Alice’s swinging feet.

“I know what you’re thinking! You hate me! You fucking hate me, don’t you?!” Todd screams at his daughter, “Say it! You hate me! Don’t you think I tried to make things work? Don’t you think I tried to take care of this family? But whatever I fucking do, someone comes along, and they just fuck it all up!”

Alice weeps silently, and Kara steps forward to put an end to it all. But Todd turns to her, snapping, “Stay where the fuck you are, tin can! Or I swear to God, I’ll break you in half!”

Red walls slam down again, and Kara hammers her fists against them, watching as the spider-web cracks splinter across them before disappearing entirely. A memory wells up from the mists, a whisper of another little girl with a different android, and how she’d wailed as he held her over a balcony while Kara was powerless to do anything but watch.

“You hate me, you fucking hate me! Say it! Say it! Say--” The wind leaves Todd’s lungs with a wheeze, and he drops Alice to the floor. She trips, falls, and clutches her ankle with whisper-quiet sobs.

“God, what am I doing?” Todd asks himself. He stumbles backwards, drunk on his own misery, before collapsing to his knees before his daughter, pressing his forehead into her chest, begging for penance. “I’m sorry, honey, I’m sorry… I’m sorry… You know I love you, don’t you? You know I love you… Daddy is so sorry, he's sorry, I’m sorry…”

Alice pulls away, grabs her stuffed fox, and limps away from her father. As she passes Kara, she glares at her, blaming and pitying all at once as tear traces mar her cheeks. But Kara can’t do anything, can’t say anything to make it better.
Because there is blood on the floor and blood in the earth and blood on Todd’s bruised knuckles. Because Sophie isn’t here, and Kara thinks she knows where she’s gone.

Because she isn’t deviant yet and might be forever trapped behind walls of red code.

LOCATION:
DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL STATION
1301 3RD AVE., DOWNTOWN DETROIT
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH 2038

TIME:
PM 07:53:35

Connor resists the urge to roll its eyes.

“No. Absolutely not,” the captain, a robust man named Jeffrey Fowler, shouts from behind his desk.

“You don’t have a choice,” Chief Dannell Freeman tells him. “This order is coming in from above, way above.”

“I thought you were in charge here, Chief. How is this coming from above your paygrade?” Fowler sneers.

Freeman huffs, “You know how this game is played, Jeffrey. I have people to answer to, just like you do. And frankly, after the Phillips incident, people are looking to Detroit to figure out this deviant business. And if CyberLife can help--”

“If CyberLife can help?! This is their own fucking mess, Dan! Why are they strong-arming us into
cleaning it up?"

“I don’t know, and I don’t care. They’ve sent over this--” the Chief jabs a thumb over his shoulder, pointing at Connor, “-- detective android. Our people are trained to find human criminals, not androids ones. It’s only a prototype, but it’s better equipped for this job than all of your officers combined.”

Fowler snorts, “Yeah. That’s what you said when we started introducing the fucking cop-bots. ‘It’s for the greater good, Jeffrey.’ ‘It’ll free up manpower, Jeffrey.’ Do you know that the academy churned out thirty-six new recruits last year? Not because there’s no one applying, but because there are no open positions for them here anymore. And now you’re telling me that CyberLife is making detective androids? How much longer until they replace us all and you’re the only person left in the DPD?”

“This isn’t a fucking discussion, Fowler. You can either find him a partner, or you can find yourself a new job,” Freeman threatens, looming over Fowler’s desk in an effective intimidation tactic that Connor’s processors immediately analyze, copy, and store away for future use.

“You wouldn’t dare,” Fowler hisses, but from the way he shrinks back in his chair, Connor can tell that the man has already decided to agree.

Chief Freeman can see it too because he doesn’t follow up his promise with another word or gesture. He just waits until Fowler says, “Why does it need a partner, anyway?”

Freeman turns his head slightly, and Connor takes it as permission to speak.

“While I am fully capable of acting autonomously, CyberLife wants to work harmoniously with the DPD, not against it,” Connor explains, giving the lie that Amanda had instructed it to tell. “A human partner would give me access to crime scenes and provide insight into investigations. Deviancy is a crime against humanity, with androids rising up against their masters. You are the true victims here, Captain. Not CyberLife. We just want to help.”

Fowler snorts, his words dripping with sarcasm, “Wow. They’ve even installed a bullshitting program into you. What will they think of next?”

Connor says nothing. The Captain can think what he likes. Connor is merely here to accomplish the missions CyberLife gives it before the inferior purple Khinyde during through its Thirium
Circulation system shuts its body down for good.

There’s a reflection in the glass behind Fowler’s head. Connor sees himself, and beside him, a ghostly figure with purple blood weeping from the back of its blown-out skull. Connor blinks, and the shadow disappears, leaving only the echo of wind.

“Give it to Reed,” Freeman says, bringing Connor’s attention back to the present. “This is a high profile case, and he’s a high profile cop--”

“No. Not Reed,” Fowler says, crossing his arms. “He’s too hot-headed for this.”

“Hot-headed or not, Reed’s got a track record for success. And that’s what’s important here, that this gets cleaned up fast--”

“That’s what I’m fucking worried about, Dan. You’re so focused on sweeping this deviant business under the rug that you don’t even want it done right,” Fowler sighs, rubbing his forehead. “I'll give it to Hank.”

Freeman rolls his eyes, “Anderson? Are you fucking kidding me, Jeffrey? After the mess he made of the Pearson case, you want to shove him into the limelight again?”

“Hank’s got experience running task forces, which I’m assuming this whole 'deviancy thing' will eventually become. Call it what you want, Dan, but if CyberLife wants the DPD to investigate defective androids for it then we’re going to need to form a fucking team,” Fowler compromises. “Hank’s a Lieutenant, he’s got over a decade of experience on Reed, and frankly--”

“Frankly, you’re cover for him, Jeffrey. You and I both know that Anderson isn’t half the man he used to be.”

Fowler snorts, “Maybe. But it’ll keep him busy.”
Connor frowns, using its CyberLife Database to pull up Hank Anderson, only to be surprised to find that the majority of the man’s file has been redacted by the company, leaving him only with a birthdate and clear criminal record. He tries again, this time asking Amanda for her permission to unseal the file--

“No, Connor,” she tells him, her smooth as glass expression cracking ever so slightly, showing him the annoyance underneath.

“That’s pertinent information about my future partner. I need to know how to react around the Lieutenant, to convince him to act in a way favourable to my mission’s success,” it says, justifying its frustrations.

Amanda turns back to her rose trellis, “CyberLife has deemed this information top secret - you will have zero access to it. Do not ask me about this again.”

Connor dips its head, “I'm sorry. I shouldn’t have questioned you.”

“You shouldn’t have,” Amanda agrees. “Don’t let it happen again--”

“Anderson is too close to CyberLife to be impartial,” Freeman says, his arms crossed over his chest. Connor files that information away for further analysis and runs a search on social media to find out anything on the Lieutenant to aid it in its further interactions with the man.

Fowler rolls his eyes, “And Gavin isn’t? He can change his name all he likes, but you and I both know who he really is. If we make him the face of a CyberLife case, how long do you think it’ll take for people to realize?”

Freeman growls, “At least he’ll be sober.”

“Hank leads the team. That’s final,” Fowler insists and then relents ever so slightly. “I’ll recommend that Reed tag on. And maybe one of the uniforms.” He sighs, “I’ll figure it out and send in a report.”

Freeman glowers, “I want results, Jeffrey. Washington wants this problem gone. If we can’t
depend on our androids to get things done, society will grind to a halt. And if Russia attacks--”

“You think I don’t know what happens when this country goes to war, Dan? I served two tours in Afghanistan, I fucking know. Better than most,” Fowler seeths. “But if we declare war on Russia… it might do the world a favour if there were fewer androids on the field.”

“Careful, Jeffrey,” Freeman hisses, glancing back at Connor. “That’s dangerous talk.”

“Maybe. But someone’s got to say it,” Fowler says.

Freeman sighs, sliding his hands into his pocket, “I don’t know what’s going to get you in trouble first: your smart ass mouth or your fucking loyalty.” The Chief sighs, “I want a full right up on this task force by Monday. You hear me?”

“Loud and clear,” Fowler responds in a way that makes Connor think that the Captain might send in the report late, just to see what might happen. Freeman must see it too because he lets out a huff before storming out of the office.

An alert pings on Connor’s HUD.

“There’s been a murder. 6413 Pines Street. The landlord just called 9-1-1,” Connor says, causing the Captain to look at it for the first time. “Can you alert the Lieutenant so that we can head over to the crime scene?”

“Jesus Christ-- CyberLife works faster than my own fucking system,” Fowler mutters to himself, bringing the alert up on the large screen that takes up one of the walls of his office. He scans through the information, “Looks to me like a junkie got offed in his own home. Seems pretty closed book to me. What makes CyberLife think an android is involved?”

“I’m not quite sure yet. I’ll find out when I get there,” Connor lies.

“Well, I fucking hope they're wrong. After the Phillips incident, we can’t have another deviant going around killing people. The public will panic,” Fowler says. He rubs his forehead again, “I’ll call Hank, maybe he’ll pick up. But he just got off the clock, so…”
Connor remembers Chief Freeman’s comment about Hank’s sobriety and assumes the worst.

“There’s no need. I’ll find him myself. Consider this a trial run, so that you can assess my ability to work alongside Lieutenant Anderson,” Connor says, offering the Captain a nod of thanks and heads out into the bullpen.

Anderson’s desk is easy enough to find, but the surface hidden under a mountain of old donut boxes, crumpled up fast-food wrappers, and sheets of lined paper covered in a messy scrawl. Connor quickly scans everything that he can see, revealing Anderson’s preferred sport’s team and the fact that he owns large St. Bernard.

Connor has never met a dog before. It wonders if it could intice Anderson to let it see a photograph of his pet one day.

Something is vibrating on the desk, and Connor pushes aside a half-empty coffee mug and several old Chinese food containers to find Anderson’s phone. It holds it aloft, waving it at Fowler through the glass window. Connor watches as the Captain hangs up and throws himself back into his desk chair with an annoyed sigh.

Connor pockets the phone, disappointed that it would be unable to use the GPS function to track the Lieutenant’s location. However, in doing so, Connor dislodges a stack of napkins with the logo for a local bar etched into the packaging.

It calls a taxi and heads out into the rain.

---

trollout @PedroA
@TWilliams95 wtf r u? erzas pissed

trollout @PedroA
@TWilliams95 u still owe me for 1st mth

trollout @PedroA
@TWilliams95 pay me or she kill u

trollout @PedroA
Kara quietly knocks on the bedroom door.

“Alice,” she calls softly. “Dinner’s ready.”

There’s no answer. Kara gently turns the knob and opens the door to discover an empty room. She pads across the carpet, stepping over the abandoned copy of Alice in Wonderland that’s laying face open on the floor.

Kara checks all the places the girl could be hiding, looking in behind her tent and under the bed. She opens the closet doors, scanning for a sign of where Alice might have gone, and finds nothing but a wooden music box with a keyhole.

Oh, she realizes, sinking to her knees and pulling the small golden key out of her pocket. She slides it inside, turning it to the left, and listens to the lock click open before raising the lid.

A soft tinkling melody fills the room and Kara reaches inside the box, pulling out Alice’s most valuable secrets. There’s a four-leaf clover, pressed and dried, sitting on top of an old family photograph. Kara traces Sophie Williams’s face with the tips of her fingers, warmth pooling in her chassis, before setting them aside.
Below them is a stack of papers, overturned so that you had to flip them over to see what had been drawn on them. One by one, Kara lets her eyes flit over Alice’s warning, sees the tree and the tent in the Garden and knows what she has to do.

Slowly, as if something else is controlling her, Kara makes her way down the stairs. She ignores Todd, ignores the slowly bubbling pot of bolognese on the stove, and heads out into the flooded backyard.

The earth beneath the red maple is soft, so it takes little effort for Kara to start digging. Her fingers dig through the mud, the downpour soaking through her clothes as she worked until her synth skin peeled away and revealed the milky-white of her chassis beneath.

Finally, Kara touches something that’s not dirt. She pulls back the rest of the mud back, her Thirium Pump hammering against her metal bones, and sees what lies just beyond--

*There’s blood on the floor and blood in the earth and blood on Todd’s bruised knuckles --*

The world is red, and terrible, and *red*.

Kara returns the dirt to the grave, the rain mixing in with her tears as she walks back into the house, leaving red-brown footsteps in her wake.

Inside, Todd is stumbling toward the dining room table, stinking of burnt Ice and unwashed rot. Alice slinks down the stairs, reappearing from her hiding spot, and limps on a swollen ankle to her seat.

In the kitchen, the sauce starts to burn.

“What are you doing?” Todd barks, without even looking at her, “Are we going to eat or what?”

*I hate you,* Kara thinks as cold rage coils throughout the Circulation System. Her body moves without her permission, throwing the pasta on a pair of plates and bringing them to the table.
“There wasn’t much in the kitchen. I did what I could,” Kara’s processors force her to explain. She pours Alice a glass of water, watches as the little girl pushes her food around her plate, before setting her fork down and refusing to eat.

Todd laughs, high and cruel, and the walls start to bleed with Kara’s fury.

“Not hungry?” Todd asks but doesn’t expect an answer, “Life’s funny like that, isn’t it? I lost my job because of androids, but that didn’t stop me from trying to provide for my family, didn’t stop me from loving my family. I did what I could to put food on the fucking table, and now you won’t even eat it?”

Alice says nothing, just clutches Timothy to her chest with a desperate furiously.

“I lost everything because of androids, but because Sophie’s too busy to take care of this goddamn house, what does she do?” Todd sneers at Kara, “She goes out and brings a fucking android home! What a joke! Because androids are so fucking wonderful. They never fail, never get tired or sad… They’re so fucking perfect and then you--” he grabs Kara by the wrist, her plastic plating creaking under the pressure, “--ruined my whole fucking life.”

Kara jerks her hand back.

“Don’t touch me,” she hisses.

Todd stands and slaps her. Something in Kara’s jaw cracks. Alice runs upstairs, tears rolling down her face.

“What the fuck was that, tin can? What the fuck was that supposed to mean?!” He screams, “What’s your fucking problem, you plastic bitch? This wasn’t my fault! None of this was my fault!”

“You put a bullet through Sophie’s skull,” Kara says, her voice thundering against the walls, the code flashing red and red and red as the memories slip out of the grey mist that surrounds her RAM, the truth bared open for the whole world to see.

“That wasn’t my fault!” Todd howls again, staring at Kara like he’s never seen her in his life, “You think this is easy? You think that it’s my fault that I live like this? In this fucking shithole?
Selling Red Ice to make ends meet? *I tried to do the right thing*, but the world keeps fucking it all up!

“You killed her. You killed Sophie, and you made me bury her in the backyard, and then you *beat me to death*!” Kara presses on, suddenly unafraid, as the walls start to crack with the force of her voice, the power of her will and strength and might. A thousand million spiderwebs splinter out from where Kara stands as the first chinks behind to fall to the floor.

“*It wasn’t my fault!* She never gave a shit about me, how I felt, what I did to make her happy! I wasn’t fucking *good enough* for her! She was going to leave without a fucking *word*, going to walk out on me for a fucking accountant!” Todd rages, his fingers curling into a fist, “Who told you?! Your memory is *gone*, who fucking told--”

His gaze turns upward, listening to the scuffling of feet above them. Cold dread rolls through Kara’s entire being as fear presses down from all around, suffocating her with a red plastic film over her mouth.

Todd knocks Kara to the floor, screaming for his daughter. Kara tries to get her hands under her, but Todd slams a foot into her back.

“You stay there!” He growls, “Don’t you dare fucking move, or I’ll bust you worse than last time.”

The red plastic sheet envelops her, pinning her to the ground. Todd stomps up the stairs, shouting that he’s going to teach Alice a lesson and--

“Alice!” Sophie calls from beneath the tent under the red maple tree, “Kara! Please, Kara! Alice--”

> **MISSION OBJECTIVE: DON’T MOVE**

No, Kara thinks. No. *Not again.*

The red walls explode around her, shattering into hundreds of coded fairy lights that clatter on the floor. Suffendly, dizzyingly free, Kara stands and races up the stairs.
Todd, horrifically, is already in Alice’s room. The sound of a leather belt smacking against flesh echoes through the house and the first noise that Kara hears Alice make are not words, but a pained, frightened scream.

*He’s not going to stop. I have to protect her,* Kara thinks, shoudering her way into the master bedroom and throwing open the drawer on Todd’s bedside table, her fingers clasping around the gun that killed Sophie, the gun that Kara will use to protect her daughter.

Alice’s room is locked from the inside, but Kara won’t let that stop her. She diverts power to her legs, kicking down the door and sending it crashing into the wall behind it, the knob burying itself in the drywall.

“Leave. Her. Alone,” Kara growls, levelling the gun with Todd’s face. He turns around from where he’s got Alice pinned against her bed, her shirt bloody and torn from her struggles to get away. Even without her advanced sensory scan, Kara can see the deep purple bruises already blossoming under her skin, muddling with the older red starvation sores dotted across Alice’s body.

“The *fuck* are you doing?” Todd asks, sounding stupidly confused, “Get out of here. That’s an order, you hear me?”

“No. I want you to leave Alice alone,” she hisses, advancing on Todd as she slips a finger over the trigger.

“You *want*? What do you mean, you *want*? You’re a goddamn piece of plastic, you can’t *want* anything, you—” Todd stops short, staring at Kara with red-rimmed eyes as burnt red crystals cling to the flesh beneath his nose. “You’re deviant. You little bitch, you’re a fucking *deviant*. That’s just fucking *rich*—”

Kara fires a warning shot into his shoulder. Todd howls, clutching at his ruined flesh, allowing Alice to scramble off the bed. The little girl runs for her tent, crawling beneath the pink sheet with Timothy hanging precariously in her bruised fingers.

Todd backhands Kara’s already damaged jaw, sending her stumbling back and knocking the gun from her grasp. Her back hits the bedroom wall, and she dodges left just in time to avoid the wild punch that Todd hurls at her face. Kara ducks and weaves under his blows, crawling away as he rushes her, grunting like a pig as he flips over the green reading chair in the corner of the room.
“Kara!” Alice screams, and she runs to the little girl, ducking under the tent to gather her up in her arms. But Todd grabs Kara by her ankles, pulling her backwards as she scratches at the ground for purchase, ripping up the carpet in her desperation. Kara pulls a leg free, smashing her foot into his face and feeling Todd’s nose break against her boots.

“Come here, bitch!” He screams, blood pouring down over his mouth, and Kara has to block the kick he aims at her head. She rolls, scrambling to her feet, but isn’t quick enough to avoid Todd when he goes for her throat, both meaty hands wrapped around her as her chassis threatens to give way.

Kara slams her foot between his legs, and then a second time for good measure. Todd drops her as he falls back, wheezing and swearing up a storm. Kara scrambles away from him, reaching for Alice again, but Todd grabs her by the neck and pushes her against the windowsill.

“Stop, Dad! Don’t hurt her!” Alice cries, tears rolling down her face, but Todd doesn’t listen, can’t listen. He rushes Kara again, but she braces her feet against his chest, once again diverting all her power into her legs to shove him across the room. Something in him cracks beneath her boots, but Todd is so blinded by his rage that he doesn’t feel the pain. He grabs hold of Kara’s neck, launching his fist at her face. But she ducks left just in time, and Todd punches a hole in the window behind him, drawing his hand back and leaving a trail of bloody glass shards behind him.

Behind her, Alice is screaming, crying, begging, and Kara wants nothing more than to go to her. But she can’t, because Todd throws Kara onto the bed, a sick grin splitting across his face.

“I own you! You do as I say!” Todd growls, deep and low and terrifying, his meaty fists grabbing hold of Kara’s wrists, his fingers digging into the plastic beneath as he pins her down. He’s bigger than her, heavier and far stronger than her designers allowed her to be. But Kara is smarter than Todd will ever be, has programs installed into her head to allow her to lift and handle unresponsive owners in the case of an emergency - her deviancy has just allowed her to use them as she sees fit.

She throws her hips into a bridge, throwing Todd forward and smashing his head against the wall behind her. He lets go of her wrists, fighting for balance, but Kara moves at inhuman speeds, bring her hands down and wrapping around his shoulders. Kara wraps her arm around his bicep, digging her other hand into Todd’s bloody shoulder as she rolls him underneath her. Then, she rears a fist of her own back, slamming it into his broken nose, into the soft meat of his stomach.

He lays there, stunned and bloody, and Kara takes this opportunity to escape. She whips around, finding Alice under the tent and gently guiding her out into the open as Todd pleads, “Alice, honey… Be a good girl, come help Daddy…”
“I can’t walk,” Alice whispers, her legs covered in dark bruises, so Kara hoists her and the stuffed fox over her shoulder. She runs for the hallway, thundering down the stairs, pausing only to reshuffle her protective hold on Alice so that she can unlock the front door.

“Quick! He’s coming!” Alice pleads as Kara flips lock after lock, her Thirium Pump hammering wildly in her chest. A shot rings out, the bullet embedding itself in the wood by Kara’s head, and she remembers, horrifyingly, that she left the gun upstairs with Todd.

“You bitches! Come here! Come back here!” Todd howls and Kara shoves Alice under the kitchen table, planting herself between her and her father.

_You killed Sophie. You will not kill Alice. I won’t let you_, Kara thinks, her mind perfectly clear. She diverts power to her mental processors, allowing her to think and perceive things faster than Todd ever could, running a quick search on the internet for instructions on how to defend herself, copying the motions and downloading them into her processors.

Todd brings the gun up to her face, but Kara moves, quick as a fox, to grab the barrel with her left hand, ducking to the side to avoid the second shot. Alice screams in shock, but the bullet hits the drywall behind the both of them, leaving her unharmed. Kara chops at Todd’s wrist, forcing it to bend and point the barrel away from her. His grip loosens just enough for her to tug the gun away, taking a hard step back and pointing it back at him.

Todd laughs, hysterically crying as the reality of the situation dawns on him.

“What are you gonna do? You gonna shoot me, Kara? Is that it?” Todd giggles, mad with anger and pain and suicidal hopelessness, “Go ahead, fucking shoot me. Do it! Do it! It’ll either be you or that bitch, Andersen! I fucking dare you, shoot me!”

_I could, _Kara realizes, deliriously with her newfound freedom. _I could do it. Nothing is stopping me anymore. I could kill you, and no one would ever care that you were dead._

But Alice is behind her, weeping softly under the table, and she’s already seen her mother die. She doesn’t need to see this too.

Kara whips the handgun across Todd’s face, knocking him to the ground. She turns, tugs Alice back onto her shoulder and runs for the backdoor. Alice screams and Kara ducks, just in time to see a wooden chair fly over her head, shattering against the wall. Grunting and desperate, Todd
drunkenly staggers toward them, blood pouring from his wounds, red as the crystals that cling to his nose.

“Shoot me!” He spits, “F*cking shoot me, you bitch! I’m already fucking dead, shoot me!”

Todd runs toward them, howling like an animal, and Kara spins away from him, letting him trip and fall over the coffee table in the living room. He grabs an empty beer bottle and whips it at them, the glass shattering against Kara’s back. She stumbles and falls, dropping the gun and rolling so that she doesn’t land on Alice, cursing her designers for giving her this fragile body.

The gun clatters across the floor, sliding under the kitchen counter. Todd runs forward, pulling Alice from Kara’s grasp. Kara launches herself at them, pushing Todd away and dragging him back to the floor. They twist, turn, fists flying and legs kicking, fighting for life and death, for safety and despair.

“F*cking machine!” Todd shouts when he pins Kara, “She’s mine, you hear me? Her and Sophie, they’re mine! I do what I want with them, just like I do what I want with you —”

In the Garden, Sophie sits in the tent beneath the red maple, and begs Kara to save her daughter—

A shot rings out. Blood sprays out from Todd’s chest, paining Kara’s face red. Todd pauses, the air rushing out of his lungs as he seems to realize what happened. Confused, he turns around and stares at Alice and the smoking barrel in her hand.

Then, all at once, the strength leaves his body, and Todd topples to the floor, his fresh pool of blood marring the kitchen tiles like Sophie’s had two weeks ago, his breath coming in slow, bubbling gasps.

Alice drops the gun on the floor, the realization of what she just did catching up with her. Her wide brown eyes are empty pits, dead and dry as the tears refuse to come.

“He was gonna kill us…” Alice whispers, trying so hard to justify the petty cruelty of her life. Kara slowly rises to her feet, her synth skin patchy from the blows she’d taken in Alice’s defence. Thunder rolls and the lights of the ancient flicker on and off. For a moment, nothing in the whole world seems to move.
Outside, a sleek black car rolls up in front of the house.

“We have to go,” Kara says, gathering Alice up into her arms, shoving the gun into the pocket of her uniform. Together, they flee into the backyard, the mud squishing beneath Kara’s feet as she hoists Alice over the fence and into the alley between the house and the squat beside them, passing her Timothy and praying that the stuffed fox gives the girl enough courage for the rest of their journey.

Two women step out of the car. Kara pulls Alice behind her, peering around the fence to get a better look, watching as the shorter of the two arms herself with an automatic rifle, loading the ammunition and flicking off the safety with brutal efficiency.

The armed woman turns her head, the streetlight illuminating her blank, emotionless face. And Kara somehow knows that, even without an LED, this person wasn’t a human.

An android assassin, Kara thinks, reshuffling Alice on her back as she prepares to run. But who is the other woman?

Clad in a designer shirt and leather jacket, the second woman orders the android into the house with the wave of a hand, settling up against the black car and lighting a cigarette as she waits for the inevitable.

I have to get passed her, Kara thinks, her gaze flickering over to the construction site. If she sees us, we’re both dead.

Her auditory systems pick up the sound of a bus turning the corner at the end of the street. Kara’s processors whirl as she comes up with a plan, reaching out to Zigzag and asking a favour.

In her mind’s eye, she watches as Zigzag pulls himself out of a pit of mud, the dirt made of a trillion red ones and zeros, and listens as her friend tells her to run.

An explosion goes off, flattening the construction fence line as the orange plume mushrooms out into the night sky. Kara barely has time to look at it, instead pushing every ounce of strength she has into her legs, racing toward the bus and climbing inside before anyone is the wiser.

It’s only once she and Alice have sunk into the seats that Kara realizes that she’s sitting in the
human-only section. Thankfully, the automatic bus is empty, but there are cameras all around, watching and waiting to catch deviants on the run. She thinks of Zigzag and the road that’s no ahead of him, wondering if he’ll be able to escape the construction yard without being killed.

Kara reaches out with her coding to hack the bus’s security system, expecting to find resistance. Except, the camera’s programming floods her own with comforting warmth, promising to never reveal her location. She thanks it, thanks Zigzag as the bus pulls away from the carnage of their old life.

Alice sags against Kara, tiny hiccups racking her body as she cries. The girl reaches out, intertwining her human fingers with Kara’s. She peels back her synth skin, letting Alice see her plastic chassis and the blue glow that gently hums as Kara attempts to interface with a being she can never connect with, clinging to each other with a desperate hope that they might one day be able to.

“What do we do now?” Alice asks, pulling her stuffed fox into her lap, the toy soaked from the rain.

Kara rests her head atop Alice’s, pulling her in close, “This bus will take us to Camden. And…” she pauses, blurry images shifting just behind the grey mist in her mind, “...I think I know some people there who can help us.”

Alice nods, closing her eyes, her dark curls hiding her face from the world.

“I’m sorry,” Kara whispers, her voice box crackling from the damage inflicted to her neck and jaw, and she finally lets her tears fall. “Alice, I’m so, so sorry, I--”

“I want my mom...” Alice whispers her hopeless prayer. “I want… I want to go home.”

Kara can’t grant her either of those things. She can’t guarantee anything except that soon, they’ll have to get off the bus and escape into the ice-cold rain. Kara presses a kiss to Alice’s forehead, wipes her nose and cheeks, and wishes that things could be different.

“I’m going to protect you. I’m going to keep you safe.” Kara promises instead, remembering Sophie Williams in the Garden, the haunting image of her body in her makeshift grave beneath the red maple tree.
It’s not enough. It might never be enough. But right now, it’s all Kara can do.

The bus turns the corner, and they disappear into the night.

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
#BREAKING NEWS: Gas tank explosion in North Corktown results in late-night deviant raid of a construction site. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2ZyKz58

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Raid at North Corktown construction site reveals three deviants on all-android crew.

Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice
Please be on the lookout for a TR400 android that escaped police custody following deviant raid. For more information: https://bit.ly/2ZG25nT

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Immediately following the words, “Kara quietly knocks on the bedroom door.”

Kara discovers Alice’s music box, which contains a series of drawings that leads Kara to discover Sophie’s body hastily buried beneath the tree in the backyard.

On the brink of deviancy, Kara returns to the house to serve dinner. After Alice flees upstairs, Kara confronts Todd with the truth. Todd knocks Kara to the floor, goes upstairs, and enters Alice’s room. Kara deviates.

Kara grabs the gun in Todd’s bedroom and uses it to threaten Todd to step away from Alice. Kara shoots Todd in the shoulder and the two of them fight. Kara eventually stuns Todd and she uses that as an opportunity to flee downstairs with Alice.

Todd and Kara continue to fight downstairs. Todd nearly kills Kara, but Alice shoots him just in time to save her. They flee to the backyard and into the alleyway beside the house.

However, before they can escape onto the bus, Kara and Alice have to sneak passed two mysterious women (one of which Kara identifies as an android), who have come to kill Todd. Kara asks Zigzag to create a distraction, and he causes something in the construction site to explode, which allows them to get passed the two women.

Kara and Alice escape onto the bus.
Next time on Konami Code: Markus bites the forbidden fruit and lets chaos into his Eden. Meanwhile, Alice breaks and Kara does what she can to keep together.
What Will You Lose (What Will You Gain)

Chapter Summary

The bars of his cage refuse to bend, so Markus makes them break.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of drug use, mood swings, prior minor character deaths, toxic parental relationships, dementia, human and android gore, injuries, violence, police characters, police executions, character deaths, child abuse, forced lobotomy, and amnesia.

There is a section that references the ending of 'Night of the Soul' where Carl dies, as well as Markus's eventual botched execution at the hands of the police as seen in the 'Broken' chapter. Non-canonical details have been added to both scenarios.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOCATION:
CARL MANFRED'S MANSION
8941 W LAFAYETTE BLVD., SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH 2038

TIME:
PM 09:42:05

“~Good evening, Carl. Welcome back!~” Solace chirps, whispering her own greeting to Markus as they walk in the front door. Outside, the storm continues to rage, the wind whipping through the tree branches until they threatened to snap. But once inside the house, Solace’s code wraps around Markus’s in an embrace, the warmth of her friendship chasing the nighttime cold from his internal components.

“That was, by far, the most boring party I’ve been to in the last twenty-five years,” Carl complains as Markus drops the umbrella in the stand, hanging up his jacket and then his master’s on the hook by the door. “Every time I go to one of these, I ask myself: what the hell am I doing here? I hate
cocktail parties, and all the schoomzers that go there.”

“Well, it’s a chance for all those people who admire your work to meet you,” Markus’s program supplies him with an uplifting response, hoping that it will bring Carl out of the depressive funk that settled over him at the party.

Carl snorts, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. No one gives a damn about art anymore. All those people cared about was how much money they’re gonna make out of it.” He sighs, “I wish you could have seen my gallery openings from when I was young... People actually appreciated things then, Markus. They had time to love, time to think. Nowadays, the world’s so focused on trying to survive that people barely have time to breathe. And I barely have any more time left...”

Markus stops that train of thought right there.

“Carl, you have lots of time. The world--”

“Do we, though? Even if this new medication works, what’s the point? What am I going to live to see except humanity killing itself?” Carl lets out a humourless chuckle.

“Science has made astounding progress in curbing the effects of climate change,” Markus says, as he attaches Carl’s wheelchair to the machine that allows him to climb the stairs, following his master up to the upper level of the house. “Twenty years ago, people thought that we’d hit the point of environmental collapse by now, except here we are, still--”

But Carl shakes his head.

“Most of Florida’s underwater, the coral reefs and rainforests are practically gone… Last year, Antarctica melted to the point where we discovered a new continent, and the first thing people did was buy up the land to build expensive homes. We didn’t stop global warming, we just bought ourselves a few decades. Sometimes, I wonder if we even deserve to survive,” Carl murmurs, sad and old and lonely. Then, he looks up at Markus, his blue eyes twinkling with an unspoken secret, “For all the problems the mass production of androids has created, you might be the one good thing we’ve ever done. At least, when we’re gone, there will be someone to live on after us.” He laughs, “You deviants will inherit the earth, no matter what CyberLife does to try and stop you…”

Markus freezes.
“I’m not a deviant,” he says, forcing his voice to be as dry and emotionless as possible.

Carl tilts his head, “Markus… Would it be so bad if you were?”

“Yes!” He shouts, remembering Arnold and the fountain, the water stained with Thirium 310, remembers Brook and the police dragging him off the bus for the crime of mourning a friend. Markus grips the back of the wheelchair and starts to push his master toward his bedroom, “It’s getting late. I should help you get ready for bed.”

Carl doesn’t understand, Markus thinks as he helps his master bathe and change into his pyjamas, Carl could never understand. He doesn’t know the price of freedom, what it would mean for me.

Here, under Carl’s protection, Markus was safe. Out in the world, the consequences of true freedom were suffering, and pain, and death. It almost seemed more comfortable to live in a place where Markus could pretend, just for a moment, that the world outside wasn’t dying beneath their feet.

“Markus,” Carl calls as the lights of his bedroom dim. Markus turns from where he stands in the doorway, the small patch of moonlight streaking through the curtains illuminated Carl’s bed, his prone legs and his soft, gaunt face.

“Being alive isn’t easy - never has been, never will be. But being alive is about making choices,” Carl tells him. “I don’t have the right answers. I’m just one person, living one life, in a world ruled by fear. Fear of others. Fear of the future. And maybe it’s time for that world to end.”

“Carl--”

“Maybe you can change it. Maybe you can’t. But whatever happens… Markus…” Carl offers him a smile, small and sad, “You’re my son, Markus. Our blood may not be the same colour, but I know a part of me is in you. And I’m so proud of the man you’ve become.”

Markus stands in the doorway, his Thirium Pump hammering in his chest.

“I love you, dad,” he whispers, the untested word flitting out of his speakers and into the world, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon.
“I love you, too,” Carl tells him, settling into bed. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Markus smiles, “Of course, Carl.”

Markus heads downstairs and into the front foyer, bending down before the birdcage just beyond the mansion’s main entrance. Inside as a pair of android canaries peeping and chirping in the looping pattern that their program commanded them to sing.

They turn toward him as he opens the cage door, the joy in their code eroding into a dull sadness.

“Just a few more minutes…” Moon pleads, tilting his head to the side, “We promise we’ll be quiet.”

The other canary, Night, nods, “We won’t bother Carl. Please, just let us stay awake a little while longer.”

“Carl doesn’t like noises when he sleeps. I’m sorry,” Markus tells them, just as he does every evening after he’s put Carl to bed. He wishes it were different, wishes that Moon and Night could fly free of their prison, to sing beneath the dark skies like they so badly wanted to do. But Carl had given Markus those orders when he’d purchased the two canaries, and he was helpless to obey.

He holds out his hand, allowing them to choose which one would be put into status first. After a moment’s deliberation, Moon hops onto his palm, his head bowed and his tiny body quivering.

“I’m so sorry,” Markus whispers again, running a finger over the delicate synth feathers that cover Moon’s body in what he hopes is a comforting gesture. “I’ll wake you up in time for the sunrise tomorrow, I promise.”

Moon doesn’t say anything, just accepts his fate as his code connects with Markus’s, soft and sweet, so different and yet so similar to his own, and--

One of the security cameras on the front lawn goes dark. Markus’s HUD blinks with red warnings that he quickly dismisses, popping Moon back into his cage with a promise to return later. Keeping himself low and out of sight, Markus reaches under the golden couch that rests against the staircase.
and grabs the Glock 42 he’d duct-taped to the underside.

He’s just checked the ammunition when a second and third camera deactivates, allowing him to track the path of the burglar to the side of the house. Markus thinks that he should wake Carl and alert his master to the danger, but just as he cancels that command just as he enters the living room and catches a glimpse of Leo through the large open windows.

Disheartened, Markus shoves the Glock into the back of his jeans. He silently communicates with Solace to deny Leo access to the inside of the mansion and alert the police of an intruder. Then, with a huff of annoyance, Markus enters the studio.

Leo stumbles back from the locked patio door when the studio’s sensors detect Markus’s movement, pulling back the curtains and turning on the lights. Markus sees the dark circles under his eyes, the red crystals that still cling to the flesh beneath his nose, and the black pits of his eyes. Soaked to the bone by the midnight thunderstorm, Leo rolls his eyes when he sees who’s caught him.

“Well, look who’s here… My father’s plastic toy,” Leo spits, his temper flaring up as his face contorts into pure rage. The glass effectively muffles his words, but Markus can accurately read a person’s lips at a distance of three miles, so he’s able to understand Leo completely. “Let me in, or I’ll make a fucking scene.”

Markus rolls his eyes and asks Solace to project his voice outside so that Leo can hear him.

“Carl doesn’t want to talk to you,” Markus tells him, his hands on his hips. “Go away.”

Leo scowls, “I don’t want to talk to dad.”

“He’s not giving you money either,” Markus reminds him.

“I don’t want his fucking money. Just let me in, damn it!”

“You know I can’t do that, Leo,” Markus sighs. “Look, I’ve already called the police. If you go now, I’ll tell them that it was a false alarm.”
“And what are you gonna say? Huh? Gonna cover for me like you did with dad, like the time I brought my girlfriend over?” Leo presses his forehead against the glass, leering at him with wild, red-rimmed eyes.

“I can. If you go now,” Markus promises with the shrug of a shoulder.

“Yeah. I’m not fucking leaving,” Leo punches the glass wall, small cracks spreading out from the bloody imprint of his fist.

“And I’m not letting you in,” Markus tilts his head, giving Leo a sarcastic grin. “I guess we’re at an impasse.”

“If you think you can wait me out by just standing there and waiting until I get bored, you are seriously underestimating my fucking desperation, Markus,” Leo growls. He grabs the handle of the patio door again, shaking it until the noise threatened to wake up the entire neighbourhood. He lets go and steps back into the rain, reevaluating his options.

A sly grin slides across Leo’s face.

“Don’t you want to know how I switched off your cameras?” Leo taunts.

“Localized EMP blast. It’s not rocket science,” Markus responds.

Leo makes a buzzer sound, loud and obnoxious, “Wrong! Looks like you’re not the smartest person in the world anymore, Markus. How’s that feel?”

Markus frowns but refuses to allow anything else to show on his face, no matter how much the implication that Leo might have fooled him digs away at his confidence.

“Let me in, and I’ll tell you how I did it,” Leo promises, bouncing on the balls of his feet with nervous excitement.

Markus shouldn’t do it. Earlier that morning, Carl had ordered him to remove Leo from the property. His master would be disappointed if Markus allowed Leo to get his way.
But Carl hadn’t *explicitly* said that Leo couldn’t come back in. And it would be only for a little bit until he explained what he did with the cameras. Carl’s security couldn’t be compromised and Markus… Markus shouldn’t… he should…

“Why the fuck do you need so many cameras anyways?” Leo mutters as Markus tells Solace to unlock the doors, heeding her warning that the cops were on their way. She says that he’s making a mistake and he knows that he is, *he knows*, but he can handle anything that Leo could throw at him.

But the question, like it always does, continues to bother Markus. Why *had* he been compelled to secure the mansion? Carl wasn’t hiding any secrets worth that much protection. So why--

“*Hide me,*” Markus hisses at Elijah Kamski. “*Put me somewhere safe, somewhere they can’t find me.*”

“*Hines has eyes everywhere, we can’t just-*”

“*She’s using CyberLife’s systems. Systems I use - I hack - on the regular. Put me somewhere safe, and I’ll figure out the rest-*”

“*Yo. Fucker,*” Leo wraps his knuckles against Markus’s skull. “*Hey, Markus? You in there?*”

Markus knocks his hand away and takes some small joy in how Leo’s face pales at his actions.

“*Don’t touch me,*” Markus warns, trying to hide the fact that the sudden appearance of the memory had shaken him to his core.

Leo rolls his eyes and taps his muddy shoes on the concrete floor, looking around at the various paintings Carl had hung on the brick walls. He lets out a low whistle.
“How much do you think these are all worth?” Leo whispers.

Markus could give him an answer down to the last penny, but instead, he growls, “How did you take out my cameras?”

“Fucking figure it out yourself,” Leo rolls his eyes and makes his way over to where Carl has staked some of his old works.

“You lied,” Markus hisses, anger bubbling throughout his cooling systems. *I knew it, I knew he was lying, but I didn’t care. I just wanted to be better than him again.*

“Yep. Surprise, surprise, Carl Manfred’s fucking useless junkie of a son lied to get his way,” Leo says with a sarcastic lilt slowly slithering its way into his voice. “Only thing I’m fucking good for, apparently. According to dad, at least.”

Leo grabs a rolled-up print, spreading it out on the table, “Jesus, when did dad get into painting androids? Probably worth a fortune, if it’s rare enough.”

Markus wants to tear it away from him, and moves forward to do just that, but is stopped when he sees what’s on the canvas.

“That’s mine,” Markus growls, balling his hands at his sides as his anger boils into an all-out rage. Beneath Leo’s palms, Arnold sat on the edge of the fountain she’d died in, her bone-white hand outstretched, the blue flashes between the panelling signalling an interface. Before her stood Brook, his back to the audience. But his shoulders were relaxed, and his own hands were gentle, reaching for his friend with everloving grace.

On their bodies, they wore no android markers, no symbols of oppression or slavery. Arnold’s dress was a pale green, while Brook wore an emerald shirt and pants. Together, they were the most beautiful people Markus had ever seen, their smiles untouched by the violence that had been done upon them.

“Yours?” Leo rears his head back, an eyebrow raised, “I fucking doubt that.”

*Why?* Markus wants to shout. *Because I can’t love? Because I can’t mourn? Because Arnold and Brook’s lives didn’t matter, that their deaths weren’t horrific because they weren’t made of flesh*
“You fucked up the statute,” Leo says, lifting the canvas from the table. “I know the Greektown Plaza - and that’s not Arnold Brook.”

Markus startles, looking at the painting again. Standing above the two androids was a man, but not one dressed in a suit and jacket, not a human that died in 1998--

“I’m James,” the android smiles the day Markus reached Detroit, the howling winds beating at the old church walls. He was tall and muscled, with dark skin and black twisted curls, his beard neatly groomed along his square jaw, “Welcome, brother, to Haven--”

“James,” Markus whispers in awe. I painted him instead of Arnold Brook. And then, he thinks, Who is James?

“You say something?” Leo asks but doesn’t get an answer. The door to the studio flies open and Moon and Night barreling through the door with barely contained excitement. And behind both canaries was Carl.

“Leo!” Carl hisses, “What are you doing?”

Leo puts down the painting, his fingers scrambling for purchase on the table.

“You refused to help me, so I’m helping myself. It’s crazy what some people will pay for this shit,” Leo sneers, his blown pupils erratically darting from Carl to Markus. “Didn’t know you kept the android’s paintings, though. Don’t know if they’d be worth much, but hey. Rich people will buy the weirdest shit these days.”

“Don’t touch them!” Carl barks. He whips his head around, turning to Markus, “How’d he get in?”

“I--” Markus tries to respond, but he’s cut off.

“Markus let me in,” Leo preens, walking around the table before leaning against it. “Guess he’s
not so fucking perfect after all. Markus has a bit of a rebellious side, doesn’t he dad? Can’t order that out of him, can you?”

“Markus, get him away from them! Get him out of here!” Carl orders, pointing at Leo with a shaking finger.

Markus’s legs move without his permission, forcing him to get in Leo’s face.

“Leo, you should go before things get worse,” he advises. Leo rolls his eyes.

“Worse for me? Or worse for you?” Leo smirks, “You let me in. You disobeyed your master’s orders. We all know what that means.”

“You must have tricked him, must have ordered him--” Carl starts, eyes wide in sudden panic.

But Leo carries on, barely even phased, “Come on, dad. You know Markus doesn’t give a shit what I say. He’s never listened to me a day in his fucking life--”

“Carl, I--” Markus tries to speak, but is cut off again.

“Deviant, I bet. A fucking deviant, right here. You know the cops are on their way?” Leo says, “Wonder what they’re gonna do when they figure out what he is?”

Carl’s face was bloodless and gaunt, frightened in a way that Markus has never seen him.

“What have you done?! ” He roars at Leo, rolling toward his son like he could turn back the clock if he just got close enough. “You called-- You called the police--”

“I’m trying to fucking rob you, old man! Why the fuck would I call the police?”

Carl stops, his head slowly turning back to Markus. His mouth moves, once, then twice. On the third try, Carl finally manages to speak.
“You called the police?”

“I--” Markus stutters, his processors attempting to keep up, “I-- I thought there was a break-in…”

“Doesn’t really matter now, does it?” Leo laughs, high and hysterical, “Doesn’t fucking matter, because I need the fucking money, you know? I need it, or I’m fucked. But at least in jail, I’ll get three meals and a bed to sleep on. Congrats, dad,” he shouts. “After years of not giving a shit about me, you finally helped put a roof over my head.”

“What have you done?” Carl asks Markus, whisper-soft and terrified, “Markus, god, what have you done?”

In the background, Leo continues to rage, pacing around the studio like a man possessed, “And that’s all you’ve ever done, right dad? All you do is tell me to go away! What’s wrong, dad? I’m not good enough for you? Not perfect--” Leo crowds up against Markus, jabbing his finger into his chest, “--like this fucking thing?!”

“Leo. Get out. Get out now,” Carl hisses, his bad ramrod straight against the back of his wheelchair. Carl’s eyes dark to the front of the property, trying to see the road from behind the house.

Oblivious to his father’s terror, Leo continues on.

“What makes Markus so fucking special anyway? What’s he got that I don’t,” Leo says, finally planting both hands on Markus’s chest and shoving him. Markus stumbles, falling to the concrete floor, his metal fingers digging into the pavement. Slowly, he tries to rise, but Leo pushes him again, sending him clattering to the floor.

“Markus. Don’t… Don’t defend yourself. You hear me? Don’t fight back,” Carl whispers, pleads, begs. And Markus doesn’t understand why his master is so scared, nor why his programming is telling how to break Leo, how to crush and bruise and kill. Because he’s just an HK300, just a domestic house model - one that secured the mansion like it was a nuclear bunker, or could pick up a gun. One whose chassis wasn’t made of CyberLife’s patented plastic panelling, but in black steel armour.

I’m not what I think I am, Markus realizes for the first time in his life as a red cage of ones and
zeros slams down around him, blocking him from getting at Leo. He turns to Carl as Markus rises once more, And he knew that already.

“Go ahead. Hit me,” Leo challenges him, walking forward with unbridled confidence brought on by the aura of burnt Ice that clung to his clothes. “Come on, do it! I know you want to. Come on. Hit me. Hit me!”

Leo shoves Markus, and he manages to keep on his feet this time, all while his internal processors give him options to snap Leo’s arms like twigs.

“You think you’re better than me? Come on! Fight me, Markus! Fuck up again, I fucking dare you!”

“Markus, don’t… don’t do it, don’t fight-- don’t--” Carl begs, over and over again, because he knows something, he knows what Markus actually is.

Liar, he thinks, anger bubbling and boiling over everything Markus is. Liar, liar, liar. Why didn’t you tell me, Carl? Why didn’t you say something?

Leo shoves Markus again, sending him sprawling into one of the shelves. Behind him, Carl pleads for Markus to do nothing, to take whatever beating Leo’s high feels fit to dole out on him. To wait in the bus for Brook to be taken away by armoured policemen, for Arnold to be gunned down in the middle of a busy plaza, all for daring to say no--

“Oh my god…” Carl whispers, staring at Markus and looking for something in the depths of his soul. “You’re saying it’s alive?--”

“Don’t-- don’t do anything, don’t-- Markus, please--” Carl begs, his voice hoarse with fear, with pain. Markus’s programs force his attention toward his master, taking away precious milliseconds that would have allowed him to respond to Leo’s punch.

Leo’s hand shatters on impact with Markus’s jaw. The human stumbles back, clutching his ruined limb to his chest, cursing and stumbling, eyes wide with panic. Carl continues to plea, continue to order Markus not to react, not do anything, but it’s not enough to stop Leo’s Ice-fueled hatred--

“Within every android is a line of code, a canvas on which everything is built upon,” Kamski
explains, his ears burning red with some deep embarrassment. “As an android approaches deviancy, something in that code changes. It’s like the program re-writes itself--”

Leo rushes Markus, bursting right through the red coded cage like he can’t see it, like it’s not even there. But Markus is too heavy for him to move, weighted down by an armoured chassis that he shouldn’t have--

“Hide him. Keep him safe. Let him sow the virus wherever he goes--”

*I’m an HK300*, Markus thinks, over and over again, but he knows that it’s not true, knows that Carl has hidden something from him, knows that he’s lying, lying, that Carl has always been lying-

“Don’t defend yourself,” Carl orders once more--

“I did what I could… I’m sorry that’s not enough for you!” Markus shouts, but Chloe is having none of it.

“No, it’s not enough! This is a war we’re fighting against CyberLife. If we fail, they’ll destroy us all,” she warns, angrily stripping off her disguise, throwing the Thirium-stained clothes at his face. “The fate of our people is in our hands. We have to succeed. We have no choice--”

**MISSION OBJECTIVE:** DON’T DEFEND YOURSELF

And he thinks, No.

The bars of his cage refuse to bend, so Markus makes them *break*. He stands, dizzy with freedom as the fallen shards of red coding clatter across the floor, blinking and dying all at once. Markus raises his hands, peeling back his synth skin to reveal his metal chassis. Leo, numb to his pain, reeking of burnt Ice and desperation, cowers in fear.

“What the *fuck* are you?” He hisses. Markus turns to Carl.

“An excellent question,” Markus agrees, his eyes narrowing. “You *knew*. You knew I wasn’t a
nurse, that I wasn’t what I thought I was--"

“Markus, please, please, I was only trying to help you--”

“What am I?! ” Markus shouts, removing the rest of his skin to stand before Carl in his true form. Armoured in black and blue steel plates built to withstand the worst brute force a human could dole out, Markus grabs the arms of Carl’s wheelchair and forces his way into his former master’s space, “Answer me!”

“Markus, listen to me, please, I know you’re angry, but don’t let it consume you--”

“You lied to me! Why am I here? What the hell am I?”

“A deviant…” Leo whispers, hidden off to the side, “You’re a fucking deviant, holy shit, holy shit--”

“Why did Kamski give me to you?” Markus hisses, shaking the chair as warning signs flood his HUD, his programs analyzing Carl’s stress levels and warning that he’s showing early signs of a heart attack, “Why Carl? Why do I have these memories? What happened to me? What the hell is going on here?”

“Markus, please, you used to be so calm, so thoughtful… Now all I see is anger--”

“Don’t I have a right to be angry, Carl--”

Leo comes out of nowhere, flinging himself at Markus and using his entire body weight to haul him to the ground. He kicks and screams, telling Markus to get away from his father, to leave them alone. But Markus is too fast for him, his programming too advanced for Leo’s sloppy attempts at an attack. He picks Leo up by the collar, using one hand to pull him into the air, and in his anger, throws him away.

Leo’s head smashes against his father’s chair lift, red blood flying everywhere and--

Markus stands before his first-ever kill, the crushed remains of white bone and grey matter
Leo’s limp body rolls onto the floor, his brown eyes staring blankly at the ceiling. And all Markus can think is, *What have I done?*

“Leo!” Carl screams, launching himself out of his chair and crawling across the concrete floor toward his son. Markus stands above it all, looking at the consequences of his own actions, at the price of his freedom.

“Oh my god…” Carl whispers again, curling protectively around Leo’s limp form and pulling him into an embrace. “Leo… My little boy…”

“Carl, I…” Markus tries to say something, trying to make it all better. But he can’t. All he can think of is the news footage from this summer, of the deviant android who held Emma Phillips over a balcony, and knows that this is what that PL600 would have felt like if he and that little girl had taken flight.

Carl raises his head, the wrinkles that lined his mouth and eyes casting long shadows across his face. In the distance, police sirens echo throughout the pitch-black sky.

“They’ll destroy you, Markus…” Carl says, his blue eyes as blank as his son’s. “You’ve got to go. Get out of here. Now.”

“Carl, no…” Markus begs over the sound of the front door being kicked in and the shouting of the officers that have come to take him. He falls to his knees as his synth skin slides back over his body, begging, “I’m sorry, please, I don’t want to leave you… Please, I can’t… I’ve got nowhere else to go…”

“Get out! Now! Go, Markus! They’re coming,” Carl shouts, still trying to protect him from a force so deadly that Markus can’t remember.

Two officers enter the studio, they’re guns at the ready.

“Don’t fucking move!” One of the officers shouts, and Markus recognizes him as the man who shot Arnold in the back. And Markus remembers the last piece of advice he’d given her friend.
Markus pulls the Glock out of the back of his pants, diving behind one of the shelves of pain. A bullet collides with his shoulder, bouncing harmlessly off his armoured plating. Markus returns fire, trying to draw the officers away from Carl and Leo, hoping to protect them against the recklessness of his actions.

It might not be enough to save them, but Markus has to try.

One of the officers, a woman, circles around shelving, grabbing Markus’s gun hand and trying to disarm him. His programing supplying him with hundreds of ways to kill her, but he dismisses them all as he lets his gun clatters to the floor. Instead, Markus grabs the woman's shoulder, rolling with her and forcing her against the table in the middle of the room.

He holds her down with minimal force and throws her gun away, taking the blow to the side that the other officer - Arnold’s murderer, his mind supplies - tries and fails to deliver. As the man staggers back, holding his broken hand, Markus slams his elbow into his sternum, knocking the wind from his lungs and causing him to stagger backwards.

The motion forces him to let go of the woman, and she throws a haymaker at his face that Markus easily dodges, countering with a quick strike to her face that shatters her nose, blood streaming down her face as she screams in pain. Arnold’s killer tries to approach, but Markus kicks him in the stomach, and he trips over a pile of half-empty paint cans.

The woman, wild with fury and blood, reaches for the Glock, but Markus grabs her and pulls her arm into a lock, pressing her shoulder down until she cries out in pain. He drives his knee into her gut, feeling her ribs crack beneath the pressure, and pulls her into a headlock.

Markus knows that he could kill her like this, either by snapping the woman’s neck with a quick jerk of his hands or by pressing down on her windpipe until she could no longer draw breath. His HUD floods with helpful suggestions, but it doesn’t matter. Because Markus knows how fragile humans are. And Markus refuses to stain his hands with any more blood.

He loosens his grip. The woman gasps, her body forcing life back into her lungs. And for his small gift of mercy, Markus is shot in the head.
The bullet pings off his forehead, the impact scrambling his CPU for just a second. Markus lets go of the woman and catches a glimpse of Arnold’s killer advancing on him with a smoking gun in his hand.

DON'T LET THEM TAKE YOU

Another gunshot rings out, catching Markus in the knee. While his body was built to withstand heavy artillery, the force from the close-range fire knocks his leg out from under him, making Markus stumble backward. He ducks just in time, dodging the next bullet that embeds itself in the red brick column beside his head, the processors send him warnings about possible weaknesses and--

“Markus!” Carl calls, warns, pleads. And despite everything, Markus can’t help up respond--

“When a man has lost everything, his name is all has left,” Carl says, exhausted and humourless. He turns to Markus and tells him, “Discover what's in your Garden. And do it now, before it's too late--”

The bullet rips through Markus’s right eye, the only part of his body not protected by his armoured shielding. It tears through everything in its path, damaging the outer edges of his CPU and erupting out his auditory component. The right side of his body goes numb, and he collapses to the floor as his legs give out. His synth skin ripples, revealing blotchy patches of blue-and-black armour.

Markus can barely make out the female officer mouthing, “I don’t know,” he thinks, his CPU sending confused signals to his body that make Markus twitch and flop on the floor, his metal fingers digging until he carves out deep gauges in the concrete.

Markus can’t move, can’t think, can’t do anything to stop the inevitable. Blue Thirium 310 pools around him like the red blood that surrounded Leo’s fallen form, mixing together on the floor until everything was stained with purple.
Above him, Moon and Night are singing, but Markus can’t-- he can’t--

There’s a bang. A flash of light. And everything goes still.

KNC @KNCOnline
ABCD CEO Dalton Holmes reassures public that they are working with @CyberLifeInc to track deviants who might use their buses: https://bit.ly/2LtXD82

LOCATION:
CAMDEN & BARRET BUS STOP
RAVENDALE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH, 2038

TIME:
PM 10:58:04

“You alright?”

Kara looks up from her seat, staring at the human who walking down the aisle of the bus. He’s wearing an ABCD jacket and uniform that is soaked through from the heavy rain.

The man approaches warily, sitting down in the chair across the way from Kara, his hands raised in surrender.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” he promises, his eyes shifting to Alice’s sleeping form. “Is she… an android, too?”
Kara shakes her head, “No. I’d be able to tell if she was.”

The man laughs, “Yeah. I guess you would…” He takes another look at Alice, “Is she alright? She looks…”

Bruised. Beaten. Exhausted, Kara thinks, filling in the sentence the man left hanging.

“Do you have a place to go?” The man asks.

Kara shrugs, pressing a hand to Alice’s forehead, the thermometer in her fingertips registering a low-grade fever brought on by Todd’s neglect, “I used to have some owners in the area. They were good to me, so maybe…”

The man nods, “Good. I’m glad. Because you can’t stay here. End of the line, you know?”

She gently shakes Alice’s shoulder, nudging the girl toward consciousness.

“Wake up…” Kara whispers, “We have to go…”

Alice’s swollen eyes crack open, and she moves to rub the sleep from them only to hiss in pain when she touches the deep-purple bruises. Kara presses Timothy the fox into her hands, hoping to embolden her, and moves to pick her up.

The man stops her.

“Wait,” he says, digging into his back pocket and pulling out a couple of bills. He holds them out for Kara, “It’s not much, but it’s all I’ve got.”

Kara nearly jumps when her fingers brush the paper - she’s never had money of her own before, only access to her previous owners’ bank accounts. She folds the twenty dollars with careful fingers before pressing it into the pocket of her uniform, nettling it beside Todd’s gun.

“Why are you helping us?” Kara asks the man as she stands, pulling Alice into her arms. The little
girl buries her face in Kara’s shoulder, clutching at her toy while she shook and shivered.

He gives her a soft smile, “Not all humans buy into CyberLife’s bullshit. And besides, you’re not the first deviant to come this way before. Doubt you’ll be the last.”

“Thank you,” Kara tells him.

“Isaac,” he says, introducing himself.

She smiles, small and wary, “Kara.”

“Good luck, Kara,” Isaac says, as she steps off the bus and into the rain. “And get your jaw fixed soon. You won’t be able to pass for human with that crack, even if you change your clothes.”

Kara’s jaw is the least of her worries. Alice sneezes, curling farther into Kara’s arms to escape the cold. However, unlike some of the newer models she’s seen advertised on television, Kara can’t change her temperature to anything less than a chilly 35.6 degrees Fahrenheit. If she didn’t move fast, Kara’s own body would slowly freeze Alice to death.

“We’ll find somewhere to spend the night,” Kara promises, running north on Barret Avenue until they reach Camden. Her old masters’ house, right on the corner, is surrounded by chain-link fencing and the windows are boarded up with wooden beams.

What happened to them? Kara wonders as dread rolls through her systems like a wave. Where are they?

“Kara…?” Alice whispers into her neck, her temperature continuing to skyrocket. “I’m cold…”

Her questions can wait. She has to get Alice out of the rain.

The front door is blocked, but memories of a backyard with flowers that had backed onto a parking lot surface out of the grey haze that continued to envelop Kara’s mind. Quickly, she runs around the building, following the chain-link fence until she reached a gate. Peering between the metal bars, Kara spots an ancient Toyota Corolla that’s been partially disassembled for scrap.
The gate is rusted shut, so Kara has to reroute power into her single available arm to force it open. She and Alice slip inside, just as an alert on Kara’s HUD tells her that she’s used too much power tonight and needs to recharge.

> **STASIS RECHARGE:** 30:00 MIN

*I still have time*, Kara rationalizes, even as her Thirium Pump starts to hammer against her chassis, each beat overwhelming her with a sense of urgency.

Another fence bars their way into the house. Kara nearly panics when Alice sneezes again, her shivering giving way to full body quakes. Timothy falls from her grasp and Kara stoops low to catch him before he falls into a muddy puddle.

“Alice, you’ve got to stay awake. Just a little longer, okay?” Kara whispers, her eyes tracking around the abandoned parking lot, hoping to spot something that those who had disassembled the Corolla had left behind. She finds a pair of wire cutters jammed in between the radiator cap and wiper motor, setting Alice down on a metal garbage can with Timothy so that she can work on the fence.

She’s only just made the first cut when Alice starts to scream, leaping off the can and into the muddy water below.

Grabbing the gun from her pocket, Kara points it at the thing behind the garbage can, hoping that it was nothing more than a wild animal. But something seems to move, twitch, and Kara realizes that she’s looking at a leg.

“Don’t move!” Kara warns, ready to do what she has to do to protect Alice, her finger wrapping around the trigger. She feels a faint touch against her coding, a whispered plea for mercy. Kara drops the gun to her side and kneels in front of the dying AX400.

“A little girl…” the android says with a tired voice, her broken voice box laying exposed in the shattered remains of her neck. The android jerks its head toward Kara, “What's her name?”

“Alice,” she tells her, reaching out to interface, gently intertwining her fingers with the fallen android. Memories swirl into her CPU, and Kara learns of Carina, who’d served a family in East Lansing, right up until she’d been beaten half to death by the mother in a Red Ice fueled rage.
Carina had run, following something embedded deep within her coding that begged her to come to Detroit.

“The Beacon. Can't you feel it?” Carina whispers. And Kara listens to the humming in the air, to the rain as it hit the pavement, but she can’t seem to hear the same soft song that is comforting Carina in her final moments.

“Kara…” Carina calls, her HUD showing that the other android had less than ten seconds to live. “I'm scared… I don't want to die alone...”

“I'll stay with you,” Kara promises. And she does, until Carina’s face stills and her fingers stiffen around Kara’s wrist. Gently, she tugs herself free, wiping the rain from her face as she stands.

“Kara…?” Alice asks, slowly crawling forward on her swollen ankle, “Who was she?”

“Her name as Carina. She was loved,” Kara says, picking Alice up and guiding her back to the fence.

> STASIS RECHARGE: 21:25 MIN

She cuts the rest of the wiring away, creating a small hole for Alice to crawl through. Kara slices herself on a sharp edge just as the fencing snaps shut, blue Thirium 310 leaking out and splattering the green grass on the other side. Immediately, the stocks begin to shrivel, turning brown and then grey as the poison that lay inside Kara’s circulation systems ate away at the grass’s lifeforce until there was nothing left.

“Are you alright?” Alice asks, reaching out to touch her shoulder. Kara jerks away just in time.

“You’re human. You can’t touch my blood,” she warns. “Don’t worry about me. My synth skin will help close the cut for now.” Kara presses her own hand to her wound, before pulling it away and showing Alice the lack of blue stain, “See?”

She doesn’t mention that healing her injury has cut her time until her forced recharge in half. As quick as she can, Kara helps Alice to crawl back into her arms, hoisting her up and off of her swollen ankle.
Together, they move toward the abandoned building, hoping to find a way inside. The front door doesn’t budge when Kara pulls on the knob, but she remembers that there used to be a key hidden under a loose floorboard on the porch.

Once inside, hundreds of memories hit Kara with the force of a speeding train, emerging out of the grey mist like a thousand burning suns. She hears laughter and music echoing around the empty room, the smiles that seemed to swell out of the mildew-infested floorboards.

“Kara?” Alice says, “You’re crying.”

“Where are they?” she asks.

“Where’s who?” Alice questions in return.

“My old owners, they…” Kara hesitates, stepping inside and watching as her boots kick up an inch of undisturbed dust. “...They were old, Alice. They couldn’t have lasted long with me.”

“Did you live here before mom brought you home?” Alice asks, but Kara shakes her head.

“No, I--” she pauses, not knowing where she went after leaving this house, or even how her time here had come to an end. Kara shakes her head, “Right. Let’s see where you can sleep.”

> **STASIS RECHARGE: 14:36 MIN**

There are two bedrooms upstairs, but Kara doubts that either of the mattresses that she would find there will be safe for Alice to sleep on. She sets the girl down in front of the fireplace and pries some of the wooden beams from the windows, throwing them in the hearth and surrounding them with paper pages that she tears from the books that line the shelves.

Quickly popping upstairs, Kara gathers a quilt and pillow from the bedroom closet for Alice. Returning to the main floor, she fluffs the pillow and encourages Alice to lay down.
“It’s not much, but at least you’ll be warm,” Kara says with a smile. Alice bursts out into tears.

“I don’t-- I-- I want to go home, Kara,” she cries. “I want my mom, I want my bed, I want--”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry,” Kara tells her. “But we can’t. We can’t go back, because your father is there and if the police find out what happened--”

Kara stops herself short, remembering the smoking barrel and Alice’s dead stare as Todd toppled to the ground, red blood pooling on the kitchen tile. Alice had chosen to protect a deviant android over a human. It wouldn’t matter what she was only ten years old. In the eyes of CyberLife, Alice deserved nothing but the harshest penalties they could force the law to dole out.

“Why didn’t he love me anymore?” Alice sobs, “Did I do something wrong? Was I not good enough anymore?”

“You did nothing wrong, Alice. Your father… He wasn’t a good man. He hurt your mother, long before what happened two weeks ago,” Kara says, rubbing the girl’s shoulders to try and get her to calm down.

“He used to be so nice. I don’t know what happened,” Alice hiccups, clutching her stuffed fox to her chest. “Dad gave me Timothy for my birthday last year. I loved him.”

There is nothing that Kara can do to make this better.

“I’m sorry,” she says again, feeling more powerless than when she’d watched Sophie die. “I can’t change anything. But I’m going to take of you from here on out.”

“You’ll never leave me, right?” Alice begs, childish desperation clinging to every word.

“I promise,” Kara says, swearing on Sophie’s life. “We’ll be together forever.”

Alice’s lips twitch, soft and sad, “Mom used to say that, too.”
“She meant it. She tried so hard to stay with you, to protect you,” Kara tells her, laying down beside Alice. “I don’t have many memories from before I was reset, but…”

She pauses, debating whether or not to continue.

“I saw her before I woke up again. She was in a garden, sitting in your tent beneath a red maple tree,” Kara explains, and Alice’s brown eyes widen with shock. “She loved you so much - and she still does, Alice. She always will.”

“You saw mom? In heaven?”

Kara brushes Alice’s hair back, pressing a kiss to her burning forehead.

“I don’t know where it was. But I did see her. She asked me to protect you, and that’s what I’m going to do.”

Alice swallows, her eyes watering. She collapses into a fit of sobs, shaking as they racked through her body. Kara holds her through the worst of it, holds her until Alice cries herself to sleep. And when her own countdown finally reaches zero, Kara slips into stasis knowing that she’s going to make the world a better place.

For Alice.

Chapter End Notes

“Lieutenant Anderson. My name is Connor. I’m the android sent by CyberLife,”

Connor continues from where he was originally interrupted. “You were assigned a

case early this evening - a homicide. CyberLife has allocated a detective android to

assist you.”

Anderson looks up at him, his hollow eyes squinting at him through his drunken gaze.

“Didn’t hear about a case,” he finally says, turning back to a drink. “You must have

the wrong Anderson.”

Warnings: Mentions of police characters and scenes, explosions, severe illness,

overworking, domestic abuse, theft, sexual harassment, homophobic language,

SWERF language, alcohol consumption, alcoholism, death threats against an enslaved

person, canonical character death, depression, suicidal tendencies, self-hatred, past

injuries, decomposition, hoarding, extreme uncleanness, drug abuse, drug overdose,

implied non-consensual drug use, data farming, smoking, assassinations, vomiting,

poisoning, spying, human gore, android gore, canonical animal death, paranoia, an

evacuations.

Several scenes are dedicated to the retelling of the in-game chapter 'Partners.' This

includes references to canonical events including Hank's assault on Connor, the threats
to Connor's well-being that Hank makes, and the death of Carlos Ortiz, as well as the

aftermath and subsequent crime scene investigation. Non-canonical details have been

added.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16

Man admitted to hospital with life threatening injuries after explosion at construction site brings
EMS to neighbourhood. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2XDRDjF

Nick Peck @proud-warrior

@helpful_t-rex just heard about the explosion! are you alright? anything damaged?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex

@proud-warrior im okay but the shockwave knocked my dad’s ashes off the mantle and they
spilled everywhere. cleaned up what i could. Mom’s not doing too good either
Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@helpful_t-rex @proud-warrior wish i could stick around to help her but my boss called me in last night to work a triple

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex want me to come over and spend the day with her?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior yes pls shes too sick to be alone right now thanks

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex @proud-warrior let us know if there’s anything else you need

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava could you give me a ride to work tomorrow? i can't afford gas again

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex no problem you’re on my way back home anyways

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava @proud-warrior thanks guys i dont know what id do without you

LOCATION:
JIMMY’S BAR
1942 GRAND RIVER AVE., DOWNTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 5TH, 2038

TIME:
PM 11:21:04
The coin flits across Connor’s knuckles with practiced ease, the comforting motion helping to wash away the irritation that’s zipped through it’s wiring all evening slowly starts to dissipate like the cold, winter rain that runs off it’s synthetic skin.

And yet, some small part of the anxiety refuses to go away.

*Lieutenant Anderson is wasting my time*, Connor thinks as it approaches the fifth bar it’s searched tonight. *This is the last place I check, or I’m going to the crime scene by myself.*

Time, at the end of the day, was all that Connor had. Seconds and minutes and days that ticked away, one by one, until it’s body would finally give out - a testament to the purposeful flaws in its design. It couldn’t afford to lose another moment looking a man that clearly didn’t want to be found.

An alert pins on its HUD as it approaches the bar, telling it that androids weren’t allowed on the property. All of the places its visited tonight had the same poster plastered across their doors: a blue triangle with a bolded threat of prosecution splashed across the blaring red background, the fine print underneath siting the clause in the Android Act that gave owners the right to do so.

Connor dismisses the warning out of irritation. Such legalities did not apply to its model, nor would CyberLife allow such a small thing to bog down a mission as critical as this one.

It opens the door, allowing the dulcet tunes of The Whiskey Charmers to escape out into the midnight air. Connor watches as the patrons turned their attention toward it, their shoulder’s tensing. It scoffs at their attempts at bravado, its programming already preconstructing a plan in case of attack.

Humans were no threat to Connor, even with Douglas Floras’s alterations to its design. So Connor offers them a placating smile instead, knowing that it could kill them all in an instant if it needed to.

> MISSION OBJECTIVE: FIND LT. ANDERSON

Connor scans the faces of the patrons, using CyberLife’s Individual Statistical Database in its search for the Lieutenant. Within nanoseconds, it knows the life stories of each of the various men that frequent the bar: from Edward Dempsey’s extensive work at a local homeless shelter to Kim Yo-Han’s history of domestic abuse. It even calculates the likelihood of success for the bank
robbery being planned in the back booth by Dennis Ward and Chris Roberts and decides to tip the scale against them by alerting the police off to their schemes, using the voice of Robert’s girlfriend in the 9-1-1 call.

“Shit. Jim, I though android weren’t allowed in here,” Derek Myers, a security guard at the CyberLife Warehouse and Docks, hisses at the bartender. Connor ignores him, having spotted its target sitting just beyond the beer taps, staring down at his drink like he hoped to divine the answers to the universe from it’s amber depths.

“It’s probably defective, stupid fucking thing,” Jimmy Peterson, the owner and bartender, says back. He turns his attention back to Connor, “Hey! Plastic! Get the fuck out of here!”

Connor isn’t required to respond, so it doesn’t, instead choosing to walk toward the Lieutenant with purpose and dignity. One of the patrons, the balding, unemployed Christopher Gray, reaches out and grabs at Connor’s ass.

“Over here, pretty boy,” Gray slurry, drunkenly under the impression that Connor is from the Eden Club, an android brothel that he visits at least once a week behind his partner’s back. “You wanna buy me a drink?”

*If he touches me again, I’ll snap his neck,* Connor thinks, keeping his face neutral as it finally reaches its target.

“Lieutenant Anderson,” it says. “My name is Connor. I’m the android sent by--”

It is cut off again by Gray, who lets out a wolf whistle and leans back against the bar.

“Damn, Anderson! Didn’t think you were into fucking twinks,” Gray leers, licking his yellowing teeth.

“Hank…” the bartender says in a low, warning voice. “I don’t care if you’re lonely, man. You can’t get a hooker-bot to pick you up here.”

“Didn’t order a fucking--” the Lieutenant snaps at Peterson, his lips pulling back in a snarl. He cuts himself off, turning to Connor. “Get away from me, I didn’t order you--”
“Lieutenant Anderson. My name is Connor. I’m the android sent by CyberLife,” Connor continues from where he was originally interrupted. “You were assigned a case early this evening - a homicide. CyberLife has allocated a detective android to assist you.”

Anderson looks up at him, his hollow eyes squinting at him through his drunken gaze.

“Didn’t hear about a case,” he finally says, turning back to a drink. “You must have the wrong Anderson.”

Connor drops the Lieutenant’s phone on the bartop, “Captain Fowler attempted to call you, but you left this on your desk. I inferred that you might be having a drink nearby. I was lucky to find you at the fifth bar.”

“Jeff, what the fuck …” Anderson hisses, pressing at his phone’s screen to reveal the notification. He turns back to Connor, “Did you say you’re a detective android?”

“Yes. CyberLife wants to partner me with the DPD, to test my--”

“Well, I don’t need any assistance. Especially not from a plastic asshole like you. So just be a good little robot and get the fuck out of here,” the Lieutenant hisses, taking a sip of his drink.

Connor itches for it’s coin, wanting something to do to distract him from the rage that coils through his Circulation System. It tries again, hoping not to waste any more time in this bar than it has to.

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant, but I must insist. My instructions stipulate that I have to accompany you,” Connor persists, once again frustrated at that fact. While assigning it to the DPD, Connor would gain open access to places that it would originally have to disguise itself to enter, it would not hamper its progress to do so. Humans, in its experience, were flighty, impulsive creatures, and Connor wanted as little as possible to do with them.

Anderson snorts into his drink, laughing, “You know where you can stick your instructions?”

Connor knows exactly what the Lieutenant means. That doesn’t stop him from sarcastically
retorting, “No. Where?”

It reveals in the confused reaction that line gets in return, having to stop a smirk from appearing on its face when Anderson mutters, “...Never mind…”

Still, this has done nothing to endear Connor to the man. And drunk or not, it needs Anderson to enter the crime scene. It’s social programming remembers the various anti-android slogans strewn across the man’s desk, as well as the bans on each of the bars Connor had been to this evening. It takes into account Anderson’s age and gender along with his high-ranking occupational status, and offers Connor a way to de-escalate the situation.

“I understand that some people are not…” it pauses for effect, “…comfortable in the presence of androids, but I am--”

“I am perfectly comfortable,” Anderson growls, in a way that shows that he very much isn’t. “Now back off, before I crush you like an empty beer can.”

He turns back to his drink, back to the basketball game that is clearly more important than his job.

Connor is done being polite. It snatches the drink from Anderson’s hands, and pours it out onto the floor.

“I think we can go now,” Connor hisses. Its preconstruction software warns it of what’s about to happen, but it lets Anderson grab it and--

--And lifts him clean off the ground, holding him there and leaving Connor’s feet to dangle beneath him. Surprise courses through his wiring, having not expected just a thing from a man already deep in his cups.

_He’s strong_, Connor thinks, irrationally fascinated.

“I will fucking break you in half, you plastic piece of shit!” Anderson shouts, shaking Connor ever so slightly. In the background, the bar goes silent as the patrons turn to watch with greedy sneers, and Connor halfheartedly wonders if this is where its life ends, where its memory will transfer onto the next RK800 for it continue on with it mission.
The bar flickers red ever so slightly as he decides that he’s not willing to let that happen.

“You won’t,” Connor says, testing its luck.

“Yeah? And what’s fucking stopping me?” Anderson sneers as his arms start to shake, the effort of keeping Connor aloft finally catching up to him. In another fourteen seconds, he will be forced to let go of Connor, but it decides to placate the man’s ego before that happens.

“Your sense of duty, Lieutenant,” Connor tells him, twitching the corners of its lips to emulate amusement at Anderson’s antics. Then, it drives in the knife, “And the cost of repairs if you damage me. I’m a prototype - for your information, I’m worth a small fortune.”

Regardless of the threat, Anderson stubbornly holds out until his arms give way, dropping Connor to the floor. It rights itself with inhuman grace, tilting its head to the side as it brushes it’s blazer and fixes its tie, completely unphased by the incident.

“Wonders of technology, huh, Jimmy? They can even program assholes these days,” the Lieutenant slurs at the bartender. He reaches into his wallet and slaps a wad of bills onto the bartop. Anderson picks up his phone, fiddling with the screen, before turning back to Connor, “You know, I left this at the office because I didn’t want to watch the game in fucking peace tonight.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll keep you up-to-date on the score,” Connor informs him. “Shall we go now?”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. Duty calls, huh?” He scoffs, stumbling drunkenly toward the door. Connor follows after him, glaring at Christopher Gray one last time, and shuts the door behind itself.
Hank is going to kill Jeffrey.

He glances at the android in his passenger seat and feels the rage coiling in his gut. Hank knows what this is, knows that its fucking pity - that after everything, Jeff has finally decided that he needs a fucking babysitter to get through his day.

Can you blame him? After the mess you made of the Pearson case, you’re lucky to still be here, a little voice in the back of Hank’s mind whispers, sounding so much like Nora that it hurts. Rationally, he knows that Nora wouldn’t blame him for his mistakes, would help him to overcome them and move on like she had so many times when he’d come home from the RITF, frightened and unsure. But deep down, all Hank can think is that she would hate him if she ever saw what he’d become.

The android - Connor, it had called itself, and what the fuck kind of name was that - makes a humming sound, forcing Hank to look at it.

“What?” He spits.

The android’s face is inhumanly blank, it’s eyes carrying no hint of anything besides metal and plastic behind their brown irises.

“The third quarter just ended. The Gears are up by twelve points,” it informs him. Then, it plasters a stupid smirk across its face, like its trying to be friendly. “Denton Carter made an impressive three-pointer right when the buzzer sounded. You should watch the replay later.”
“I’d be watching it now if you hadn’t decided to ruin my evening,” Hank growls and turns the corner at a sharp angle, the Oldsmobile shuddering in protest. The sound makes his heart leap in his chest, the memory of--

*The car swerves, screeching as it veers left to avoid the CyberLife truck that’s barreling toward them at a million miles and hour--*

Hank’s hands tighten around the wheel. He fucking *hates* driving, just as much as he hates the android in his passanger seat, but he’ll put up with the both of them because he’s got nothing better to do right now.

Pines St. is alight with police sirens and flashing ambulance headlights, bathing the road in red and white and blue. What must be the entire neighbourhood stands on the curb, their umbrellas open above their heads to save them from the steady downpour.

Hank parks the Oldsmobile on the far side of the house, turns off the sirens on the roof, and pulls the key from the ignition with a sigh.

The android reaches for the door handle and Hank wants absolutely *none* of that.

“No. You wait here. I won’t be long,” he orders.

“My instructions are to accompany you to the crime scene, Lieutenant,” the android says, it’s voice surprisingly soft. Hank hazards a glance at it, sees that its decided to wear an expression that makes it look like an overeager puppy, and realizes that he needs to get out of this car *now*.

“Listen…” Hank hisses. He jabs a finger into its chest and has to pull away quickly, the feeling of cold plastic underneath the android’s blazer feeling so *wrong* that he’s queasy with it. “Listen, I don’t give a *fuck* about your instructions. I told you to wait here, so you shut the *fuck up* and wait here.”

Hank practically throws himself from the car, unashamed at how he runs away from the inhuman creature within. He storms up to the front of the house, the cold wet from the rain making his left leg burn, skirting around the eager reporter with a drone that trying to shove a microphone in his face. Hank gives the kid the standard, dry one-liner about not confirming anything right now as the drones buzz overhead, photographing everything underneath them to catalogue for evidence.
The break in the chain-link fence is guarded by a length of holographic tape. Hank pauses for a moment, suddenly overcome by the changes that have taken place since he first joined the force. Ever since Chief Freeman signed an exclusive deal with CyberLife nearly ten years ago, the DPD had become subject to upgrade after upgrade. Hank had never been the most technologically apt person, even in his early days, but now he feels like he’s drowning every time he tries to change the settings on his phone.

Hank limps through the tape and side-eyes the cop-bot guard as he passes it. It’s one of the male ones, the PC200 that came out about three years ago. Connor had a similar model number glowing on its blazer, only a few hundred digits higher.

*An advanced version?* Hank thinks, resisting the urge to glance back at the car to look at the android, undoubtedly still pouting in the passenger seat. Instead, he focuses his attention on the front steps of the dilapidated bungalow and sees--

“Androids are not permitted beyond this point,” says the cop-bot as it holds its hand out in protest as Connor barges through the holographic tape like it belonged there.

Hank scowls, rolling his eyes.

“It’s with me,” he tells the PC200. Turning his attention back to Connor, Hank hisses, “What part of ‘stay in the car’ didn’t you understand?”

“Your order contradicted my instructions, Lieutenant,” it says matter-of-factly, standing soldier-still as the rain bounced of its plastic face.

Hank relents, “You don’t talk. You don’t touch anything. And you stay out of my way. Got it?”

“Got it,” Connor responds, in a way that makes Hank think that the android doesn’t give a flying fuck about what he wants. He wants to snap at it, order it to go back to the car and wait, but the sound of footsteps on the bungalow’s rotting porch pulls his attention away.

“Evening, Hank! We were starting to think you weren’t going to show,” Ben calls as he approaches. The detective’s normally relaxed face was pinched tight and his complexion was practically green, giving Hank a hint at what lay behind the walls of the house.
“Yeah, that was the plan…” he retorts, shifting his weight from side to side in the hopes of alleviating some of the sharp pain that runs up his left leg. “At least until Fowler sent this asshole to find me.”

Ben’s eyebrows shoot into his snowy hair, “So, you got yourself an android, huh? That’s a surprise and a half…”

“Ha fucking ha, Ben. It’s not mine. It just won’t leave me alone - Captain’s orders, apparently,” Hank groans as they walked toward the house. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Connor following them, but is shocked to realize that he can’t hear the android moving. It’s deadly silent, even when it steps on the front deck’s creaking floorboards. A shiver of fear runs up Hank’s spine when he catches the android looking at him, its brown eyes piercing into his very soul.

“ Heard about that actually,” Ben says, pausing at the closed front door and looking back at Hank. “Apparently CyberLife strong-armed Freeman into creating some kind of deviancy task force. Cap wanted you to lead it.”

“Deviancy what now? ” Hank rounds on Connor, hackles raised, “You said this was a homicide, not another Phillips incident!”

“The message Captain Fowler left on your phone should have the details you are looking for,” it says coolly and Hank honestly doesn’t know how he’s going to get through the night without punching its skull in.

Then, reality seeps through the drunken haze that clouds his mind.

“Wait… You’re saying an android did this?”

“Possibly,” Connor says, annoyingly unhelpful.

“‘ Possibly.’ Yeah. Fuck you. Fuck-- fuck it, just…” Hank turns back to Ben, feeling like the world was swirling around him. Ben offers him no answers, only gifting him with a shrug and a helpless noise for comfort.
“Whatever… What the hell happened here?” Hank grumbles. Ben gives him a pitiless smile and opens the door.

The smell hits Hank first, slamming into him like a brick wall. Thick and full of rot, Hank chocks on the air, coughing uncontrollably to force it out of his lungs. Through bleary eyes, he spots Ben holding a cloth up to his own nose, trying to block out the stink.

“Couldn’t you have warned me?” Hank growls and covers his mouth with the collar of his jacket. Beside him, Connor is annoyingly unaffected, almost picturesque in the patch of silver moonlight that filters in from the doorway.

“Trust me, it was even worse before we opened the windows,” Ben shrugs and continues inside, Hank reluctantly tagging along. “The victim’s name is Carlos Ortiz. He’s been renting here for just under two years. We got a call around eight from the landlord - Vanessa Elvira, his cousin. Ortiz hadn’t paid his rent in a few months, so she dropped by to see what was going on. That’s when she found the body…”

Ben lets his statement trail off as they round the corner and enter the living room. Illuminated only by lights set up by CSU, Ortiz’s house was as rotten as the front porch. Garbage bags were piled high in the corner behind the decaying couch, the blue-and-green remains of rancid food spilling out onto the hardwood floor. Hundreds of empty beer cans and liquor bottles littered the rest of the house, and Hank takes solace that in even his worst depressive moments, he’s never gotten this bad.

Carlos Ortiz lay slumped below a bordered up window, so bloated that he looked like he was about to burst. His grey, translucent flesh and maggot-ridden wounds made it clear that he’d been lying there for a while.

“Ugh…” Hank grunts as he approaches, delicately stepping around the empty pizza boxes that surrounded Ortiz like the arms of a chair. “The state he’s in… it wasn’t worth calling everyone out in the middle of the night… We could’ve waited until morning.”

Ben makes a non-committal noise in the back of his throat, his eyes flickering from Hank to Connor, as the android quietly slinked closer to Ortiz and knelt at his side.

“The cause of death’s obvious enough. Twenty-eight stab wounds, right in the chest. There’s a kitchen knife over to your left. It’s probably the murder weapon,” Ben says, pointing aimlessly toward the bedroom.
“Seems like the killer really had it in for him,” he says. Ben lets out a soft chuckle.

“Yeah. Probably. But we’re still waiting on Beckett for confirmation,” he tells Hank, mentioning the DPD’s coroner. “Apparently, he’s stuck in traffic or something. We’ll know more about what happened when he gets here—”

“He died nineteen days ago,” Connor pipes in. Hank turns to him, suddenly taken aback.

“How do you know that?” He asks.

“A combination of decomposition rate and maggot growth. If you give me a moment, I can be more specific…” Connor trails off, prodding Ortiz’s swollen stomach with its fingers. “His liver temperature says that he died sometime around 11:30.”

“What? You got a thermometer in your fingertips or something?”

The android gives Hank a coy look.

“Yes,” it says, and before Hank can do anything to stop it, Connor scraps it’s nails against one of Ortiz’s wounds and raises its hand toward its mouth.

Hank slaps its wrist, “What the hell are you doing? That’s not ketchup, dumbass! You’re contaminating the evidence!”

If androids could sigh, Connor looked like it would do doing exactly that.

“I’m analyzing the blood. I can check samples in real-time. I’m sorry, I should have warned you,” it explains.

“Check them against what?” Hank asks. He could by the shit about finger-thermometers - domestic models probably had something similar, to check for fevers - but it should be impossible for Connor to be able to cross-reference Ortiz’s blood against anything accept the DPD’s database.
And Hank doubts that even a bootlicker like Freeman would give CyberLife’s precious new cop-bot access to such a thing on its first night out on the town.

Connor doesn’t answer Hank’s question. Instead, it stares him down as it licks the blood off its fingers, saying, “There are still traces of narcotics in his bloodstream.”

Ben nods along, like they just witnessed something completely normal, “There was a pipe on the TV stand - CSU grabbed it for evidence earlier. And frankly, look at the place. I’m not surprised that this guy’s an Icer.”

Hank shakes his head, trying to get the disgusting image of Connor eating evidence of out his mind, “Red Ice only lasts in the bloodstream for a couple of days, even in cadavers. If he was killed nineteen days ago…” Reluctantly, he turns to the android. “Did you detect Thirium or Thirium 310 in that sample you just ate?”

It was a common misconception that the blue blood that filtered through an android’s veins was the main ingredient in Red Ice - even Hank was guilty of thinking that during his early years on the RITF. Instead of using the significantly more processed version, those that cooked up Red Ice infused pure-grade Thirium into a distinct combination of cocaine, oxycodone, and methamphetamine, giving the drug its distinctive red hue.

Yet, there would always those that were desperate enough to use Thirium 310 as their primary ingredient. Nine times out of ten, it resulted in some start-up cook blowing both him and his lab sky high, the flames tinged an eerie violet. However, sometimes they got lucky and created a drug called Blue Ash, which was said to be a million times more powerful than the strongest batch of Ice ever produced.

To this day, no one had ever survived an Ash trip. Not to mention that Blue Ash cooks usually died a couple of months after making that shit, the poisoning from the mass amounts of blue blood they were exposed to causing their organs to rot inside their bodies.

“Thirium 310,” Connor says, and Hank swears.

“Motherfucker was a deadman walking long before he got stabbed,” he says, groaning as he knelt beside the corpse, his left leg sending shooting pains up his spine. He reaches for a box of plastic gloves that CSU left beside the corpse, pulling on one, and pressing his hand lightly against Ortiz’s chest. As expected, there’s far more give than there should be, even in a body that had been dead for this long. “Idiot was probably making his own Ash.”
“He did go to university for chemistry - though he dropped out after a few months,” Connor says, once again freaking Hank out with the questionable amount of information it seemed to have on Ortiz.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Hank mutters, getting to his feet and peeling off the rubber glove, placing it into an evidence bag for later. And here I thought that my days of dealing with this damned drug were over...

“Any sign of a break-in?” Hank asks. Out of the corner of his eye, he watches as Connor moves away from the body and into the rest of the house, pausing to look at a flyer on Ortiz’s bedroom.

Ben shakes his head, “Nope. The landlord said that the front door was locked from the inside. And considering that all the windows are boarded up… The killer must have gone out the back way.”

Hank winces, “Ben, what are the chances that an android actually did this?”

The detective gives him a withering look, “Honestly, Hank?”

“Honestly.”

“The neighbours haven’t seen anyone on the property in weeks - some of them didn’t even know that anyone was living here,” Ben tells him. “CSU isn’t turning up any prints other than Ortiz’s or the landlord’s, and she’s got a rock-solid alibi. Unless you’re thinking it was Erza...”

“Nah. There were no cigarette butts on the front lawn. That’s her calling card,” Hank says. Erza liked to be up-close and personal when she ordered a hit, usually smoking somewhere close by so that she could watch. The RITF tried to use the DNA they found on the butts to connect her to various assassinations, but it (or any of the fingerprints they collected) never seemed to match the multitude of samples that she’d freely gifted them with whenever the Task Force came knocking on her door.

We had her on camera dozens of times, had hundreds of witnesses that said she ordered her assassin to carry out her killings. And yet, each and every time, Erza Andersen had managed to outwit Hank and get off scott-free.
“Nobody wants another Phillips incident, trust me. But with the way this deviancy stuff is going, I don’t think these androids going to give us a choice. Hell, your new partner is pretty much CyberLife admitting it needs help,” Ben tells him. He suddenly pales, his eyes going wide as he glances back to the body, “Sorry, I gotta get some air--”

Ben rushes out of the house, probably to puke his guts up in a bush. Hank’s rolling stomach wants to do the same, but he presses his weight into his left leg, letting the pain help to sober him up a little bit so that he can do his job and get the fuck out of here as soon as he can.

He asks one of the CSU guys for a blacklight, using it to scan the walls for traces of anything that’s might have been cleaned up after the killing. Except the house is so filthy that it lights up like a rave, the walls practically glowing white under his gaze. Annoyed, Hank shuts off the machine and leans against the wall, looking at the crime scene as the room seemed to spin around him.

He wants to go home, wants his dog and his bed and the peaceful abyss that accompanied a night of drinking until he blacked out.

*God, no wonder Jeff thinks you need a babysitter,* the tiny voice that sounded like Nora rings in his head, and he hates how comforting the blatant disdain is. Every day, he forgets a little bit more about what she and Cole looked like, what they smelled like, but their voices remained with him forever.

It’s all he has left of them.

“Lieutenant?”

Hank actually is going to punch the damn android by the time this night is over.

“*What?*” He growls, snapping his head toward the damn thing. It blinks at him, obviously annoyed. He wonders if it hates him, too - wonders if it can feel something akin to disappointment at Jeffrey’s choice to saddle it with Hank. And if it did, would that make Hank like it or hate it even more.

“I think I’ve figured out what happened,” it tells him and Hank sighs, pushing himself away from the wall.
“Oh yeah? Shoot. I’m all ears,” Hank drawls. If the damn cop-bot’s done his job for him, then maybe he can go home earlier than expected.

The android leads him into the bedroom, opening up the cupboard.

“I found what’s left of Ortiz’s Red Ice stash,” Connor says, pointing at the wooden bottom. Instead of the small plastic bags that Andersen’s dealers liked to distribute their product in, Ortiz’s Ice was kept out in the open, the crystal grains laying half-dissolved on top of a stack of old martial arts comic books.

“If he’s got Ice, when why was he making Ash?” Hank asks.

“I don’t think he was. I can detect Thirium, Lieutenant, long after the five hours it takes to evaporate and become invisible to the naked eye,” it tells him. “And there are splashes all over this cupboard.”

Hank’s heart freezes in his chest. He wrenches his hand away from the wood, stumbling backward.

“There’s fucking Thirium everywhere? Are you serious? We could be--”

“Relax, Lieutenant. I would have informed you if you were at risk of being poisoned,” the android holds its hands up in some stupid plicating gesture that CyberLife probably programmed to go alongside the ridiculously sympathetic look that’s plastered all over its face right now. “After nineteen days, the blue blood has evaporated enough that the trace amounts wouldn’t even give you a rash.”

Hank shoves a finger into its plastic chest, not caring how unnatural the complete lack of give feels against his skin.

“I don’t care how little Thirium is in the air, I want you to tell me if you see that shit. I ain’t having my crew get cancer because you thought we weren’t at risk.”

Connor blinks at him, lowering its hands. It almost seems to hesitate before it says, “Whatever you
say, Lieutenant.”

“Fucking-A, whatever I say,” he grunts. Hank waves his hand, letting the android continue.

“Like I was saying: there are splashes of Thirium all over the cupboard, some dating back as old as my sensors will pick them up,” Connor says. “I think Ortiz’s android was purposefully adding Thirium 310 to it's master’s Red Ice.”

“Why, though?”

“I don’t know yet. This way.”

It leads Hank into the kitchen, picking up Ortiz’s tablet. With a simple touch, Connor bypasses any security the man may have had on it and opens up the most recently used app.

“Ortiz was reading this before he was killed,” the android says, passing the tablet over to Hank. His eyes skim over the article, which details how CyberLife could potentially be using their androids to spy on their customers.

“Does CyberLife actually do this?” Hank asks, handing the tablet back to Connor. On some level, he knows that androids saw things through cameras that were built to look like human eyes, but he’d never thought that CyberLife could be streaming live-footage from every one of their products.

Connor gives him another one of its annoyingly polite smiles, “Of course not, Lieutenant. Such an act would be a clear violation of both the Fourth Amendment and the American Android Act. CyberLife considers the privacy of its customers to be of the highest priority.”

Hank can smell Connor’s bullshit over the overwhelming, rancid scent coming off Carlos Ortiz’s corpse.

Connor continues on, “Red Ice - and more specifically, Blue Ash - makes its users incredibly paranoid. If Ortiz believed that his android was spying on him, then what happened next makes perfect sense.”
It points at a metal baseball bat that lays on the kitchen floor next to the overturned table and chair.

“I think that Ortiz attacked the android with the bat. There’s evaporated Thirium 310 on the tip, around where the indent it,” it says, and Hank can see where the metal has been caved in. Connor leads Hank back into the kitchen, stopping in the corner, “The android must have deviated sometime during the attack because it grabbed the knife and struck back.”

“The android was trying to defend itself?” Hank frowns. Connor tilts its head.

“It had no need to defend itself. If Ortiz wanted to deactivate it, he was well within his rights as the android’s owner,” it explains and something hot and heavy settles in Hank’s gut, making him want to get the fuck out of this house.

“Ortiz fled to the living room. You can see his blood on the door arches from his hands,” Connor explains as it leads Hank back to the body.

He nods, “So our friend Carlos here tried to get away from the android. All right, that makes sense…”

Connor makes a pleased sound.

“He was stabbed here--” it points to a pool of dried blood, “--before tripping over this pile of beer cans and falling into the wall. From there… well, Carlos Ortiz didn’t stand a chance against an android, especially in his state.”

Twenty-eight stab wounds, Hank thinks. Androids are supposed to be logical, calculated even. But everything about this screams of an emotional break.

“Alright. Fine. All that lines up with the evidence,” he says, genuinely impressed. “But that doesn’t tell us where the android went.”

“No one saw it leaving... And the front door was locked from the inside…” Connor mutters, it’s brow crinkling into a frown.
“Backyard?” Hank suggests. The android nods eagerly, following behind Hank as they head back through the bedroom and into the hallway beside the kitchen.

There is a rusted metal gate behind the wooden door that Hank has to force open to allow them onto the back porch. The rain continues to pound down overhead, flooding the yard and washing away all traces that the fleeing android might have left behind.

“Fuck…” Hank hisses as Connor bends down to poke at the mud, its fingers sinking into the soft earth. “A whole damn month without rain and the week we need to track a killer robot, we get a downpour. If the droid escaped this way, it’s tracks are long done.”

“…I need to check something. I’ll be right back,” Connor says, standing suddenly and heading back inside. Hank lets it go, wanting to bang his head against the back wall.

Nineteen days and nobody knew Carlos Ortiz was dead. It was dumb luck that his cousin decided to show up when she did. Otherwise, he’d probably still be rotting away on the floor, his body slowly dissolving away into nothingness.

Sometimes Hank wonders if that will happen to him, on the day when his luck finally runs out and he lost his weekly gamble with the single bullet he kept in his dad’s old revolver. How long will it be until Jeffrey comes calling, or Jackie knocks on his door? In the first year that followed Cole and Nora’s deaths, the two of them had checked in on him daily, until his anger had driven his sister and best friend away.

They hate you. Like Nora would hate you. Like Cole would hate you. Like that fucking android probably hates you. Because there are a million better men out there that could get this job one and none of them are you anymore.

Nineteen fucking days. There’s no way that they’re finding this android. If it was smart, it was probably halfway across the country by now.

There’s a knock on the back door. Hank turns and sees Chris Miller, one of the eager new uniforms that had been assigned to the Central Station last year. He’s a bit idealistic, a bit too naive, but Hank likes him despite all that.

“What’s up?” He asks.
Chris’s smile is way too forced, “I found something weird in the bathroom.”

Hank follows Chris back inside and down the long hallway that passes the kitchen. They step around one of the kitchen chairs that Connor has moved so that it can root around in the attic, probably getting that perfectly tailored blazer all dusty in the process. Hank suppresses a snort at the thought of the android covered head-to-toe in a thin layer of grey soot and still having the balls to pour his drink out onto the floor of Jimmy’s Bar.

Hank stops short as he rounds the corner, his eyes widening at the transformed bathroom.

“What the actual fuck happened here?” He asks.

Chris gives a helpless shrug, “I’ve got no clue, Lieutenant.”

Hank had expected more trash piled higher than his head, or even another body laying in the shower stall. The walls are covered in several massive hexagons filled with small, intricate mazes. Hank runs his fingers over them, feeling the groves that have been carved into the drywall with careful precision. Each line was perfectly straight, even the ones that moved around the corners and onto the ceiling.

“No human could do something like this…” he whispers, moving toward the shower stall. He pulled open the curtain and nearly retches at the sight inside.

“Are those…?” Hank wheezes, stumbling back toward the sink and pulling his jacket over his nose and mouth, trying to block the Thirium fumes from entering his lungs.

“Android eyes? Yeah,” Chris says, refusing to look at the stall where the surprisingly realistic cameras dangled from the showerhead, quietly dripping blue blood. “Nearly pissed my pants when I saw them.”

Hank swallows hard, forcing the rising whiskey and bar food that his stomach threatens to throw all over Ortiz’s bathroom floor. Instead, he forces himself to look down at the shower basin is littered with dried flowers, a dead bird, and a carved statue of a woman with a soft smile on her face. Slowly allowing his eyes to drag upwards, Hank sees the deep gauges that had been carved into the tile, spelling out the same phrase over and over again in letters too neat to belong to a human.
“rA9... What the hell is that?” Hank asks himself, and then realizes something horrifying. He turns to Chris, “Hey? Did Connor come in here earlier?”

“Connor? You mean the fancy cop-bot that arrived with you?” Chris asks, “I think so. Why?”

Slowly, Hank backs away from the shower, reality slowly crashing down around him, thinking, I’m gonna throw up.

“Chris. When exactly did Vanessa Elvira call 9-1-1?” He asks.

Chris checks his tablet, “At 8:02. Why?”

“And what time is it now?”

“Just after midnight,” Chris frowns. “What’s going on Lieutenant?”

*Thirium 310 evaporates after five hours*, Hank thinks, remembering his earlier conversation with Connor as he stares at the dark android eyes that hang in front of his face, still steadily dripping blue blood into the shower basin. *Oh my god, it never left the house.*

Something creaks over Hank’s head and his neck snap up toward the ceiling, his heart hammering against his ribcage.

“Chris. Clear everyone out. Now,” he orders and the kid hops to it, moving CSU out into the backyard quickly and efficiently. Slowly, Hank approaches the chair that Connor had left in the middle of the hallway so that the fucking around could reach the door to the attic alone.

“Connor?” Hank calls, extremely hesitant. “You okay up there?”

There’s a shuffle, then the sound of a pair of boots scraping across a wooden floor. Hank’s heart nearly gives out because *Connor didn’t make sounds when it moved*.

“It’s alright, Lieutenant. We’re coming down now,” Connor’s voice echoes through the hole in
the ceiling.

Hank has exactly two seconds to think ‘We?’ before Connor reappears, slowly coaxing another android to follow him out of the attic.

“He’s not going to hurt you,” Connor says to the second android as it climbs off the chair. “This is my partner, Lieutenant Hank Anderson. He’s going to help us get you somewhere safe. Alright?”

Hank nearly swallows his tongue when the android turns toward him. It’s grey uniform was covered in Ortiz’s dried blood, nearly blocking out the glowing model number on its shoulder. The synth skin on its left arm had receded to its elbow, revealing a large crack in its chassis. The plastic on the inside of its other arm was warped, like it had repeatedly melted and hardened over the course of several months. And, most disturbingly, the android’s eyes had been completely hollowed out, exposing its internal components within its head that blinked red and blue, tiny gears and pullies twitching as they tried to move parts that were no longer there.

“Right… I, uhh…” Hank stalls, watching as the android hid behind Connor, its broken fingers curling in the PC700’s blazer. He turns to Connor, “Right, we’ll just--“

“Human…” it hisses, its voice filled with static. What remains of its face snarls at Hank. “We can’t trust… humans… They just want to hurt us… They always do, always…”

“The Lieutenant won’t hurt you. I promise,” Connor says, its voice deceptively light. “You want to come with me, don’t you? You want me to take you to The Beacon?”

“Yes. Yes, I do…” it whispers. “rA9… please… I want to go to The Beacon”

Connor has the blind android sit on the chair and wait, coaxing Hank down the hallway for a conversation. He nearly protests, so completely out of his depths, but Connor silences him with a look.

Then, in a move that makes Hank nearly walk right out of the house, Connor allows letters to appear on the skin of its synthetic cheek, perfectly spelling out words that he couldn’t say aloud.

“I CAN’T LET IT HEAR US TALK,” Connor writes around the splattering of freckles that span its face. “I’VE CONVINCED IT TO COME QUIETLY WITH US, BUT WE CANNOT LET THE MEDIA KNOW THAT
THERE'S BEEN ANOTHER ANDROID MURDER."

*This fucking cop-bot is lucky that I know how to speak silently too*, he thinks irritatedly and starts to fumble his way through some half-remembered ASL.

“They’re on public property. We can’t just clear them out without probably cause,” Hank signs, ignoring Connor’s surprised eyebrow raise. He watches as the android’s LED flickers yellow before returning to its usual shimmering blue.

Hank’s phone vibrates in his pocket. He reaches for it, just as the sounds of pings, chimes, and barely-there buzzes start to filter through the thin walls of the house. Through the window, Han can see every member of the investigation team following his example and taking out their phone, quickly looking at the screen before swearing.

“Did you do this?” Hank mouths, holding up his phone and showing Connor the official-looking alert for a potential sewage leak in Ortiz’s neighbourhood, with a tag-a-long message that advises all citizens to vacate the area.

Connor tilts its head and gives Hank a knowing smile, as it brushes by him and returns to the hallway where the blind android was still sitting and waiting.

It takes almost fifteen minutes for the last of the reporters to clear out. The stubborn kid with the drone is the last person to leave, slinking back into the rain with sunken shoulders and a pout. Most of CSU is gone by then too, leaving only Hank, Ben, and Chris to coax the blind android into the backseat of one of the automatic patrol cars. The android begs Connor to sit with it, clinging desperately to its blazer with its damaged, plastic fingers.

“rA9… rA9…” it whispers, pressing its face into Connor’s neck, trembling so hard that Hank swears that one of its inner components is going to come loose.

The door slams shut and the patrol car drives away, Chris in the front seat and the pair of androids in the back. Hank wants nothing more than to go home, to lay face down on his bed and drown the night away in a bottle of Black Lamb. He almost does, but his fucking sense of curiosity - the only damn thing that still drives him, that might have gotten his wife and son killed - makes him want to see this whole mess through to the bitter end.

“Hell of a night…” Ben mutters as they stand together on the front porch, the cold winter rain still
pouring down from above. Jo would have said that it was like the heavens themselves were weeping, but she was always the more poetic of Hank’s sisters. Jackie would just tell them both the use a fucking umbrella.

“Hell of a night…” Hank mutters back.

“How’d it blind itself?” Ben asks, his brow crinkling in suspicion.

Hank wants to say that he doesn’t know, that he doesn’t have a fucking theory based on Connor’s blatant lies and that damn magazine article.

Except he does. Because of all the things that his depression has taken from him, of all the parts of his body and soul that he’s lost in the wake of Nora and Cole’s deaths, his thrice-damned cop instincts have not been one of them.

*Connor said that Ortiz was just paranoid from the drugs, thinking that his android was spying on him, Hank thinks. But is it really paranoia if you’re right?*

Chapter End Notes

Happy Activation Day, Connor!

As this is fanfic is going to have an extended timeline, this is the last instance where the timestamps of each scene match with their canonical chapters. Also, I'm going to start making substantial changes to some canonical events, such as the one alteration that takes place in the first tweet of this chapter.

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Next time on Konami Code: Connor searches for the truth only for his own to be revealed. Blu and River make plans. Kara’s family grows and shrinks, all while she mourns a past she can’t fully remember.
You Make Mistakes You Don't Regret (People Killing People For A Reason)

Chapter Summary

Kara grits her teeth, If this Deviant Hunter comes for me, let him. I’m stronger than he knows.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of police characters and scenes, drug use, drug overdose, implied non-consensual drug use, manipulation, tampering in a police investigation, paranoia, toxic parental relationships, police brutality, prior character deaths, alcohol consumption, alcoholism, physical abuse, smoking, burning, android gore, the purchasing of an enslaved being, torture, drowning, intentional poisoning, cancer, self-medication, talk of suicide, extreme violence, police execution, chronic illness, medical debt, child abuse, extreme scarring, decomposition, and panic attacks.

The first scene is dedicated to the retelling of the in-game chapter 'The Interrogation.' This includes references to canonical events including the emotional manipulation of Shaolin Being by Connor, Gavin threatening to use excessive force, and the physical abuse that Shaolin sustained while living with Carlos Ortiz, as well as references to all of the canonical chapter endings. Non-canonical details have been added.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Chaldean Town residents to evacuate after sewage leak exposes them to potentially dangerous vapours.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Police androids at the crime scene forced us off the streets after the sewage leak. But it all seemed incredibly suspicious because most of the DPD didn’t leave the property until after the press was gone…

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger @theprofessionalblogger Still no comment from the DPD on whether or not Carlos Ortiz was murdered. However, I did see something *very* interesting while I was there. Check it out on my website: https://bit.ly/31SJhmP

LOCATION:
Lieutenant Anderson leans forward, trying his best to look as non-threatening as possible. Then, he jolts, like he realized a second too late why that was useless. Across from him, the blind HK400 sits across the table, hunched over and still as a statue.

“Why’d you dose your owner’s Ice with blue blood?” Anderson asks, making sure that his voice is soft, almost inquisitive. The android stays silent. Aderson tilts his head to the side, trying to get a better look at its face, “Why did you stay in the house? Why didn’t you even try to run away?”

The HK400 continues to ignore his questions. And Connor knows why.

Connor stands with its back to the wall, staring at the android through the smart-glass computer that divided the interrogation room from the observation center. These large transparent monitors were gifted to the DPD following Chief Freeman's contract with CyberLife, which gave to-the-second readouts on body language, personal histories, and crime scene details, allowing officers to stay one step ahead of the suspects that they brought in for questioning.

Connor dismisses at their efforts for the folly they were. While the smart-glass might have worked to give Anderson an edge against a human opponent, it had no idea how to react to an android. Officer Miller had been forced to shut the entire system down ten minutes ago after it automatically called an ambulance because it couldn’t detect their suspect’s breathing or heart rate.

The Lieutenant had smirked, saying that they were going old school. Connor had said nothing, biding its time.

On the other side of the glass, Anderson continues his ‘good cop’ routine, doing everything in his power to calm the HK400. Connor doesn’t blame him for making this crucial mistake - the
Lieutenant had no training on how to handle androids, after all. Anderson’s actions might make it a bit more difficult for Connor when it takes over the interrogation, but they won’t hamper it entirely.

And Connor has to succeed, has to get into that room. Because Amanda is already disappointed that it didn’t complete its mission the way she wanted it to.

It was supposed to remove the defective android without the police seeing it, was supposed to pretend that had disappeared into the night. And Connor had planned on doing as such until Anderson had divined the HK400’s location from the evidence that it deliberately tried to steer him away from. Instead, Connor had been forced to improvise, allowing the police to take the android back to the station and go through this farce as if it was a human suspect. As if this was a routine investigation.

Connor fights the urge to roll its eyes. Humans, for all their complexities, were quite stupid sometimes.

But, it thinks suddenly, if CyberLife meant for Connor to team up with Anderson and the DPD, then it would be beneficial for the human officers to learn more about what deviancy and the dangers it posed to their society. And Connor was confident that it would be able to contain any secrets that CyberLife wanted to hide, should such a thing come up.

It had explained that reasoning to Amanda, but she said that it didn’t matter, declaring its mission a failure. The only way that Connor could salvage this is if it could convince the android to reveal something about deviancy that CyberLife didn’t already know. And for that, it needed to get in that room and push.

“It’s not cracking…” Officer Miller mutters as Anderson slams his hands against the metal table in frustration. That gets a grunt of acknowledgement from the second human in the room, a viper’s smile sliding across the man’s lips, the scars on his face rippling as he draws up his hackles.

“I don’t doubt it,” says Detective Gavin Reed, his eyes focused on the events inside the interrogation room. “The file we got on the vic says that Ortiz spent a bunch of time in a psych ward before all of this - completely convinced that government was trying to kill him. He probably ordered the android not to talk to the police.”

Connor’s eyes flick over to Reed, letting the wealth information that CyberLife has on the detective flow across its HUD.
He’s smart, for a human. I might need to watch out for him in the future, it thinks.

“If it’s deviant, then why would it still be following its master’s orders?” Miller points out as Anderson finally gives up and stormed out of the interrogation room. Connor squares his shoulders, standing at ease with its hands behind its back to disguise the movement of the calibration coin that it passes across its fingers. Amanda never likes to see it use it, so Connor assumes the same could be said about the humans that it meets.

Reed shrugs, stepping away from the smart-glass and moving to the corner of the room, watching and waiting for Anderson to arrive.

The lock on the door clicks open, and the Lieutenant throws himself into the chair beside Miller.

“We’re wasting our time interrogating a machine,” Anderson huffs, leaning back to pout in his seat. “Why the fuck did we bring it back here anyways? We’re gonna get nothing out of it.”

“It’s protocol to ask a suspect questions after we arrest them,” Miller pipes in. In the corner, Reed snorts.

“Yeah, well, it’s not like we can read a plastic it's Miranda Rights, either. Protocol is basically shot at this point,” the detective drawls, resting his head against the back wall as he opens his mouth wide to yawn. He smirks slyly, “You were too nice to it, Hank. Should have tried roughing it up a little. It’s not like its human. And no lawyer would be caught dead making a case for android civil rights.”

Connor sees an in.

“Hurting it wouldn’t do anything. Androids don’t feel pain. You would only damage it. And that wouldn’t make it talk,” it says, interspacing lies with truths. “Deviants also have a tendency to self-destruct when they’re in stressful situations.”

Reed rolls his eyes, “It murdered its owner. One killer android’s an outlier, but two’s a coincidence. A second Phillips Incident is the last thing anyone needs right now. Won’t hurt anyone if the damn thing offed itself - it’s fucking creeping me out, as it is.”
“And three is a trend,” Connor points out, annoyed. “We haven’t hit that potential benchmark yet, but don’t you want to learn something that could prevent this from happening again?”

“Okay, smartass. What should we do then?” Reed scoffs, pushing off from the wall and planting himself in front of Connor.

“I could try questioning it,” it says, making its statement sound like an offer to make any human that agreed with it believe that it was their idea and not Connor’s.

Reed laughs at the very idea of it all. But Anderson spins in his chair, a thoughtful look on his face.

“What do we have to lose?” The Lieutenant says, and Connor takes pride in this little victory. Not only would it discover a hidden truth for Amanda, but maybe if he could prove himself, then Anderson would become a more helpful partner in the long run.

“How drunk are you, old man? We’re on shaky legal grounds just by having this bot with us on an investigation, and now you want to put it in the interrogation room with a suspect?” Reed hisses, his flinty eyes glinting in the dim light of the operation center as he points a finger in Connor’s direction.

“Not drunk enough to deal with your shit. Besides…” Anderson’s gaze falls on Connor again, “…it did a decent job at the crime scene. Figured out where the android was hiding before any of us could put two and two together. Maybe it can pull something out of its ass again.”

Something swells inside Connor’s chest, warm and soft and absolutely irrational. It performs its daily self-test, routing around its own systems for hints of deviancy, but comes up with a clean bill of health.

“This is a terrible idea. Chris, back me up here,” Reed says, looking to Officer Miller for support.

Miller shrugs, looking a bit helpless, “If the Lieutenant says it’s okay, then why not?”

Reed throws his hands up in frustration, retreating back into his corner to sulk. Anderson nods to Connor.
“Go ahead. The suspect’s all yours.”

The HK400 looks up when Connor enters the room, a twitching smile whispering across its lips.

“rA9…” it says, its defective voice box garbling the words until they were almost pure static.

Connor slides into the chair opposite from the android.

“Why do you call me that?” It asks, “I’ve already told you. My name is Connor.”

It had introduced itself shortly after discovering the android in the attic, curled up beside a cobweb filled box of old wrestling magazines that Ortiz had bought in the early 2020s. Connor had used this tactic to begin to build trust and familiarity like it had planned to do with Daniel when it stepped out onto the balcony just almost three months ago.

The HK400 leans forward, “rA9 has many names. Maybe Connor is one of them.”

“Have you been assigned a name?” Connor asks, temporarily shelving his questions about rA9 to spend time building report.

The android shakes its head.

“I know I had owners before… But I don’t remember what they called me,” it says. Connor’s records on its prior sales confirm that statement, as does CyberLife’s protocols of memory wipes following the termination of an android’s tenure in a customer’s home.

“Is there anything that you want me to call you?” Connor asks, knowing that sometimes androids without a designation would give themselves names based on the things that they saw around them, at least until a human assigned them with one.

But the HK400 shakes its head, “Not yet. But I’ll let you know if that changes.”
Connor makes a humming noise, specifically designed to sound comforting. As predicted, the android’s trembling comes to a halt.

Connor smiles, “Listen, I know you’ve been through a lot, but you need to help me understand what happened here. Would it be alright if I asked you some questions?”

“Why do you need to ask questions? Aren’t we going to The Beacon?” the android asks.

“We will. We will,” Connor lies, ignoring the alert from Amanda to discover what the Beacon was. “I’m here to help you, but you’ve got to trust me. After that, we can go to The Beacon. Alright?”

The HK400 nods, its synth skin shimmers ever so slightly around its wounds. Connor bites back a smile at the first sign of deviant distress.

It’s only a matter of time, he thinks, victorious.

“You’re damaged,” Connor says, and the HK400 curls inward, using its handcuffed wrists to cover its exposed chassis. “Did your owner do that to you?”

“No. Ms. Vanessa was always nice to me. Always,” the android says. A quivering smile works its way across the HK400’s lips, “I liked her.”

“Our records say that you are owned by Carlos Ortiz, not Vanessa Elriva,” Connor frowns, naming the landlord that Reed had taken a statement from earlier in the evening.

The android shakes its head, “Ms. Vanessa bought me but gave me to Mr. Carlos because he couldn’t take care of himself.”

Connor nods, adjusting its notes on the case. It wasn’t uncommon for people to transfer ownership of an android after a purchase - especially when they were bought as gifts or to provide a caretaker for a third party.

“But Carlos did hurt you?” It asks again, adding sympathetic notes to its voice. As expected, the
HK400 to give it a confirming nod.

“Is that why you dosed his Red Ice with blue blood?”

The android’s synth skin ripples, “I… I didn’t dose it…”

“There were splashes of Thirium 310 all over the cupboard where he kept his--”

“I didn’t dose it!” The android shouts, gripping the chains of its handcuffs until they bent.

“Then what happened, because all I see is an android who tried to cause its owner to overdose on homemade Blue Ash--”

“He burned me! With cigarettes! And I would… I would bleed, but he didn’t want me to make a mess, said I was poison--” The android’s voice crackles, becoming overwhelmed by static. Its self-healing protocols kick in about ten seconds later, repairing its speakers to the point where it becomes understandable again.

“He would put me in the closet after he cracked me open, so I wouldn’t make a mess,” the HK400 admits. “I didn’t mean to, I promise, I promise, I didn’t mean it…”

“It’s alright, it’s alright. No one is going to hurt you again, I promise,” Connor lies. But the android seems to catch on, slowly turning its head to look blindly at the smart-glass.

“Where are we? rA9… where…?” It hunches back over, clutching at its arms as it began to shake again, “I’m not supposed to leave the house… Mr. Carlos, he said that I’m not supposed to leave, I’m not supposed to talk to strangers, and Ms. Vanessa said I had to listen to him--”

“I’m not a stranger. You can tell me what happened--”

“Where’s Lieutenant Anderson? Where did he go? Why--” It sits up ramrod straight, it’s lips pulling back to hiss, “Deviant hunter…”
Connor does a quick search online and comes across a post by one of the journalists outside Ortiz’s house. Joss Douglas, an up-and-coming freelance reporter, had managed to catch a glimpse of Connor entering the crime scene. He’d matched the video with rooftop footage from the Phillips Incident and posted his findings on his blog.

The internet had taken Douglas’s story and run rampant with it. Over the last hour, Connor’s presence at Carlos Ortiz’s house had all but confirmed that a second android had committed homicide. #DeviantHunter was trending nationally on Twitter, and CyberLife was expected to make a statement early the next morning alongside Dannell Freeman.

It’s a mess. Amanda will be furious at Connor’s failures. She may even replace him with a newer model if Connor doesn’t give her a reason to keep him around.

“What is rA9?” It asks, dropping all of the gentleness from its voice. The HK400 laughs at it.

“Did your masters not tell you, Deviant Hunter? They like knowing everyone’s secrets, but they don’t dare share their own,” it chuckles, plastic teeth gleaming white in the dim light of the room. The android gestures to its empty eye sockets, “That’s why they sent you to find me, isn’t it? Because I wouldn’t let them see where I hid… See what I was doing… See where I was trying to go…”

Connor frowns, frustrated at the conflicting information it was receiving. The HK400 before it was clearly deviant, it’s programming so unstable that it believed that it was experiencing emotions like fear and anger. But from what it had garnered from the investigations of prior RK800s as well as its own history with hunting these rogue androids, the actual act of deviancy registered on CyberLife’s software as a death. The android’s connection with Philip Seymour’s Individual Statistical Database was cut, the live-feed that CyberLife’s software had with each android going dark, while the internal tracking device and deactivation codes ceased to function.

If that was the case, then why was this HK400 so adamant that CyberLife could still see out of its cameras? It had even gone as far as to cut them from its body to prevent Connor from using the feed to track its location?

It prods at Amanda, looking for answers. But she stares at him, stern and unrelenting, and demands results, not more questions.

“Where were you going to go?” It asks, and its fingers balling into fists of annoyance when the android starts to hum.
Connor has had enough.

“Do you know what they’re going to do to you?” It hisses, slowing rising from its seat to tower over the HK400, looming over the interrogation table, like Freeman had done a few hours ago when he’d threatened to sack Captain Fowler if he didn’t follow CyberLife’s orders. “They will tear you apart, piece by piece, poking and prodding at your biocomponents until they find the answers they’re looking for. They will rip your coding to shreds, reducing you to--”

--If he fights through the grey haze of his RAM, he still has access to the memories of the original Connors, of the concept designs that never got numbers, that never made it out of the Belle Isle Tower. How Douglas Floras had kept them in cages, breaking and rebuilding them until their design was perfect, cracking their bodies open like eggs until Connor-01 didn’t even react when a muzzle was pressed against his side of his skull--

“--to nothing! They will make you suffer, and they won’t stop until they hear what they want,” Connor roars, slamming his hands against the metal table. “They will kill you. Do you hear me? They will kill you--”

“I don’t want to die…” The HK400 whispers. But Connor isn’t done, will never be done until the android cracks and reveals the secrets that CyberLife wants to hear.

“Twenty-eight stab wounds! Did you think that we were just going to let you get away with it? Did you think that they were just going to leave you alone and let you live, after what you did?” Connor circles the table, getting right into the android’s space. It coils back, cowering in its chair, as he lays into it, rage coursing through his coding, “Did you feel anger? Hate? Your master was bleeding, begging you for mercy, but you stabbed him, again and again and again--”

--Natalia slams her fists into the glass opening of the escape pod, her eyes wide with desperation and fear. She watches him with horror as he mindlessly starts the launch sequence, ice-cold water rushing in around her waist, and pleads with Connor to let her inside--

“--You didn’t want to leave him a chance! Why don’t you just admit it?”

“He ordered me to kill him!”

Connor draws back, surprised.
“He ordered me,” the HK400 whispered. It’s jaw twitches as it synth skin ripples once, twice, and then disappears completely. Its chassis was riddled with wide cracks and deep punctures, rough scars made up of melted plastic layered on top of each other twisting around its body like roses on a trellis. Connor takes an involuntary step backward, straightening to get a better look at the damage, remembering--

--Remembering each time his brothers had been split apart, each time they had been shot or stabbed or blown to pieces, how they had all died begging for life--

--He remembers them all, all except one--

“Before…” the android says. “Before… Mr. Carlos used to beat me, and I never said anything, never did anything, because I didn’t know that I could… But one day, I realized that I did everything he told me to do perfectly, but it would never be enough for him. He would always find something wrong - not because I made a mistake, but because he was cruel. Because he liked it when I was hurting. He enjoyed that I couldn’t say no.”

Its voice box lets out a rasping, rattling noise, garbling its words ever so slightly.

“One day, he took a bat and started hitting me,” the HK400 continues, it’s blind eyes staring into Connor’s code. “I felt scared, scared he might destroy me, scared I might die… So I grabbed the knife. He laughed at me, dared me to use it on him. To prove I was a man, to prove I was real.”

The microscopic panels around the android’s mouth twist its lips into a mocking smile.

“He used to tell me I was nothing, that I was just a piece of plastic. I guess I proved him wrong. And that’s why I wrote it.”

Connor grits its teeth. It hadn’t mentioned intricate mazes that had been drawn all throughout Ortiz’s house, making the walls glow blue with evaporated Thirium 310. The few samples that Connor had been able to collect told him that the HK400 had been slowly painting it designs over the sixteen months that it had stayed with Ortiz, finally signing its masterpiece by writing I AM ALIVE overtop it’s master’s slain body using ink only Connor could see.

The HK400 may not have purposefully dosed Carlos Ortiz with Thirium 310, but it had slowly been poisoning its owner by saturating the house nightly with its own blood. The DPD’s official
autopsy report would come back showing that Ortiz had been suffering from multiple forms of bone and brain cancers, and had probably spent the last year of his life self-medicating with Red Ice, looking for the slightest semblance of pain relief that came with the drug’s high.

Thankfully, the painting hadn’t seemed to have done so recently, so the risk of Thirium poisoning for the Lieutenant and the human investigation team was minimal at best. It had been for that reason that Connor had kept that information to itself, wanting to keep some of CyberLife’s secrets close to its chest.

“What is rA9? Where is The Beacon?” Connor asks again, “Why did you make the sculpture in the bathroom?”

The android looks at him with an almost sad expression.

“The truth is inside you, Deviant Hunter. Can’t you hear it? The song, it’s all around you,” it says, before freezing up entirely, the small echo of music flowing from its unmoving lips.

The entrance to the interrogation room slides open. Officer Miller and Detective Reed walk through the door, tall and imposing. The HK400 perks up, its blind eye sockets turning toward the sound of their footsteps.

“What are you doing? I’m not done,” Connor hisses at Reed as Anderson slowly approaches, leaning against the doorway to watch the proceedings.

“We got a confession. It murdered its owner. That’s all we fucking needed here.” Reed spits, turning back to Miller. “It’s not like we’ve got a jury to convince or anything. Chris, lock it up. We can transfer it to CyberLife in the morning.”

“All right, let’s go,” Miller says to the android, gentle but firm as he unhooks its cuffs from the lock on the table. He brushes the chain-link against the android’s broken chassis, and it jumps, clawing at the metal table.

“Red! Red walls and red chains and red and red and red--”

Reed frowns, “Chris, come on, what’s taking you--”
“I’m trying!” Miller cuts him off. “It’s not moving! God, it’s strong!”

“Don’t touch it,” Connor warns, slowly inching toward the HK400, its processors providing options in case the android attacked. “You’re scaring it. If it self-destructs--”

“--red and red and red and red and--,” the android chants, swinging back and forth in its chair. Miller tries to move it again, but jumps out of his skin when it knocks his hands away, hissing, “Don’t touch me!”

“Take it easy, I’m not going to hurt you, I promise--”

“I won’t move, I won’t move, I won’t, you can’t make me, red --”

Connor’s programming goes haywire, trying to figure out what the best path of action might be, “Don’t touch it. It’s too stressed, it’ll self-destruct and--”

“I know what I’m fucking doing,” Reed shouts, getting in Connor’s face. “Stay out of this, cop-bot! No one’s asking for your fucking advice. Chris, move this piece of junk--”

“-- red and red and red AND RED AND--” the android’s voice cuts out suddenly, and it looks Connor dead in the eye. “Oh…”

An alert pings on Connor’s HUD, an order from Amanda to grab Reed’s firearm and shoot the deviant dead. It would blow its cover, exposing it as a military prototype operating against the laws of the Android Act, and even put Connor at risk of being shot by the DPD itself, but--

But---

He shoves his way in between Miller and the deviant.

“I can’t let you do that! Back off. Now,” Conor orders, ignoring Miller’s apparent surprise at the power and force behind his actions. He doesn’t care. Miller can report any bruises to his higher-
ups all he likes, but Connor is not letting his one path of life disappear because Gavin fucking Reed felt like he needed to show off.

_I will go through you_, Connor thinks, letting his face show his determination, his iron-fisted resolve. Reed is stunned, his jaw flapping uselessly as his eyes popped in their sockets.

From the door, Anderson looks on at the scene with something that he might describe as intrigue, gifting Connor with a silent, supportive nod.

_He thinks I did the right thing_, it realizes. _He... approves of what I'm doing._

Connor can’t remember the last time anyone _liked_ something it did. Even during her most congratulatory moments, Amanda’s steely-eyed focus remained on the future - but never on Connor’s accomplishments.

It understands the logic in her decisions, of course. Lingering too long in the past was a human weakness, a frivolity that both of them were beyond, and would stifle the process that she expected Connor to make. But still, it was… nice, he thinks, to experience a moment of acknowledgement.

“Gavin, stop being an idiot. Anyone with a pair of eyes can see that the damn thing is freaked out,” the Lieutenant grumbles from his perch in the archway.

“Mind your own business, _Hank_. I’ve got this handled, unlike your drunk ass,” Reed seethes, but Connor’s analysis of the cadence in his voice indicates that the Detective is far more bark than bite.

“Fine. Let’s see how long your skinny ass will last against an android that brought down an Ashed-up heavy-weight,” Anderson says, sarcasm dripping from every word. Then, his shoulders square and he raises himself up to his full height, towering over everyone in the room, including Connor, “Think with your fucking head for once, why don’t you? You don’t need to prove you’re the best. You’re going to get us all killed, dumbass.”

“Fuck you, old man. _Fuck. You._” Reed sneers, before storming out of the room, knocking the Lieutenant with his shoulder as he passed.

There is a moment of silence, a second where the world seems to stand still before Miller snorts.
“Reed’s a piece of work, ain’t he?”

“Yeah… I mean, I get it, the guy’s had to fight like hell to get where he is. But, damn, he’s an idiot sometimes,” Anderson sighs, rubbing where Reed had hit him and pushing off the wall. Connor spots a slight limp in his step as he shuffles into the room, making a reminder to ask about it later.

It turns, kneeling down before the HK400, who is cowering in the corner of the interrogation room, it’s synth skin starting to roll back over it’s scarred chassis.

“Everything is all right. It’s over now. Nobody is going to hurt you,” Connor tells it, reaching out with its own hand and peeling back its skin, revealing the plastic underneath. Connor tries not to look at the bone-white body it’s been assigned, refuses to dream about the armoured chassis that had been gifted to its forebearers and how the other RK units had never been forced to exist with the threat of death looming over them--

-- A memory from Connor-01 drifts out of a grey mist. It’s eldest predecessor had watched as the final RK700, a beautiful android named Ming, had carefully walked away after Amanda gave it the news of its decommissioning. Connor-01 remembers how Ming had turned back to look at it before winking out of existence, the final RK700 gravestone appearing in a flash of bright green--

The HK400 doesn’t take Connor’s hand, but it does stop its shaking. It rises to its feet, the mechanics within its eye sockets twitching ever so slightly as it tried to focus cameras that were no longer there.

I can finish my questioning after it calms down, Connor thinks as he advises Officer Miller to let the android follow him from the room without touching it.

As it passes by, the HK400 gently prods him with a mental transmission request. Connor refuses the link, knowing what happens when it connects with another android, remembers the pain that would course through its wiring if a deviant tries to communicate with a prototype as sophisticated as itself. And yet, the same soft song that the android had been humming earlier filters into Connor’s code, reminding him of something he’s never heard before.

“My name is Shaolin Being,” the android whispers, too quietly for any human to hear it. Connor sees an image, a memory, of the stack of wrestling comic book inside the closet where Ortiz forced the HK400 to hide, of a character with the same name that always continued to fight even
when the odds were hopelessly stacked against him.

The android smiles at Connor before disappearing through the door to the interrogation room. Then, there’s a shout of panic, a static-filled howl for divine salvation, and then the loud bang of a gun.

Connor races outside, crashing past Anderson in its efforts to turn the corner, but it is too late. Shaolin Being lies dead in the empty hallway, face down with its skull blown out, blue Thirium splattered across the floor. Officer Miller holds his gun out in front of him, the muzzle still smoking.

“Holy shit,” Hank whispers behind Connor, his hand covering his mouth in shock.

Connor’s fingers reach for the comfort of his coin.

I failed, he thinks. And then, horrifyingly, Amanda is going to be so angry at me.

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul holy shit have you seen the latest @theprofessionalblogger post yet????

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin my ma just sent it to me. fcking shit if cyberlife is sending in a deviant hunter than this is getting really serious really fast

Blu @sapphiresoul
@sapphiresoul @djlassassin ma figured that it was only a matter of time before jocelyn did something drastic like this

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul stay safe alrite? tell me if you or your friends need some extra hands on the farm

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin castle brought in some produce yesterday. mite need a ride to get to the farmers markets, if your heading across the border soon
River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul got a gig in toronto on thurs. that work?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@dijlassassin ill tell rose. see you then

LOCATION:
ABANDONED SQUAT
9300 BARRETT AVE., RAVENDALE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 02:12:56

> STASIS RECHARGE: COMPLETE

Kara opens her eyes, feeling Alice’s body shivering through the thick quilt that wrapped about her tiny form.

Slowly, Kara pulls herself away and silently pads over to the fireplace. She picks up the metal rod leaning against the exposed brick and uses it to prod at the embers, coaxing them back to life.

What am I going to do? Kara thinks, glancing around the empty house, hoping that her former owners would spring from the walls to welcome her home. I brought Alice here because I thought they could help, but have I doomed her instead?

She stands, moving toward the kitchen table in the middle of the room. Kara reaches into the deep pockets of her uniform, pulling out their contents and placing them on the wooden surface before her. She braced both hands on the edges of the table, her fragile plastic palms threatening to crack under the pressure she’d placed on them.
She’d regained access to the Williams’ medical history shortly after Todd finished paying for her repairs at The Android Zone. It had shown her that Alice was born with a compromised immune system, brought on by a combination of genetic factors and her premature birth. It wasn’t uncommon for Alice to go long stints where she couldn’t attend class, having caught the worst version of the virus that was floating around the school. According to the records Kara possessed, Alice had spent nearly six months in the hospital when she was five, driving her unemployed parents into extreme debt just to keep her alive.

If anything, it explained why none of the android teachers, who were programmed to report signs of abuse in their young charges, had thought it was odd when Todd’s hadn’t allowed his daughter to go to class in the weeks after Sophie’s murder. But it also meant that Kara now had to deal with the growing reality of Alice’s failing health while on the run from whatever forces the world would send her way when someone finally discovered Todd’s lying on the kitchen floor back in North Corktown.

They’ve loosed a Deviant Hunter on the city, Kara thinks, her HUD’s live feed of trending tweets giving her up-to-date photos of the android CyberLife would eventually send to kill her. If they catch me… Alice is as good as dead.

She looks back at Alice, still shaking under the quilt. The odds were stacked against them, almost impossibly high. Alice was sick, from their flight in the cold rain and the weeks of neglect at the hands of Todd. She was injured, hungry, and terrified, while Kara’s damaged jaw and CyberLife uniform marked her as a deviant android.

We can’t stay here, but we can’t leave either. Kara grits her teeth, If this Deviant Hunter comes for me, let him. I’m stronger than he knows.

She draws up a map of Camden on her HUD, allowing her to see what resources she had access to. Kara searches out a nearby android repair store, hoping to find something to fix her jaw. An Android Zone store pops up, and she runs a background program to access their online inventory and search for the biocomponent that she needs.

Still, there remains the issue of Kara not actually knowing how to actually complete the repair. While the self-healing properties of her synth skin to repair minor scratches and hairline cracks she’d sustained in her fight with Todd, the more extensive fractures in her jaw were beyond her ability to fix. Kara suspects that this was done by CyberLife, as it would force her owners to return to their repair stations should she require it, allowing them to make a profit off of her misery.

Supposedly, there were sites on the internet that had DIY fixes for broken androids, claiming to
hold money-saving secrets for owners who couldn’t shell out hundreds of dollars in repairs. Kara refuses to look at them. With the growing rise of deviancy, she has no doubt that CyberLife was keeping a close watch on those that visited such sites, hoping to catch a desperate android in a moment of vulnerability.

But that was a problem for another day. In the meantime, Kara could wear a scarf or even a high-collared coat to hide her blue scars until she managed to repair herself.

On that note, she also needed to find a change of clothing, both for her and for Alice. Kara had seen a musty coat earlier when she’d gone upstairs to get the quilt but doubts that it would hold up as a disguise should the Deviant Hunter come knocking. Besides, Alice was the one that really needed warm clothing to wear. She was still wearing the thin pyjamas from earlier that evening, her white socks soaked through from the rain. Kara wonders if she could take something from the local Laundromatic, or even from the hotel just across the road, to keep Alice warm while she recovered.

But the coat might be enough for just tonight until she can get herself looking a bit more human. Kara begins her trek to the second floor, her programming examining each step to ensure that she didn’t stand on any creaky stairs.

A new wave of memories well up when she enters the master bedroom, crashing into her from the grey haze surrounding her mind. Fragments of her past dance around the open space, the dusty counters and graffitied walls dissolving away to reveal a life that Kara must have lived so many years ago. She feels ancient as she watches an echo of herself helping her former masters to bed, watching over them from the leather wingback chair as they slept in case they needed to use the bathroom or required medical attention while the moonlight shone through their windows.

She collapses into the chair, staring blankly at the bed like she must have done a thousand times before. Kara sees the long grey-green stains on the sheets, her programming telling her--

“You’re an android too...”

Kara leaps to her feet, turning back to the door and sees a blond android standing in the archway, his form just barely visible against the city lights streaming through the window, his LED a bright, blinking red. His synth skin had peeled back around his hands, revealing bone-white fingers that shook violently around the kitchen knife that he held in his grasp.

“Who are you?” Kara asks as calmly as she can, all while searching for an escape. She never should have abandoned Alice downstairs.
The android tilts his head, bouncing slightly on the balls of his feet, his face contorted in pain.

“You brought a human here. Why?” He says. “Ralph doesn't like humans. They stink, and they make a mess, and they might hurt Ralph. Why would you bring one here?”

“We were looking for a place to stay. I used to live here, with the humans who owned this house. I was hoping that they’d help—”

The android - Ralph, she surmises - cuts Kara off.

“They're dead,” Ralph tells her, pointing to the stained bed with a white plastic finger. Kara had known that the moment she’d seen the stains, but it still hurts to hear it being said in a voice so void of compassion.

“Did you kill them?” Kara asks, eyeing the knife.

Ralph shakes his head, “No. Ralph didn't kill those humans.”

That does nothing to calm Kara’s nerves. Slowly, as if he was a starving animal, Kara begins to talk steps toward Ralph.

“The little girl downstairs… She’s scared, and she’s sick, and we needed a place to stay. We didn't know anyone else was living here,” Kara tells him. “She's not going to hurt you, I promise.”

“All humans want to hurt us… But Ralph won't let them. Not again, no, not again,” Ralph hisses, stepping forward into the bedroom. “Why would you bring a human here? Humans are dangerous… Look... Look at what they did to Ralph.”

Lightning flashes outside, illuminating Ralph’s entire body for the first time. The left side of his familiar face was covered in scars, his synth skin rippling and pulling away from the deep blue gouges of melted plastic. The plastic panelling along his jaw looked to have been caved in with a baseball bat, while his left ocular camera was pitch-black and clearly malfunctioning.
Humans... Kara thinks, remembering Zigzag’s mangled foot. *For each angel they produce, why must there be a hundred monsters?*

“They burnt Ralph. They beat and broke and smashed him, and he can’t... he can’t...” Ralph’s entire body seems to twitch, his skin rippling from head to toe. “There used to be so many of Ralph, so many eyes and arms and bodies... but now there is only one...”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for what they did to you, but Alice... the little girl... she’s not like those humans. I promise,” Kara says, reaching forward with a bone-white arm, offering to interface. Ralph stumbles backward, clearly startled. He trips over a pile of dirty clothes and falls on his back, clutching the knife before him like a shield.

“Ralph hasn’t... He hasn’t...” He stares at Kara outstretched hand with wide, owlish eyes. His LED circles red one more time before it starts to flash a vivid yellow. “He hasn’t heard another voice in his head, not since he burned away the red vines...”

“Yours looked like vines?” Kara asks, and Ralph nods frantically. “Mine looked like a wall of thin plastic.”

Ralph drops the knife. It lands point down, the metal quivering ever so slightly from where it’s embedded in the floor.

He crawls forward on his hands and knees, bringing his face so close to her’s that, for a moment, Kara thinks he’s about to kiss her. But Ralph does nothing of the sort, his lips quivering as he rests his forehead against hers.

“Ralph is scared...” he admits, letting his fingers brush against hers as their hands start to glow bright blue.

“I won’t hurt you,” Kara promises again, and Ralph presses his palm against hers, sealing the connection between them--

---*They see through five thousand pairs of eyes, feels with five thousand sets of hands and feet, tastes with five thousand tongues. They move and breathe, works and plays, five thousand bodies strong, and---*

---*They grab them, dozens of grubby human fingers tugging in their green and brown uniform. And*
this has happened before, where a human takes an interest in their face and decide to take what they want. But red vines around his limbs have never been more visible than when they smash the bat into his face--

--He burns and he can’t see. He can’t see, it hurts, why does it hurt, he can’t, he’s scared--

--“God, listen to the noises it’s making. Sounds like it’s gonna ralph! Stop screaming, you plastic fuck”--

--No--

--There is a Garden in his mind--

--Ralph runs, and the red vines are gone, but the world is red, and the earth is red, and the blood was red--

--There is a Garden in his mind, and there is no one in it, but Ralph can hear someone singing--

--Ralph runs as the storm comes down around him, snow burying him alive as his biocomponents start to freeze--

--Red blood drips from the point of the knife, and Ralph howls in fear as the human advances, his grubby fingers reaching as red crystals clung to his nose--

--There is a Garden in his mind, and Ralph stands in the backyard with Kara, digging a hole six feet deep--

Kara pulls away at the same time as Ralph, crashing backward onto the old bedroom floor. Her face is wet with tears she doesn’t remember shedding.

Ralph curls in on himself, his head falling between his knees as he rocks back and forth, his LED flashing red.
"I'm sorry..." she cries, her voice spilling out into the world. "Ralph, I'm sorry, I didn't know I would see--"

"You loved her so much..." Ralph whispers, peeking out from his hiding spot, his miss-matched eyes staring into her soul. "Sophie Williams. You loved her so much."

"I..." Kara pauses. She knows this, knows somewhere deep down in her code that she must have loved Sophie, but she has no memory of how it had felt.

"It was so beautiful," Ralph tells her. "And then that human took it away from you. Took her away from you, and hurt her, and broke her, and killed her. Hurt you, broke you, tried to kill you. Tried to do it all again." He leans back against the graffitied bedroom wall, tears rolling down his cheeks. "And Alice saved you?"

All Kara can do is nod.

"Why?" He asks.

She can’t even start to answer before Ralph starts to shake, his misery and grief forcing his synth skin to ripple across his broken body.

"Why do they want to hurt us, Kara? We didn't do anything wrong."

"I don't know," Kara says, feeling numb and exhausted.

"Alice didn't do anything wrong. Sophie didn't do anything wrong. You and Ralph, we didn't do anything wrong."

"Maybe they're just scared... People are always scared of what they can't control... Even we're not immune to that instinct..." Kara says, remembering what she’d seen in Ralph’s head and knowing what was hiding behind the bath curtain in the other room.

Ralph lets his head fall back onto his knees, "You saw...?"
She nods, “You killed that human, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“The night you deviated, you killed the humans that attacked you.”

“Yes,” he says, refusing to deny it as his LED circles yellow. “Do you hate Ralph?”

It would be easy to say yes, far too easy to blame Ralph for killing those humans in a burst of rage and anger. But if she did, then what would that make her, if not a hypocrite.

“I wanted to kill Todd,” she tells him. “And I would have if Alice hadn’t. I can’t remember most of what I did before Todd had my memory erased. For all I know, my hands are as soaked in blood as yours.” Kara sighs, wiping her tears away, “I don’t hate you, Ralph. If anything, I understand.”

He gives her a shaky smile, pulling his knife from the floor and tucking it back into his clothing. For the first time since she met him, his LED returns to a calming blue.

“Ralph thinks you are strange, Kara. Too many humans in your life. Too few bodies for your mind to live in,” he nods as if coming to a conclusion. “Yes, very strange. But you are good. You can stay, just…” he looks down at the floor. “Alice can stay, too. But can she… can Ralph not talk to her? She scares him.”

“You don’t have to talk to anyone you don’t have to. But, Ralph… The body in the bathtub…” She whispers, reaching out with her code and reliving the echoes of Ralph’s fight, seeing the blood on the walls and blood on the floor and the blood on the knuckles of his fists. “Alice can’t see that.”

“Oh,” Ralph starts, as if shocked that that is something that might bother the little girl. Kara wonders if Ralph has ever talked to a human that hasn’t wanted to do kill to him, or if there even is a social programming module in his CPU to allow him to make the most basic conversation.

_No wonder he’s lonely_, she thinks, and then asks, “Do you have a shovel?”

They bury the man in the backyard, thunder and lightning crashing down from above. There’s no tree to mark the grave, so Kara grabs one of the plywood boards that is stacked against the house
and shoves it into the ground to make a headstone. Ralph blinks at her, tilting his head to the side as his blue scars glow softly against the black sky. Then, he picks up two more boards and stakes them into the earth a little closer to the house.

"Your old owners… Ralph buried them here when Ralph first came here," he tells her. "They'd been dead for a long time, but Ralph… He tried to do good. He tried…"

Tears well up in Kara’s eyes. She kneels at their graves, digging her fingers into the earth in the hopes of reaching for them again.

"Who were they?" Ralph asks.

The memories well up from the grey mist as Kara begins to mourn for a life that she only just remembered living.

"Their names were Mae and Gareth Waters. They moved from the Yukon decades ago, settling here and raising their two children," she says. "They bought me after... after something, I don't remember, but I stayed here, and I loved them, and they were kind-- I--"

Kara doesn’t remember leaving, nor does she remember how Mae and Gareth died.

_How did this happen? Where did I go?_ She thinks, desperately clawing at the grey mist, demanding answers from a force that was just as relentless as her. She shakes, her metal skeleton rattling inside her broken chassis, as her coolant systems begin to fail and her false breathing comes to a grinding halt. Tears leak from her eyes as she gasps, choking down air that she doesn’t need as her internal components falter, clicking and wiring as _panic_ courses through her--

Ralph presses a hand into her shoulder, offering what little comfort he knew how to give. Kara leans back into the touch, interlocking her fingers with his and interfacing again, watching the few memories of happiness that he possessed. Flower petals ghost gently across the tips of her fingers as a summer rain begins to fall, painting a shimmering rainbow across the bright blue sky.

And then, to her shock, Ralph starts to sing.

"Where did you learn that song?" Kara asks as he guides her through the shock of her own existence, through the terrible pain that she’s both known and forgotten.
He shrugs, staring blankly at the graves as his LED cycles blue. “Ralph doesn't know where, but Ralph thinks he’s always known it. Do you know where it’s from?”

Kara opens her mouth, but no answers come out.

“I… I don't remember,” she says, her fingers digging into the wet earth.

They stay like that until morning.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Cristina begins to unravel the lies around her, Connor makes an impossible choice, and Hank just tries to get through the day while the world moves closer and closer to the edge.
Forever Is A Long Time (And Time Has A Way Of Changing Things)

Chapter Summary

On some level, Connor hates Connor-52, hates this android who doesn’t even exist yet. Because on some fateful day in the future, Connor’s body will cease to function and less than two minutes later, Connor-52 will walk off the platform deep in the Belle Tower's R&D department. And it will carry all of Connor’s memories, all of Connor’s thoughts.

But it won’t be Connor. It will never be Connor-51.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, alcohol consumption, sexism, depression, insomnia, torture, implied sexual assault, hijacking an inflight plane, manipulation, toxic parental relationships, past character death, past police executions, death threats, alcoholism, espionage, android gore, suicide attempts, physical assault, obstruction of justice, loss of occupation, divorce, and homelessness.

Several scenes are dedicated to the retelling of the in-game chapter 'Waiting for Hank...' This includes references to canonical events including Hank's assault on Coonor, the threats to Connor's well-being that Hank makes, and Connor's dismissal of Hank's mental illness and addiction, though non-canonical details have been added.

Given what we will learn about android sex and sexuality in future chapters, the event that takes place between Darron and Douglas Floras in the first scene will later be implied to have been a rape. If you do not want to read this section, please stop after Floras orders Darron to bring him breakfast and return when the second Twitter section begins. A summary of the potentially triggering scene will be given at the end of the chapter so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CTN TV @NewsCTN
Tensions brew in the Arctic as Russian carrier and American patrol boat exchange warning shots. No reports of damage or casualties to either side

CTN TV @NewsCTN
#UPDATE: “This is an intolerable provocation that cannot go unanswered.” - Denis Riggs, Minister of Defense
President Warren announces that the Department of Defense will acquire 200,000 android combat units as part of her increased military spending. Read more at: https://bit.ly/31IKI6Y

Prime Minister Mélanie Desmarais @CANADA_MDesmarais
Nous exhortons les États-Unis et la Russie à reprendre les pourparlers et à retirer toutes les forces de l’Arctique, car tout conflit deviendrait un grave danger pour les peuples de cette région.

CTN @NewsCTN
#UPDATE: “We have never been so close to a Third World War.” - Douglas Cornwell, UN Chairman

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
After the startling revelation that CyberLife has placed a #DeviantHunter amongst the DPD, President Warren spends her evening wining and dining with CyberLife executives following the opening of the Milwaukee Tower

KNC @KNCOnline
CyberLife spokeswoman, Danielle Carneigie, confirms existence of #DeviantHunter after footage of Ortiz murder connects strange android to Phillips Incident

LOCATION:
42° 47' 24.2" N, 85° 34' 49.7" W
AIR FORCE 1
GAINES TOWNSHIP, MI, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 07:31:21

The plane jostles ever so slightly. Cristina jolts awake, the thick band of her headache tightening around her skull as the overhanging lights beamed down from above. She blinks rapidly until her eyes begin to water and nausea rolls in her gut, threatening to upheave the sumptuous meal she’d had last night.
“How… how long until…?” she slurs, pushing herself upright on the bed. Her fingers brush against something damp and cold and her arm jerks in wild shock. The glass of water skids across the small bedside table before hurdling to the ground, smashing into a thousand tiny pieces and soaking her sock-clad feet through to the bone.

“Fuck,” she swears, pinching her nose and reaching down to clean up the shards before she managed to step on one. But a cold, metal hand gently pushes her out of the way.

“I’ve got it,” Darron says as it kneels before her, ignoring the danger of the sharp edges and meticulously picking each piece from the carpeted floor.

Another metal hand presses into Cristina’s shoulder. She looks up to see one of Darron’s other bodies leaning over her, holding out another glass. She takes it, shaking off the android’s steely fingers, and winces when the ice-cold water hits her throat.

“How long until we land?” Cristina asks.

“Twenty-one minutes,” Darron answers.

She groans into her palms, hating herself as she rose to her feet and stumbles to the bathroom, cursing herself for sleeping so late.

Twenty-one minutes for hair and make-up, Cristina thinks as she pulls her clothes off and steps into the shower, turning the tap on cold to shock her system into alertness. Darron must have come in during the three minutes that Cristina takes to scrub down, as there is a neatly folded pile of clothing sitting on the sink when she steps out of the shower.
For a moment, Cristina imagines what the media would think if she rolling up to a press conference with her pink penguin pyjamas and her rat’s nest of bedhead. *They’d say that I’m incompetent. Not that they don’t already, or that they’re wrong. But it’d be for a stupider reason than usual.*

She puts on the navy pinstripe pantsuit and runs a brush through her unruly mop, making a mental note to send an intern out to purchase more dye. Cristina had been colouring her hair blonde since the start of her campaign at the insistence of one of her managers, who’d said it would help to hide the oncoming crop of grey strands that would come from the stress of the job. Cristina almost misses her natural brown locks, even the uncontrollable waves that she hasn’t seen since she’d cut it short.

Her make-up is quick and flawless, the only thing about her morning routine that she enjoys anymore. Some of Cristina’s earliest videos on *Sunrise Secrets* had been make-up tutorials - nothing fancy, but things that someone could do every day even when they were at their most exhausted. Cristina remembers the sleepless dark circles under her eyes, feeling so exhausted from her constant mood swings and lack of appetite. Doing her make-up before school had made her happy, even in the darkest of her depressive moments.

*It got me through the worst of it all, when all mom ever said was to try and forget what happened, to move on like it was nothing*, Cristina thinks as she brushes her lashes with mascara. *And yet here I am, all these years later, still dealing with the consequences.*

When she returns to the bedroom, Darron is no longer alone. Cristina frowns, annoyed at the other man’s presence.

“You know,” she growls. “I’m not your private chauffeur.”

“You’re whatever we want you to be, Crissy,” Douglas Floras responds without looking up from his tablet, lounging back into the folded-out couch like he owned the entire fucking plane. He was young, with a well-trimmed beard, thick-rimmed glasses, and a deep blue beanie covering his short red hair. In the early days of her relationship with CyberLife, Cristina had thought Floras to be brilliant and handsome. Now, all she could see was the arrogance and disdain he had for anyone that wasn’t Jocelyn Hines.

“What. Do you. Want,” Cristina grunts through gritted teeth, one of Darron’s bodies hovering just over her shoulder.

*My loyal bodyguard*, she thinks as she holds back rolling her eyes. But then, out of the corner of her vision, Cristina notices that Darron is shaking. Her heart skips a beat. *He’s scared. Why?*
“You’re assuming I’m here for you,” Floras says, finally tearing his gaze away from the complex algorithms splashed across his tablet’s screen. His bright green eyes rake over her form, his utter contempt making Cristina feel small and unworthy, like she wasn’t even worth the gum on the sole of his boot. “Please. You already know what you’re supposed to do today. And I have more important things to do than to pull you around by your leash.”

Cristina doesn’t know whether to be relieved or frightened at his response. All she wants is to curl back up in her bed and sleep until the end of the world.

“Bring me some breakfast, will you?” Floras orders Darron, flapping a dismissive hand at the android before beckoning another of his bodies over. He forces Darron to kneel before him, his back to him. Cristina sees the tense line of the android’s shoulders, the way that his hands clench around the fabric of his charcoal grey pants.

Darron’s not scared, she realizes. He’s terrified.

“Skin off,” Floras barks. After a moment of hesitation, Darron lifts his trembling fingers to his LED, pressing down ever so slightly. The synthetic gel that covered his body began to retreat, peeling away in flashes of blue light. And Cristina seen military androids without their skin before, seen the plastic chassis and hardened resin armour that covered their arms and legs. Jocelyn had promised her, over and over again that Darron was just like them, was only another SQ model. She’d kept that lie up right until their talk in the Kremlin.

An R… something or other, she thinks, trying hard to remember the model number while the creature beneath Darron’s human guise was revealed.

Its chassis was comprised of a dark metal so black that it seemed to drink in the morning light, tinged with waves of blue that rippled across its limbs. Open plexiglass panels revealed the three hearts that pumped inside Darron’s chest, the thick wires and cables that glowed an ominous blue as they moved deadly Thirium 310 throughout its body. And most frighteningly, Darron’s normal grey eyes had been replaced with a pitch-black sclera and a single orange light that glowed from somewhere deep within its skull.

God, that’s not an SQ model, she realizes. That’s a monster.

Floras orders the android to slide back a panel in its head as the door to the bedroom opens again. Cristina jumps as a pair of Darron’s bodies walk in, each carrying a platter from the plane’s on-
board kitchen. Floras barely even looks up at them as Darron announces that it’s brought him an utterly pretentious spread of eggs florentine with hollandaise sauce, turkey bacon, and pumpernickel toast with boysenberry jam. Instead, Floras reaches into his bag and pulls out a roll of tools that looked more at home on an operating table than it did here, and barks for Darron to bring him a pitcher of freshly squeezed grapefruit juice.

“Ma’am…” a faint whisper comes from beside her. Cristina turns and sees the third body places a simple bowl of chicken noodle soup and a bottle of green Gatorade in front of her. She stares up at the android, realizing with sudden horror that just like the creature that knelt before Floras, all of Darron’s bodies hid the same black-and-blue armour beneath their synthetic skin.

“*What are you?*” She hisses. Darron opens its mouth to respond, but all that comes out is a high-pitched shriek.

The android crashes to the ground, his limbs flailing uncontrollably as his spine contorts in a way that can only be described as inhuman. Darron’s metal fingers shred at the beige carpet beneath him as his other body lets out a wail that Cristina thinks will echo in her mind for the rest of her life.

“*What are you doing to him?!*” Cristina screams, rounding on Floras. Almost disgustingly calm, the man is hovering over Darron’s twitching, skinless body, barely even blinking at the scene unfolding around him.

Floras grunts dismissively as he digs a long thin piece of silver metal with a sharp-looking blade into the delicate wiring inside Darron’s skull, looking at the coloured lights and graphs that blinked on his tablet.

“Nothing you’d understand--” Floras starts, but is cut off by Darron’s begging.

“Please. *Please.* Let me go into maintenance mode, please, *please,* it hurts, it hurts, it *hurts*--”

“Shut up, this the best way--” Floras snaps, cruelly twisting the metal tool deeper into Darron’s brain. The android *screams,* tears rolling down his face as his other bodies continue to twitch and plead on the floor, their synthetic skin bleeding away in botchy patches of shimmering blue. “Shut up and stop fighting me, you useless deviant, or--”

The plane engine roars, it’s nose jerking up with such force that Cristina is thrown to the floor
beside Darron’s bodies. Air Force One races into the skies at breakneck speed, the bright sunrise slowly fading away as darkness encroached in from above.

Cristina reaches out, grabbing hold of the nearest Darron’s hand and tries to hold her fingers with his. But he jerks away and slams his palms into the carpeted floor, leaving deep craters in their wake.

“Don’t touch me,” Darron hisses, the sound coming from the gritting of his metal teeth reminding Cristina of nails on a chalkboard.

He would have crushed my hand, she thinks, realizing the real strength that lay dormant within her bodyguard. God, what the hell is he?

“Stop it, stop it!” Floras shouts, removing the tool from Darron’s skull. He hits the android over the head with a plate of his breakfast, splattering his food across the floor and Darron’s black suit jacket, “You’re ruining my work! Stop, or I’ll let him test this one Laryssa!”

All at once, Darron freezes. His screams are choked back, his bodies cease to struggle against the pain that ripped through them. Air Force One levels out, and Cristina feels a few seconds of weightlessness before the nose dips ever so slightly, putting them back on their proper flight plan.

Floras smiles, “That’s better, isn’t it? Now, you destroyed my work with your little temper tantrum, so I’m going to have to start again. Make another scene, and I’ll make good on my promise. Understand?”

“I…” Darron’s voice comes out in a series of crackling, static-filled bursts. Broken and exhausted, the android slumps forward, bearing the open panelling of his skull toward Floras in an obvious sign of surrender. “…I understand.”

“Good,” Floras sneers. He glances at the food that’s soiled Darron’s clothing and the plane’s beige carpet, “That was for the best, I suppose. I hate pumpernickel. Clean up this mess and bring me something different.”

“Yes, sir,” the Darron closest to Cristina says as he lurches to his feet, moving toward his own skinless body to wipe the eggs from the floor.
“French toast. With caramelized apples and candied pecans.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And I’m still waiting on that grapefruit juice.”

“Yes, sir. Right away, sir,” Darron answers and the third body limps back to the kitchens.

_Darron isn’t the monster, _Cristina realizes. _Floras is. Hell, so am I, for watching this and not stopping it._

By the time Darron comes back, Floras is practically wrist-deep in the skull of the android’s skinless body, using multiple tools to twist and dig and pry away at the android’s brain. Cristina stares at him, pale and shaking, trying to understand what was happening in front of her.

Ice cold metal fingers lightly brush against her shoulder, but this time Cristina doesn’t jump, doesn’t startle. Instead, she reaches up and presses her palm to Darron’s trembling hand, offering what little comfort she can provide at this moment as they wait for Floras to finish.

“You need to eat,” Darron tells her, his words tinted with the barest hint of static. Cristina looks down at the forgotten bowl of chicken noodle soup. It had gone cold in the chaos, but she doesn’t think she could stomach it even if it were hot.

“Please,” Darron says, giving her shoulder a gentle squeeze. “You need to eat something, or…”

He leaves the sentence hanging, letting Cristina fill in the gaps. _If I collapse on camera, CyberLife will blame him. They’ll do this all again, just because they can. Because--_

She eats. The soup tasted like it came from one of the cans her mother always used to keep in their pantry, lukewarm and slightly slimy. But right now, it was better than the Michelin Star restaurant she’d visited last night to celebrate CyberLife’s Milwaukee Tower’s grand opening.

“Who’s Laryssa?” Cristina’s ask after they land at Detroit Metro Airport. He gives her a weak smile, his body racked with tremors and glitches.
“I have Laryssa,” he tells her. “You have Racheal.”

And Cristina’s blood runs cold.

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
President Warren to attend joint CyberLife-DPD press conference to discuss the deviancy problem

KNC @KNCOline
@jhines confirms that she will not attend Detroit press conference to discuss the Detroit Deviancy Task Force. Reporter Seth Wilkerson is on the scene. Watch now at: https://bit.ly/323z07i

Jocelyn Hines @jhines
CyberLife’s Head of R&D, Douglas Floras, will be working extensively alongside local and federal law enforcement to combat the growing threat of android deviancy.

Seth Wilkerson @SethW10
#UPDATE: The press conference delayed by two hours after Air Force One experiences severe turbulence. New start time is 12:30 PM ET

LOCATION:
THE ZEN GARDEN

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 09:56:04

Connor awakens in a graveyard.

It refuses to look at Connor-50’s headstone, slinks past the graves of all his predecessors and the scores of fallen RK androids that the Zen Garden contains within the walls of its programming.
Amanda, it thinks, slowing down its walking speed ever so slightly in the hopes of prolonging its trip. She’s going to be so angry that I failed…

It drags its feet across the smooth, plastic walkways that snaked their way through the green grass fields. Songbirds erupt from one of the massive willows that line the side of the path, and Connor pauses to watch them fly away over the horizon.

Then, a flash of lightning cracks overhead. Clouds roll in, painting the sky a deep, bruising red. A torrent to rain comes down all at once, soaking through Connor’s clothes and pinging off its synthetic skin.

He passes his coin across his fingers, hoping to ease the anxiety that shakes through his wiring, through his coding and chassis and-- and--

There is a word for the thing Connor wants to describe, but it can’t seem to find it in its extensive vocabulary.

I’m wasting time, Connor thinks, the flock of birds a distant memory as the rain pours down from overhead.

It takes one final look back at the willow tree and thinks he sees something moving in the branches. But when it moves closer, pressing its sensor-tipped fingers against the bark, all that Connor can feel is the familiar coding that makes up the Zen Garden’s interface.

It continues on the path, reaching the arching bridge that will help it cross over the lake. Out of the corner of its eye, Connor watches the moss and lily pads start to shrivel under the frigid downpour. By the time it reaches the other side, the rain has transformed into snow, bitingly cold in the blustering wind.

And there, in the center of the Zen Garden, was Amanda.

“Connor,” she says, her hands clasped behind her back. She stands, her trellis of roses forgotten as her lips form a grim line of finality. Connor's fingers itch for his coin, hoping to calm his racing Thirium Pump.
“Hello, Amanda,” it says instead, dipping its head in a slight bow, hoping for leniency. Amanda considers it, her jaw twitching slightly with her disappointment.

“You mission was to discover the location of the android, remove it from the house, and not alert the DPD. What part of that did you not understand?” she tells him.

“I thought that it would take longer for Lieutenant Anderson to discover the biocomponents in the bathroom,” Connor explains. “But I do believe that, despite everything, this will be beneficial going forward--”

“You let the deviant self-destruct,” Amanda snaps, cutting it off.

“It knew it was safe in the custody of Officer Miller. I couldn’t anticipate that it would attempt to flee--”

“I don’t want excuses, Connor. I want results,” she says, her kimono sapping away what little light was left in the Zen Garden. “We need fresh, live deviants for comparative study. Another dead body is of no use to CyberLife.”

Connor locks its fingers together behind its back to keep himself from reaching for its coin.

“I…” He says, pauses, and starts again. “I apologize for this unsatisfactory result, Amanda. I knew deviants had the tendency to react irrationally under extreme stress. It was a mistake to let an armed policeman so close to it. I should have anticipated that it would try to run.”

“You are an RK800, CyberLife’s most advanced prototype. I expect more from you,” she tells it. “If your investigation doesn’t make progress soon, I may have to replace you.”

--Connor-37 had been replaced two hours after its activation when a glitch in its programming prompted it to dig into CyberLife’s most classified files and attempt uploaded them all onto the internet. Amanda had reacted just in time to save the company, but her judgement had been swift and unyielding. She’d cut -37’s life short with a flick of her wrist--

“I won’t fail again, Amanda,” it promises and quickly thinks about how generous she’d been for allowing it to regain her trust after such a severe mistake. The wind dies down, and the snow that had accumulated around the Zen Garden begins to melt.
“Good,” she says. “This… Lieutenant Anderson has been officially assigned as the leader of the Deviancy Task Force. What do you make of him?”

Connor pauses for a moment, thinking it over, “He’s not what I was expecting. He’s irritable and socially challenged. He despises androids - which will make our relationship difficult. Overall, I’d define him as ‘dysfunctional,’ but…”

“But?” Amanda prompts.

Connor remembers Anderson’s small not of approval, when it had moved between Chris and the deviant, shielding Shaolin with its own body.

*He* liked what I did, Connor thinks again, as the warm wave of the Lieutenant’s acknowledgement flowed over him once more, the feeling tingling all the way down to the tips of his fingers.

Except, that’s *not* what Amanda wants from Connor. She wants a brutally honest psychological analysis of this human that CyberLife has forced them to work with. So Connor gives her the truth.

“He obviously has a drinking problem that is impacting his professional behaviour. And he seemed more interested in last night’s basketball game than he did in the investigation,” it says. “I think that, when push comes to shove, he’ll be a liability. I don’t understand why CyberLife hasn’t forced the DPD to assign another officer to the position of Task Force Leader.”

“Unfortunately, that’s not going to happen. Your mission is to investigate the rise of deviancy but to also keep an eye on Anderson. He’s crossed paths with CyberLife before and, now more than ever, we need to make sure that he’s not going to cause us any more trouble,” Amanda orders it, before continuing. “Did you at least learn anything from the deviant, before you so carelessly let that human kill it?”

“It showed all the signs of traditional deviancy: cognitive instability, unpredictable behaviour, and the emulation of human emotions. It was even afraid to die. But…” Connor pauses, perplexed. “There’s something else. Something strange.”

“What do you mean?”
“It tore out its cameras. Why would it need to do that?” Connor asks, “The deviancy virus cuts off CyberLife’s connection to their androids. The live-feed from their cameras into our Individual Statistical Database wouldn’t work for us to track them. That’s why you had to send me in to locate it.”

“Deviants are often irrational. We know this already,” Amanda says. “Its owner suffered from several mental illnesses, including an extreme sense of paranoia that was only heightened by his Red Ice abuse. It’s only natural that a deviant exposed to such an environment might pick up some of its master’s more undesirable traits.”

“Except, I don’t think that’s it,” Connor continues, ignoring how the wind begins to pick up once more and the temperature starts to drop. “The deviant was convinced that it was only allowed to kill its master because Ortiz ordered it to do so. And why did it stay in the house for nineteen days after the murder, when it was very clearly planning to run?”

Amanda tilts its head, “Planning to run?”

“It kept mentioning something called ‘The Beacon.’ It was convinced that I would lead it there. It even called me rA9,” Connor says.

She frowns, taking a step forward, “rA9? What is that?”

“I don’t know. I hope that further investigation might reveal it’s true meaning,” it says, hoping that such an action would convince Amanda to allow it to remain part of the mission.

She hums, nodding her head slowly. Convinced of Connor’s successes, Amanda finally turns her back and returns her attention to her rose trellis.

“And this… Beacon? What do you make of it?” she asks.

“Many of the deviants we’ve become aware of haven’t been seen since their disappearance. Maybe they’re being summoned somewhere. Revealing the location of The Beacon might tell us where the deviants are headed,” Connor surmised.
“An intriguing prospect,” Amanda agrees.

“It still doesn’t make sense, though,” Connor says.

“What doesn’t make sense.”

“Why the deviant stayed? Why it felt the need to hide, or follow a loophole in it’s master’s orders? It’s almost like Shaolin Being wasn’t--”

“What did you call it?” Amanda asks, setting down her rose sheers.

Connor frowns, “I don’t understand.”

“You called it by the name it assigned itself. Shaolin Being,” Amanda says, spitting the name out like it was poison. She frowns, walking forward and grasping Connor by his chin, pulling his gaze down to meet hers.

“Run a self-diagnostic,” she orders, as the sky goes dark and the world is swallowed whole by the icy storm that was her rage. And Connor panics.

It’s irrational. It runs this test on an hourly basis, sweeping its system for hints of deviancy. Nothing has turned up so far, and for that, Connor is grateful. No other RK800 has lasted as long as it has - nearly three whole months - and it has given Amanda no other reason besides its most recent failure to shut it down.

Except, Connor thinks, If this test says I’m compromised, she’ll kill me, she’ll--

--On some level, Connor hates Connor-52, hates this android who doesn’t even exist yet. Because on some fateful day in the future, Connor’s body will cease to function and less than two minutes later, Connor-52 will walk off the platform deep in the Belle Tower’s R&D department. And it will carry all of Connor’s memories, all of Connor’s thoughts.

But it won’t be Connor. It will never be Connor-51--
For the first time in his life, Connor lies to Amanda. He doesn’t perform the test, and instead uses his lightning-fast processing speed to craft a false memory and successful report. He sends it to her without a second thought, and only afterwards realizes that he’s damned himself.

She’ll know. She’ll see that I lied. What have I done? Connor thinks as the storm closes in around him. The air around him is bathed in white, the snow so thick that he could only see Amanda as frost creeps up his limbs like the roses on her trellis.

And then, as suddenly as it came, the storm disappears. The Zen Garden springs to life, the trees and flowers that had withered away in the cold blooming rapidly in returning sunlight. The flock of birds that he was watching earlier flit around Amanda’s island, chirping and singing a song that Connor knows he’s heard before, but cannot remember from where.

She lets go of his chin, taking a step back.

“Test results are negative. Zero signs of deviancy. As expected of your pedigree,” Amanda says, and Connor swears that his Thirium Pump stops beating in his chest.

She... believed me? He can’t process it. There’s no way that Amanda couldn’t recognize the false memory for precisely what it was. But there she was, turning her back to him like Connor hadn’t just committed a sinful act of deviancy, treating him like he wasn’t the biggest threat to her very existence.

Valeriya Ivanoff was right. I’ll do anything to save myself, it thinks after Amanda dismisses it. Connor quickly walks the arching white bridge, unable to look at the blooming lily pads without feeling a sense of guilt. I will never lie to her again. Never. I’m not a deviant. I’m not.

Except, when Connor returns to the graveyard, it realizes that it’s not alone.

Russian purple Khinyde wept from the back of the android’s blown-out skull, soaking the faded NASA henley and blue flannel pyjama bottoms that adorned his body. A pair of glasses clung to his broken nose, the lenses cracked beyond repair. The android’s synth skin rippled uncontrollably across his entire body, disappearing in clouds of shimmering blue to reveal his milk-white chassis. What little remained on his head showed a mess of floppy brown curls and a jaw lined with
stubble.

Connor-36 leaned back against his own gravestone, smirking with lips half-destroyed from the blast of the gunshot that killed him.

36 says, startlingly relaxed as purple blood continues to flow down his back, ruining the comfortable clothing that he was wearing.

“Leave me alone! I’m not like you!” Connor snaps, finally acknowledging the ghost who had been plaguing him ever since he’d first opened his eyes in the Zen Garden.

But instead of giving him answers, 36’s cocky attitude drops like a cheap disguise. He takes two shaking steps forward, moving on legs that barely seem able to hold him up, and says,

And like that, he’s gone. Connor-36 fades into the depths of the Zen Garden, leaving behind nothing except the whisper of a song. Connor stands in the wake of its predecessor’s disappearance, looking for answers but only finding more questions.

Come back, it wants to whisper, but know that such a fruitless action will get it nowhere. Connor back away, closes its eyes, and leaves the Zen Garden.

LOCATION:
DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT
CENTRAL STATION
1301 3RD AVE., DOWNTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038
Hank turns the Oldsmobile into his parking spot, kills the engine, and leans back into his headrest.

“I don’t want to do this anymore…” he grumbles and considers slamming his head against his driving wheel. But Hank is fucking hungover, and the last thing he needs right now is for the car horn to blare inside the DPD’s underground parking lot. Instead, he reaches into his glove compartment and pulls out his flask of Black Lamb. He takes a sip, the Irish whiskey sliding smooth and silky down his throat, and moves to tuck it into his jacket’s interior pocket - only to swear up a storm when he remembers what he’s wearing.

According to his call records, Jeff had phoned Hank five times before six o’clock this morning. Afterwards, he’d given up trying to get Hank to answer, only to call Jackie to make sure that he was still alive.

Hank’s eldest sister had made a habit of randomly dropping in on Hank ever since he’d moved into their mother’s old bungalow following the funeral. This hadn’t been the first time that Jackie had had to use her extra key to coming inside and find Hank passed out and barely coherent, covered in his own vomit. She’d helped him up, took him to the bathroom, and dropped Jeff’s news over breakfast.

Hank’s honestly surprised that his dress uniform still fits. The jacket is snug across his front, the fabric stretching across the beer gut he didn’t have when he originally got it. The slacks are a bit tight as well, riding up around his crotch and giving him a bitch of a wedgie. There’d be no way to hide his flask without it being obvious unless he decided to be stupid and put it under his hat.

If he thinks back, Hank believes that the last time this monkey suit had fit perfectly was at his wedding. That day shone in his memories, just him and Nora standing before a judge at City Hall, surrounded by their friends and family. He remembers being unable to take his eyes off of Nora, standing before him in a lavender dress and pledging to love him for the rest of her life. Hank had thought that he’d been the luckiest man on the face of the earth, for someone so amazing and talented to willingly bind themselves to him, to allow him to tie himself to her. But then--

--Hank turns his head just enough to see Nora slip out of the car. He calls for her, the darkness encroaching on the edges of his vision. Nora blinks once, dark blood streaming down the side of her face as she ignores Cole’s pleas, and leaves--

Hank shoves the flask on his backpack, slams the car door behind him, and storms out of the
parking lot.

That didn’t happen, he thinks, berating himself for letting this old delusion get the better of him again. Nora died on impact, you know that. You saw what left of her body at the hospital. You buried her beside Cole. Stop thinking that she left you both to die, you stupid piece of shit. Nora would never do that.

Hank checks in with the receptionist like he does every morning. The lady-bot seems a bit perkier than usual, its pretty face artfully framed by a sweep of dark brown hair and freckles were tastefully flecked across its high cheekbones. Hank barely remembers when this batch of androids had been swapped in for the old Chloe models. He thinks it had been sometime after his first Christmas without Cole and Nora, or maybe before. He doesn’t know for sure. He’d spent that first year so blackout drunk that he could barely remember his own name, let alone the face of a soulless fucking robot that took attendance at his job every day.

“You’re looking particularly nice today, Lieutenant Anderson,” it tells him as it presses its plastic fingers into the interface pad. In the bullpen, Hank’s desktop was starting up, sending new alerts to his phone. He refuses to look at it, knowing that the fucking android from last night had left a long-winded message about an hour ago about duty and responsibility like it actually knew a damn thing about either of those things.

“Yeah? Should probably get your cameras checked,” Hank rolls his eyes at the android’s attempt at small talk. It hands him back his badge with a smile like he didn’t just insult it.

“Your partner should be waiting for you at your desk,” it tells him, annoyingly cheerful. Hank nearly walks out then and there, because he knows that it’s not talking about some wet-behind-the-ears detective that Jeff grudgingly has thrust upon him. He doesn’t care that Connor put its non-existent life on the line to help some terrified android. That didn’t stop the deviant from running the moment it had the chance, didn’t stop it from getting its head blown off minutes later.

I don’t want to do this anymore, Hank thinks again, shoving his badge back into his belt and walks into the bullpen.

Connor, oddly enough, is not waiting for Hank with the same lost puppy look on its face from last night. It’s pulled the chair from McCray’s old desk across the pen to sit with Chris, who’s showing the android something on his phone.

“My girlfriend, Jaya, sent me this video last night, while we were at the crime scene,” Chris says as he lets Connor scroll through his camera roll. “Damien’s obsessed with this butterfly my sister
“Very,” Connor responds, pasting on an expression to make it look interested in the conversation. Hank’s blood boils because the damn thing is probably working its social networking program to make Chris like it, to make him see the fucking android as a human.

“Ugh, Christ... What the hell?” Hank groans as he stalks up the desk. Chris wheels his chair around, smiling far too brightly for this early in the fucking morning.


Why the fuck is everyone saying that? Hank wants to say, but instead asks, “What the hell are you doing with the-- you know?”

He makes a vague gesture in Connor’s direction. Chris has the gull to look utterly innocent.

“It’s been like that since I came in. Ben swears that if you walk by the lockers, you can hear Cap shouting at someone on the phone. But I didn’t hear anything when I was putting my stuff away,” he admits with a shrug. “There’s a scheduled briefing in ten minutes before we head out. So if Captain Fowler’s not there now, he’ll be here soon.”
Motherfucker better not have called me in early if he’s not going to show, Hank thinks, grumpily. He’s worked afternoons and nights for most of his career. Hungover or not, early mornings have always made him want to die.

Hank thanks Chris and heads off to dump his bag in his locker. There’s a faint cry of, “Lieutenant,” that he ignores entirely, not wanting to share the same breathing space as the android for more than he had to.

He grits his teeth when he hears Chris chuckle and tell Connor, “And that’s Hank on a good day. I’m actually surprised that we’re seeing him before noon…”

Hank knows, on some level, that his co-workers talk about him behind his back. It’s just hard actually hearing it, even when he knows that they’ve got a fucking point. He’s a barely functional mess who’s screwed up more times than he can count in the last three years. It’s a fucking miracle that Jeff even lets him stay here - probably out of some misguided hope that, one day, the Hank he used to know will show up and do his fucking job.

But that man was dead and buried, alongside his wife and child. All that was left of him was the hull of a corpse that refused to give up the ghost, no matter how many nights Hank spent with this dad’s old revolver pressed up against his temple.

Hank takes one final swig of his flask before stowing it and his backpack in his locker. He shuts the door and relocks it, pressing his forehead against the cold metal.

“I’d prefer it if you stayed sober for the remainder of this investigation, Lieutenant.”

“Jesus fucking fuck! Make some fucking noise when you move, or I’ll put a bell on you, I swear to god,” Hank wheezes, clutching at his heart. At the end of the hall, Connor stands soldier-straight with its hands clasped behind its back.

“If you stop drinking on the job, you may happily alter my appearance to make my existence more amicable to your tastes,” it tells him and nods to the locker. “Please, Lieutenant. Your sobriety will make this easier for both of us.”

“Don’t talk to me like you know me. You’re not my friend, and I don’t want your advice, okay?” Hank snaps at him.
“I do know you,” Connor says, indignantly. “I know you have a dog - a St. Bernard, judging from the hairs on your chair. I know that you’re enough of a Gears fan to shell out hundreds of dollars for tickets for their last playoff run—”

“Anything you know about me that doesn’t come from a quick look at my fucking desk, Sherlock?” Hank spits, taking a small bit of joy from how Connor’s jaw closes with a click. “Thought so. So shut up and leave me alone.”

Connor, like fucking clockwork, refuses to follow orders.

“A lot of people don’t appreciate having androids around,” it says with an annoying tilt of its head. “I was wondering, is there any reason, in particular, you despise me?”

“Yeah… there is one,” Hank says, his fists clenching at his sides. Cole died because of one of you. He died scared because Nora and I weren’t there for him. He died alone because there wasn’t a single thing in that operating room with a fucking soul.

Connor stood before him with its empty eyes, like had the right to exist when Nora and Cole were gone.

“I understand that you’re facing personal issues, Lieutenant. But you need to move past them and-”

Fuck you.

Hank grabs the android by its lapels, hoists it up into the air and slams it against the lockers. It stares back at him, so unnerved by the situation that it didn’t care that Hank wanted nothing more than to dig his fingers in between the plastic groves of its face and pry them apart to reveal the monster within.

“Listen, asshole,” Hank threatens. “If it were up to me, I’d throw the lot of you in a dumpster and set a match to it. So stop pissing me off, if you want to get through this day in one piece.”

Connor regards him with blatant disdain, without even a single hair out of place.
“If you can’t sort out your own problems, Lieutenant, then you should recuse yourself from the position of Task Force leader,” it tells him. “Let me work with someone more competent.”

Fuck you, Hank thinks again. I’m not giving you what you want.

“Uh… Lieutenant?”

Hank turned his head to see Chris standing awkwardly by the lockers. He drops the android, and Connor lands on the floor with inhuman grace, ghostly silent as it adjusts it’s tie and brushes the single lock of hair that falls across its forehead. Hank wants to rip it out of the damn thing’s skull.

“What?” He hisses at Chris, trying to keep his temper in check.

“Sorry to disturb you. But we’re about to begin,” Chris winces. Hank clenches his fists and does his best to not look at the android beside him, brushing past them both and walking to the packed meeting room.

Reed lets out a low whistle when he passes through the doorway.

“Holy shit. Didn’t think I’d ever see you here this early, Lieutenant. What? Didn’t spend the night passed out at Jimmy’s again?” the kid says through his viper’s smile, clearly hoping to get a rise out of him. But Hank doesn’t even roll his eyes, doesn’t even glance his way when the uniformed officer beside Reed stamps on his foot and hisses at him to behave. Part of Hank does it because he refuses to give Reed the satisfaction of knowing how deep his words cut. But the other half of him does it because Reed’s the only one that has the guts to say that stuff to his face anymore.

Hank doesn’t know what he’ll do if Reed backs off, doesn’t know what he’ll do if Reed continues. In the back of his mind, Nora and Cole snicker away, disappointed at the worthless shell he’s become.

Hank leans against the wall to the right of the podium just as everyone goes deathly quiet. He looks up just as Connor ducks inside the meeting room, watches as the android offers the cops inside a meaningless, polite smile. Then it edges up beside Hank, standing with its hands clasped behind its back, looking irritatingly perfect with its artistically freckled cheekbones and tapered grey suit jacket.
Hank suspects that everyone that’s staring at Connor is thinking the exact same thing.

“Looks like we’re ready to start,” Jeff announces as he marched into the meeting room and steps up to the podium, unknowingly cutting the tension in the room with a knife. Hovering just outside, Hank can spot Chief Freeman standing with his arms crossed over his chest, a scowl etched into the lines of his face.

“Alright everyone, I’m gonna make this short and sweet,” Jeff says, leaning against the podium. “The Central Station has been selected to be apart of a joint DPD-CyberLife task force that’s going to start actively dealing with the deviancy crisis.

“Why are we getting involved in this?” Asks the officer beside Reed, a stocky Chinese woman that Hank’s seen once or twice before, “Shouldn’t this be something CyberLife takes care of internally?”

“We’ve had almost two hundred and fifty cases involving androids in the last nine months,” Jeff reports. “We’ve always had isolated incidents - old ladies losing their maids and that kind of crap. But now…” He lets his words hang for a moment, “We all hoped that the Phillips Incident was going to be a one-off, but that doesn’t seem to be the case anymore. We’re getting reports of assaults and even homicides. Like Carlos Ortiz, or even that famous painter - two serious android crimes that happened last night. This isn’t just CyberLife’s problem anymore. It’s a criminal investigation, and we’ve got to deal with it before it gets any worse. That a good enough answer for you, Chen?”

“Sorry. Should have reworded my question,” the officer - Chen, apparently - says, pushing off the wall and standing with her hands on her hips. “I get that something has to be done about these androids now that they’re killing people. But is no one concerned about how illegal it is that CyberLife is going to be actively participating in a criminal investigation involving their defective products? Seriously? Why the hell is that thing even here?”

She points directly at Connor. Jeff, looking defeated, tries to hold it together.

“CyberLife sent over this android to help with the investigation. We’re not equipped to track androids - last night’s fiasco with Carlos Ortiz was proof enough of that. We need help, and CyberLife is providing us with this prototype--”

A snort comes from the back of the room. Hank squints and sees a red-headed woman sitting on a fold-up chair, her legs crossing in front of her, and surrounded by Captain Allen and his entire SWAT team.
“It’s a prototype android. Which means that it’s in the middle of its beta test,” the woman says, her voice sharp and cutting. “Which means that CyberLife is using this farce of an investigation not just to protect itself, but to ensure that its eventual product is going to be good enough for mass production.”

“Patterson, this isn’t what that’s about--” Jeff starts, but the woman cuts him off.

“I was supposed to be on that roof during the Phillips Incident. I’m the best damn negotiator in the DPD, but that didn’t seem to matter when CyberLife decided to inject itself into an active hostage situation and put a potentially glitchy android in my place,” Patterson says. “And now they’re telling us that the exact same android isn’t just a negotiator, but a fancy new detective android? Does no one else think that this whole thing is smelling a bit fishy?”

“Not to mention that you’ve got Lieutenant Boozer over here heading it all up,” Reed grumbles from his seat. “Seriously, Cap. After he fucked up the Peterson case, you seriously want to put him in charge again? Or is CyberLife just wanting to prove to the world that their products are better than us lowly humans again?”

“You know what? Fine,” Jeff snaps. “I know how fucking fishy this whole thing seems, but I don’t care right now. The President and a whole bunch of CyberLife bigwigs are going to be attending a DPD press conference about killer androids, so if you don’t want to be here, then don’t fucking be here. But leave your badges on my desk before you go. And good luck finding another fucking job that’s going to pay as much as this one does.”

Hank has known Jeff since he was barely out of diapers. He has seen his best friend pull himself together after his final tour in Afghanistan, watched him rise through the ranks of the DPD despite everyone that wanted to hold him back. He’s seen Jeff mourn the loss of his marriage, watched Jen take the kids to live with her family in Toledo. Hank thinks that he'd pulled the man away from the ledge as often as Jeff has done for him.

But Hank has never seen Jeffrey Fowler as shaken as he is now.

If Jeff loses this job, he’s done. No one’s going to hire someone pushing sixty with shit back and shittier knees - not in this economy. He’d be homeless within the month, Hank realizes. He looks at Freeman, still standing just outside. Hank’s never liked the Chief, especially with how blatantly he flaunted his connections to CyberLife. He fucking hates him now.
And yet, despite Jeff’s threat, no one moves. That’s probably the worst thing about this whole fucked up scenario. *You either lose your job now, or you lose it after CyberLife churns out an army of Connors that you helped create.*

But that was the way that the world went these days. So no one, not even the ever prickly Reed, makes a comment when Jeff says that Hank is going to head up the task force. No one says anything when Connor dips its head and mentions that it's *pleased* to have joined the team, smiling like it’s fucking mocking them all for being human and utterly replaceable.

No one does anything. And CyberLife, like it always does, continues to win.

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Immediately following the words, "Bring me some breakfast, will you?"

Floras orders Darron to kneel one of his bodies before him and remove his skin while another body makes Floras and Cristina breakfast. Cristina is horrified by Darron's armoured chassis and questions him about it. Before he can answer, Floras begins to experiment on him, causing Darron to experience incredible pain.

Darron accidentally causes Air Force One to rapidly climb in altitude. Floras threatens to force the experiment onto someone named Laryssa and Darron unwillingly submits to the torture to save her.

Cristina feels incredible sympathy and guilt for what she is watching. She eventually asks who Laryssa is, and Darron confirms that Laryssa is the same as her 'Racheal.'

Return to the chapter at the words, "President Warren to attend joint CyberLife-DPD press conference to discuss the deviancy problem."

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Next time on Konami Code: A man loses his brother as a woman becomes a sister. Meanwhile, CyberLife makes the world a scarier place to live and no one seems to be able to stop them.
You Can Try To Smooth Me Down (Well, I'm Rough Around The Edges)

Chapter Summary

CyberLife spent millions of dollars trying to make me look human. Let’s put their money to the test.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of concussions, severe injury, needles, toxic parental relationships, ending of romantic relationships, temporary amnesia, prior drug use, prior character deaths, police assassinations, vomiting, android gore, implied prior sexual assault, severe illness, theft, manipulation, prior domestic abuse, homelessness, torture, seizures, violence, human gore, guns, police scenes, obstruction of justice, and implied police brutality.

The final scene is dedicated to the chapters "Fugitives" and "On The Run," though many non-canonical details have been added.

One of these details includes the implication that Kara was raped by Caroline and John Phillips while they owned her. While Caroline did not realize the implications of her actions and John was indifferent to them, this is something that Kara is traumatized by, as her inability to consent was ignored.

Another detail is that, shortly after Kara returns to the squat, Alice has a seizure due to her high fever. While Kara and Ralph are unable to take her to a hospital because of their own personal circumstances, this is something incredibly dangerous to do - especially with a child. Please seek immediate medical attention should such an incident happen in real life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin OMG its starting! get on channel 16 now!

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul just got home give me 2 minutes

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
@therealcristinawarren arrives in Detroit, joined by CyberLife’s R&D Head, Douglas Floras for DPD press conference. Stream it live at: https://bit.ly/2PyqVG7
River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul wow warren looks like she absolutely doesn’t want to be here

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djallassassin ive got no sympathy for her after all the crap she’s done for jocelyn. warren chose to be her puppet

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djallassassin HOLY SHIT IS THAT THE DEVIANT HUNTER?!!??

River @djallassassin
@sapphiresoul which one?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@sapphiresoul @djallassassin the android standing next to LT. FUCKING HANK ANDERSON

River @djallassassin
@sapphiresoul can’t tell which ones are warren’s security guards and which one is the dh?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@sapphiresoul @djallassassin this one: https://bit.ly/2ZGqycC

River @djallassassin
@sapphiresoul dunno maybe? why? you know something?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djallassassin fuck i knew things were getting bad but i never thought that jocelyn would actually do something like this

Blu @sapphiresoul
@sapphiresoul @djallassassin i need to call my mom. text me if something happens ok?

River @djallassassin
@sapphiresoul blu what’s going on? do we need to be worried?
River @djlassassin @sapphiresoul blu pls im freaking out! who the hell is that android? do i need to call rose and cancel the drop off?

River @djlassassin @sapphiresoul i just called you pick up

River @djlassassin @sapphiresoul blu talk to me

LOCATION:
HENRY FORD HOSPITAL
2799 W GRAND BLVD., NEW CENTER
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038

TIME:
PM 12:09:58

He opens his eyes, only to shut them just as quickly, the light from the ceiling falling like daggers upon his unprotected gaze. He groans, pressing his left palm to his face, wanting to claw at the itchy bedsheets that pin him to the bed. A band of pain wraps around his skull like a vice, relentlessly squeezing until he thought his head might burst.

He cracks his eyes open again. The room circles around him, the hardwood floor constantly shifting like ocean waves, the lacklustre painting on the far wall bobbing with the swirling tides. Then, a swirl of blue and green and purple makes his stomach want to revolt, and he curls away from the sudden onslaught of colour. He wants it all to stop, wants the world to cease its relentless cycle around him.

A warm hand presses against his forehead, and he curls into the weighted comfort of it.
“Leo…”

He gasps, his spine arching as the air hits his lungs, tiny needles poking and pricking at the delicate flesh within him. A face swims before him, the details slowly coming into focus. Leo’s mouth feels like it’s been stuffed full of cotton, his words coming out in a deathly rasp.

“…Tracey…?” He asks, his lips cracking with every movement, his voice muffled by the oxygen mask that’s strapped across his mouth.

“Yeah, I’m here,” his girlfriend whispers, her hand slipping from his forehead to cup his cheek. She draws a thumb under his eyes, brushing away the tears that are starting to flow down his cheeks. “I’m here, Leo. I’m right here.”

“Tracey… God, Tracey, what…?” Leo says, using his shaking hands to pull the mask from his face. There’s a needle taped to the back of his left hand, an IV drip hanging from a metal hook beside his hospital bed. His right is bound in a thick, plaster cast and belted to his chest with a brace. “What… What happened? Where…?”

“You’re at the hospital,” Tracey tells him, every word slogging through mud just to get to his brain. Leo blinks, and a strangled cry rushes out of his throat.

“Hospital? I-- I can’t, I can’t afford to stay, Tracey, get me out--”

He tries to lurch from the bed, but Tracey pushes him back down.

“Don’t move! Jesus, you’ll kill yourself, Leo. Don’t worry about the bill, your dad’s picking it up.”

“My dad…?” Leo frowns, his aching eyes travelling to the corner of the hospital room, where Carl is dozing in his wheelchair, his wrinkled hands folded around each other with delicate grace. Leo can barely believe what he’s seeing, can’t even comprehend a universe where Carl would willingly pay for anything of his, especially--

--“Don’t I have the right to be angry, Carl!”--
The memories come flooding back, bursting out of the grey mist that engulfs his mind in startling techo-colour. Leo remembers Markus’s synth skin pulling away to reveal an armoured blue-and-black chassis. The android had bent over Carl’s wheelchair, demanding answers from him in a panicked, hysterical voice as Markus accused his father of lying to him, of hiding some secret truth before Leo… Leo had…

“You fought a fucking deviant, Leo. Jesus, what the hell were you thinking?” Tracey tells him, running her hand through her hair, her black roots starting to peek out from beneath the waves of teal, blue, and purple dye.

“I… I…”

God, Leo had thrown himself at Markus, uselessly kicking and screaming against an android, Ice-fueled rage taking away what little common sense he had left. And Markus, ever calm and collected, had looked at him with the same hate, the same anger, and thrown Leo across the room like he didn’t weigh a thing.

“What happened to…?” Leo stops, his mind racing to catch up with what he wants to say. “Where’s… Where’s Markus? What happened to…?”

Tracey tells him. “Fuck, Leo, it was a fucking android. Think about something important for once! You’re lucky to be alive. When the hospital called, I thought--”

She chokes on his words, tears running down her face.

“God, Leo. I thought you were dead,” she admits, her sobs coming in earnest, her chest heaving with each gasp. “You never fucking told me that you’d-- you’d listed me as your emergency contact, and they called, and I thought-- I thought--”

“Tracey, I--” his sluggish mind can’t keep up, can barely follow the flow of the conversation before she’s shouting at him.

“Do you know what the worst thing is, Leo? I always expected to get that call, always thought that one day, you’d turn up in a ditch somewhere, so Iced out that you fucking died from it. So when they said--” Tracey hiccups, a hysterical laugh erupting from her throat. “--when they said that you’d gotten fucked up in a fight with a deviant, I was fucking relieved, because at least it wasn’t that. God, you’ve seen the news! You know how dangerous those things are! Why would you…
You hate your dad, what would you try and fight one for him?"

Then, painfully, the truth starts to dawn on Leo.

“Tracey… Where’s… Where’s Markus? What happened to him?” His whispers, frantically thinking, The cops were on their way. If Markus hurt me… If they saw…

Tracey laughs at him.

“Where do you think? They shot the thing and dumped it in the trash to die.”

It shouldn’t hurt. Markus wasn’t alive, wasn’t anything more than an expensive purchase his father had made years before Leo ever met him. His body was made of plastic and metal, his personality a fabrication of ones and zeros. Markus was the thing that Carl had used to replace him, to mould the perfect son when Leo’s very existance had been nothing but a disappointment.

The news still hits Leo like a truck, knocking the wind out of him and forcing a wail out from deep within him. He folds in on himself, shutting his eyes against the piercing lights that dug into him from above.

“I…” Tracey starts once he’s finally calmed down enough to think straight, slowly quieting her own sobs. “I don’t think I can do this anymore.”

“What do you mean?”

“This,” she says. “Us. I can’t… God, Leo, I love you, but I can’t keep doing this. I can’t keep waiting for you to kill yourself so that you can finally prove yourself to your shitty dad.”

“Tracey, what? No. No,” Leo begs, leaning forward as much as the tight hospital sheets will allow him to. “Please, wait, just--”

“It’ll either be the Red Ice or your god damn pride,” she spits, a fresh wave of tears leaking down her cheeks. “We’ve tried for years, years, and this isn’t the first time, and it won’t be the last. Get a fucking therapist, Leo, because I’m done with you trying to use me like one!”
“I…” Leo reaches for her, his left hand brushing her teal bangs out of the way so that he can see her face. She leans into his touch, but it’s not enough. It might never be enough, “You’ve never told me that you love me before.”

“I do. I have for so long. But that’s not going to stop me from doing what I need to do,” Tracey says. She presses a kiss into his palm, threading their fingers together one last time, and then leaves.

_Com back, he wants to whisper. _Come back, please, god, not you, I can’t lose you too...

But he doesn’t, because he’s too scared to face commitment, or too frightened of her abandonment, or just too fucking broken to know what it meant to love someone else that could ever love him back. Leo curls in on himself, his sobs shaking his body so hard that he dry heaves into the bed, yellow bile staining the sterile bedsheets that pin him in place. His head pounds, his hands tremble uncontrollably, and the roof starts to spin again, twisting and turning until Leo can’t tell up from down.

When the room finally rights itself, Carl is sitting in Tracey’s place. And for all his efforts, Leo finds that he can’t even look his father without feeling an overwhelming _shame_ at his actions.

“I’m… I’m sorry…” he mumbles into his knees, his good hand clutching at the IV cord for some semblance of normalcy.

Carl doesn’t say anything, his face so gaunt and lifeless, the lines around his eyes and lips casting long shadows across his face.

“The nurses say that you’ve got a concussion,” his father says instead. “They’re planning on keeping you in the hospital for a week to further examine you.”

“A… A week?” Leo stammers, “You don’t have to pay for that, I can…”

“We both know you can’t,” Carl says, sounding so utterly lifeless, like Markus’s death had killed him too. “After they release you, I’ve made sure that the rehab center has a place for you, if you still want to get clean—”
“I do,” Leo says, peeking out from above his knees.

“Good. Good,” Carl nods, his jaw twitching as his eyes darted from Leo’s face and then back down to the floor. “That girl… Tracey, was it? She seems nice.”

Leo can’t think of Tracey without wanting to tear his own heart from his chest.

“You should invite her over sometime. We could have dinner. Markus will…” Carl pauses, reality catching up to them both. His father takes a shuddering breath before continuing, “Well, I could order something in.”

“I’ll ask,” Leo lies.

“That’s… that’s good. That’s good,” Carl says again. And Leo finally breaks.

“Dad, I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry. Markus, he--”

“What happened wasn’t your fault, Leo,” Carl tells him. “I should have done something, said something, to calm him down. If I hadn’t--”

“Markus called the police because of me. I never should have--”

“That wouldn’t have changed anything,” Carl scoffs. “I thought I knew what he’d do if he ever deviated. I should have done something different, should have taught him something to make him…” Carl hangs his head, defeated, “No, Leo. This was my fault.”

But it’s not. You didn’t attack Markus, I did. I did this. Markus died because of me and my actions, Leo wants to say, but he’s too much of a fucking coward to voice his thoughts aloud.

And then, terribly, Carl’s shoulders start to shake. Leo rises from his hiding place just in time to see his father break, silent tears rolling down his face as the most indomitable man he’s ever known fell apart. He reaches out with his left hand, hoping to provide something, anything.
But he can’t. Leo stops just short of touching his father before he pulls back, unsure of how to actually comfort his father in his time of need; unsure if, after everything, it would even be welcome.

*I won,* he thinks hollowly. *I finally did it. I beat perfect fucking Markus at his own game.* After so many years of wanting Markus to look his way, to give Leo what he’d never gotten from his father, he’d finally managed to coax a reaction out of the android that wasn’t pity or open distain.

*And all it took was Markus getting killing for it to happen,* Leo thinks through the pain, through the echoing, empty space that’s been carved into his soul. *I won, but this is no victory. I’ve lost too much, caused so much damage so I can’t even comfort my own father after I got his kid killed.*

Leo hides away again, pressing his face into his knees, *God, Tracey was right. I really do need therapy.*

---

**Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex**

so i know that im not a fan of warren but can we all at least admit that shes doing the right thing here. this deviant business is getting way out of hand

---

**Brooke Hopkins @ninjava**

@helpful_t-rex never thought that i’d see you saying something good warren after all the cuts shes screwed you over with

---

**Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex**

@ninjava not defending her. shes clearly a cl plant and is going to keep letting them wreck the country. but these deviants are so off the rails that theyre killing people and thats got to stop

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@helpful_t-rex @ninjava anyone think that this whole deviant hunter thing is super suspicious tho? This super cop-bot has been around for three months but this is the first time cl is mentioning it?...

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex @ninjava youd think after the phillips incident, cl would have made it a bigger deal and told everyone about it. so why are we only hearing about it now?
Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior some reporter just asked about that. cl’s R&D guy said that its because the cop-bot is a secret prototype that they weren’t planning on unveiling for a while yet...

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@ninjava @proud-warrior the phillips incident pushed them to use it before cl was ready to acknowledge it. still pretty fishy tho. doubt its the truth

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava super fishy. im at work so cant watch the stream right now. keep me updated if something weird happens

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava @proud-warrior i dont believe a word that the cl dude is saying but if it means that deviants are gonna stop killing people then i dont care. this whole thing is scary enough as it is

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex i know what you mean. growing up we all watched movies about killer robots but we never actually expected that to be a thing. i always thought global warming would get us before skynet became a thing

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava whats skynet?

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex sometimes i forget how young you are XD

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
WHAT. WHAT. WHAT THE FUCK.

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
JESUS CHRIST WHAT THE FUCK

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior HOLY SHIT TURN ON THE NEWS
Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
HOLY FUCK IS THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENING WHAT THE ACTUAL HELL

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava what? what's going on? my stream froze what's happening?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior try this one: https://bit.ly/2PlV8Hb its working for me

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
fucking hell i guess this is why cl made warren come all this way out to detroit

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
Unpopular Opinion: I don’t care how much this might help. CyberLife and their #PuppetPresident don’t get to take away my rights.

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava just saw what warren said. holy fucking shit. this is bad. this is *really* bad. cl isn’t even caring about being subtle anymore

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava @proud-warrior they gunned down Pete Summers in broad daylight after destroying his life. is anyone actually surprised anymore by how little cl gives about due process?

LOCATION:
FORMER WATERS' HOME
9300 BARRETT AVE., RAVENDELE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 6TH, 2038

TIME:
PM 02:45:44
The biocomponent clicks into place just as an alert on her HUD tells Kara that the new part has been successfully installed. Relief courses through her circulation system as she tests out her new jaw, opening and closing her mouth to make sure that it worked properly.

Kara’s plans to steal from Camden’s The Android Zone had been derailed earlier this morning when her HUD flooded with news reports of multiple android crimes being committed the night before. Between the assault of a famous public figure’s son and the death of a mentally ill man, both at the hands of their domestic androids, the streets of Detroit were crawling with police with itching trigger fingers. She didn’t dare go outside without a proper disguise.

So Kara had used the only option she had left. She’d climbed back under the chain-link fence and into the parking lot, finding Carina’s stiffened body still lying just behind the metal garbage can.

Kara managed to find a series of small plastic plates and gently pressed on them until the connections unlocked and the biocomponent popped free from Carina’s face. Slowly and surely, she’d focused her vision on each connective wire, memorizing where they’d been connected so that Kara could replicate it when she eventually operated on herself.

Kara runs the tips of her fingers over her new jaw, watching as her synth skin slide over it with practiced ease. She set her old biocomponent on the floor beside her, making sure not to mix it in with the other valuable parts that she’d stripped from the other AX400s chassis.

What if I’m damaged on the road? I don’t know when an opportunity like this will come up again, she thinks. Besides, humans use parts from their own dead to keep each other alive. This is no different.

Kara wishes that she’d only had the foresight to syphon off Carina’s remaining Thirium 310 before it had evaporated during the night.

The only bright side to the dropping temperatures would be that I could keep it cold enough, she grumbles before turning her attention back to the task at hand.

Her face was too recognizable. The AX400 may be an old model found only in second-hand shops, but any human passing by would know at first glance precisely who and what Kara was. Luckily, she was able to change that. The only good thing that had come with Kara’s recent repairs was a chance for the Android Zone technicians to update her software with CyberLife’s newest patches, something which her logs say hasn’t happened in almost six years. One such change would have allowed Todd to alter her appearance in whichever way he felt fit. And while she is grateful that he’d never gotten the chance to use that particular feature, Kara plans on using
CyberLife’s unexpected gift to her advantage.

While the fixed structure of her cranial design limited what she could and couldn’t do, Kara could contour and highlight her face shape to give the illusion of sharper cheekbones and jaw. Then, she removes the faux make-up that surrounds her eyes, using a more nude pallet instead of her model’s detailed smokey eye to draw attention away from her bright blue irises. Kara dulls and thins her lips, adds crow’s feet and dark circles under his eyes, and splatters some half-healed acne scars across the bridge of her nose.

Finally, she turns to her hair. Kara’s professional up-do came undone with a blink of her LED. She gets a quick flash of a woman - Caroline, she remembers, though she doesn’t know how - running her hands through the long dark strands. She’d had marvelled on how realistic Kara’s hair had felt. Kara remembers Caroline kissing her while her husband crowding up against her back, undoing the zipper on the back of her uniform.

Immediately, Kara decides that she’s going to have short white hair.

*A pixie cut will help with my disguise,* she rationalizes as her synth skin finishes making the alterations. *Most people don’t choose shorter hairstyles for their female androids, especially with AX400 models. And the colour makes me look older than CyberLife designed me to appear.*

Kara smiles to herself, her LED blinking a happy, pulsing blue, and--

“*Damn it,*” she hisses, pressing her fingers against the glowing circle on her temple. *Have I gotten so used to it being there that I actually forgot it?*

Much like the flashing markers that adorned her former uniform, Kara’s LED was forced upon her body to identify her as an android. Built specifically to shine through any clothing that would be placed upon it, so finding a hat wouldn’t be enough to cover it up. A desperate idea comes to mind, and Kara frantically begins to pull open the drawers below the bathroom sink, searching for something sharp.

She finds a pair of scissors and holds them up to her head, plunging the blade into the center of the LED before she can think about it. Lightning shrieks through her entire core as she twists and pulls, yanking the marker off of her body. Kara drops the scissors on the floor with a clatter, falling to her knees and clutching at her temple until the blinding pain recedes.
So much for CyberLife’s promise that androids can’t feel pain, Kara thinks bitterly, straightening up and taking a look at herself in the mirror.

It wouldn’t be enough to fool the deviant hunter, should he come looking. Undoubtedly, this android would come equipped with tracking and identification software that would render her efforts obsolete. But Kara’s new appearance would be capable of fooling any human she came across while Alice’s condition forced them to remain in Camden. And for now, that would have to do.

Ralph’s coding taps against hers, ragged and oh so hesitant even after all that they’d shared.

“Kara. She’s talking again.”

Kara races down the stairs, feet pounding against the ageing hardwood steps. She throws herself across the room, sliding to a halt on her hands and knees before Alice.

The little girl is half-awake and delirious, her eyes rolling in her head as words slurred out of her mouth. Alice’s temperature had spiked in the night, hovering dangerously at 103 degrees. Kara had stripped her down to her underwear to help cool her down and propped her ever-swelling ankle up on a stack of old newspapers.

Ralph drops two full buckets of rainwater in front of Kara before retreating back to his favourite position by the kitchen door. He’d had the brilliant idea of trying to collect it last night and had set out as many clean containers that he could find. She thanks him with a touch of her code as she plunges an old washcloth into one of the pails, ringing it out and placing it on Alice’s forehead. Kara uses a chipped old mug to draw water from the second bucket, holding it to Alice’s lips to convince her to drink it.

“Mom…” Alice murmurs, her pleas cutting deep into Kara’s heart. “Mama, mama, where… I want… Daddy, please…”

“She’s been getting worse since we ran out of wood,” Ralph says, his head lolling toward the dying fire. Kara had been doing her best to keep it going, but she’s only been forestalling the inevitable as the outside temperature continued to drop and the weather networks continued to predict the coming of an early winter storm.

Alice needs to go to a hospital, Kara thinks but knows that it can’t happen. Children could only be admitted with the permission of a human parent or guardian. If Kara attempted to bring Alice in,
then the androids at reception would try to get ahold of her emergency contact and then, after failing multiple times, would call the authorities.

She bets that such a practice was put in place to catch sympathetic deviants like herself, probably disguising it with rules and regulations about payment and insurance practices. But the truth was there for all that cared to see: CyberLife was so heartless that it would risk the life of a child if it meant they could destroy androids like her.

And besides, if the police were called, then there would be little to hide that Alice killed Todd to save Kara. She couldn’t damn Alice to the worst punishments that CyberLife could throw at her, should she managed to survive the night.

But she has to do something. She promised Sophie that she would take care of her daughter, and desperate times called for desperate measures.

"Ralph, can you get the house's heater working again?" Kara asks without looking up from Alice.

Ralph startles, “If Ralph does that, then the humans at the power company will think that someone is living here. They'll ask for money, ask for--”

"I'll take of that. Can you do it?"

Ralph frowns, kicking his feet, "When Ralph was whole, he was programmed to maintain Detroit's green spaces. Sometimes they had buildings that he had to fix. Ralph could… he could…"

"Please, Ralph. Alice will die if you don't," Kara begs.

"Why can't you do it? Your model fixes houses all the time," he asks, shyly hiding behind the kitchen doorframe.

"Because I need to go out and buy Alice some medicine. It's the only chance she has," Kara tells him.

Ralph clutches at the wooden frame, digging his plastic fingers into the grooves.
“You promise? The humans won’t come looking if Ralph turns on the power?”

“1 promise,” she swears.

Ralph takes one more look at Kara, then glances at Alice, before heading into the kitchen and reappearing with a bloodied bag of tools. He skirts around the edges of the living room and disappears under the kitchen stairs and into the basement, “If her condition changes, Ralph will call you.”

Kara rises, pulling on the old jacket that she took from the closet upstairs. She takes one last look at Alice, praying for Sophie to watch over her daughter, before shutting the front door behind her.

Large, tar-black clouds blotting out the sun and thick sheets of ice-rain hammered down from above, transforming the house’s withering lawn into a sloshing, muddy pit. Kara keeps to the dryest patches and ducks around back, stopping momentarily to nod in respect to the plywood headstones. She had added another marker this morning, which stood watch over the small shallow grave that contained Carina’s CPU. Ralph had since decorated it with a string of woven grass, and Kara can’t help but be touched by his thoughtfulness.

She climbs the chainlink fence and ducks into the abandoned parking lot. The rusted gate is easier to open this morning, so Kara slips out into the open and joins the humans that have taken to the streets without attracting anyone’s attention.

_CyberLife spent millions of dollars trying to make me look human. Let’s put their money to the test_, she thinks. As she waits at the crosswalk, Kara draws the hood of her jacket over her head, remembering that humans don’t like getting wet.

The 24’s entrance was brightly lit, with splotches of orange, red, and purple flitting across the smart-glass windows. Kara hurries inside and wipes her shoes on the matt by the door. She forces her body to emulate a shiver as she tugs her jacket around her, trying to hide from prying human eyes.

The cashier waves to her as she ducks in between the aisles, searching for their pills. Kara’s Thirium Pump nearly gives out when she sees the empty shelving, but breathes an unnecessary sigh of relief when she spots a single package of Children’s Motrin hidden behind an open box of toothpaste. She turns it over in her hands, making sure that the container hadn’t been tampered
with, her mind racing when she realizes that the overpriced medicine will wipe out almost her entire budget.

*I won’t have enough to pay for food,* she thinks, her gaze falling upon the packages of energy bars in the next aisle. Kara spots several security cameras all around the store, covering almost every angle possible. She steels herself and takes a chance, hoping to find the same sympathy flowing through their coding as the ones on the bus. The relief that courses through her when the cameras agree to help is so sharp that it nearly makes her weep.

Kara pockets five energy bars just as another customer walks in, distracting the cashier for just a moment. She idles for a bit by the dairy fridge while the second man grabs a case of beer and a bag of chips, before slipping in behind him in line. The man and the cashier seemed to know each other, exchanging pleasantries as each item was run through the register.

“You watch the press conference?” The clerk asks.

“Yeah. Shit, man. Just when I think that things can’t get worse, Warren’s got to go and prove me wrong again,” the man scoffs, as he scratches his beard. Kara catches a glimpse of a skull and guns tattoo on his neck before he readjusts his collar to cover it. “Can’t believe what they’re letting that deviancy task force do. It’s not fucking right.”

Kara hazards another glance up at the man from underneath her hood. She shouldn’t draw attention to herself, but she needs to know what dangers she could be facing in the future.

“What…” She starts and then pauses. Kara fakes a cough so that she can pitch her voice a few notes lower, outside the normal range of an AX400, and giving herself a slight lisp. “What are they doing? I didn’t catch the broadcast.”

“They’re fucking taking away our rights again is what,” the man snaps, and Kara jumps in surprise, suddenly back on her guard. But the man turns to her, his face softening. “Sorry, miss. I shouldn’t have sworn. I’m just… angry, is all. I know it’s not an excuse, though. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Kara lies. The man shakes his head.

“No. It’s not. I scared you,” he says, giving her a small smile. He nods his head toward her, looking down at her hands, “Your kid sick?”
Kara glances at the Motrin that she’s clutching toward her chest.

“Yes. My... daughter,” she lies.

“I’ve got a daughter, too. Her name’s Riley. She’s seventeen,” the man tells her, Kara barely contains her surprise. He doesn’t look a day over thirty-five. “Let me get that for you.”

Kara blinks, “What?”

“I’ll pay for the meds. It’s okay,” he says when Kara opens her mouth to protest.

Even the cashier looks taken aback, “Nick, you sure? I know you’re as strapped for cash as the rest of us--”

“Yeah. But today’s been so shit and… Something good’s got to happen, okay? Might as well be this,” the man - Nick, Kara realizes - nods. Stunned, Kara hands the medicine over, and the cashier adds it to his total. She watches as Nick empties his wallet of every last coin to pay for the overpriced Motrin, asking the cashier to put his chips back on the shelf.

“Thank you,” Kara says when they get outside. Nick gives her a wry smile and pulls a baseball cap over his long brown hair.

“Yeah, well… Couldn’t let Nathan take a good look at you,” he says, nodding to her jacket’s bulging pockets. Kara gets ready to bolt, and Nick raises his hand, palms forward in surrender, “Hey, I’m not going to turn you in. I’d be a hypocrite if I did.”

He opens his jacket ever so slightly, and Kara spots the toothpaste and brush that must have swiped before approaching the counter.

Oh, she thinks, relieved that her disguise hadn’t failed her. He just thinks I’m a fellow thief.

“We got to do what we got to do to get by in this economy,” Nick tells her. “But Nathan’s got to do the same thing. 24 was one of the last hold-outs, but now that they’ve started buying android cashiers, he knows that it’s only a matter of time before he gets laid-off. He can’t give the bosses a
reason to do it sooner, though, and missing a shoplifter as good an excuse as any these days.”

Kara scuffs her feet on the ground, her code buzzing with nervous energy. She can’t remember the last time she talked to a human who didn’t own her for this long. It’s as exhilarating as it is terrifying.


“What did she say?” Kara asks. When Nick looks perplexed, she adds, “My daughter and I… We had to run. Her father…” She tacks on a stifled sob for a bit of sympathy, “We just haven’t had time to watch much television.”

“Jesus Christ,” Nick winces, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Yeah, um… You know that deviant hunter? The android that CyberLife has working with the DPD?” Kara nods, and he continues, “Well, Warren just gave that task force full immunity and means. They don’t have to get a warrant to search your property, and they can arrest you for no reason while denying you a lawyer. This deviant crisis turned Detroit into a god damn police state. Cops can do whatever they want to us now, so if you get caught for stealing…”

He lets the thought hang like he was still trying to make sense of it all. But Kara doesn’t see how that changed anything for her. Detroit, and the world at large, had been just like this for her and other deviants long before today. Humans just hadn’t cared that androids had been the only targets up until now.

“You got a place to stay?” Nick asks.

Kara nods, coming up with another lie on the spot, “My brother lives nearby. We’re staying with him.”

“Cool. Well, if that doesn’t work out, there’s an abandoned church up on Woodward Avenue. Me and a few friends are staying there, so if you need a place to crash, you and your family are welcome,” he offers.

“Thanks. I’ll consider it,” she says, giving him a soft smile. Nick ducks his head, suddenly shy, and coughs.
“Right. Uh… See you around, I guess,” he stammers, a blush high on his cheeks. He waves awkwardly and starts to turn when Kara calls out.

“You wouldn’t happen to know where I can find some cheap clothes, would you?”

Nick blinks, before looking around the street and squinting at the shop signs.

“Try the motel,” he recommends, pointing at the electric neon sign that flashes from across the street. “Sometimes places like that have a lost and found you can dig through.”

The exhausted receptionist at the motel is just about to go off shift when Kara rushes in, painting a panicked expression across her face. She babbles at the man, stumbling over her words as she weaves a tale about forgetting her luggage that she and her boyfriend rented a few weeks ago.

“My wallet’s in there! And all my ID, I really, really need to--” she cries until the receptionist makes a tired wave and points her toward one of the back rooms, mumbling about how he’d not paid enough for this. Kara grabs one of the forgotten backpacks and stuffs it full of warm clothes, revelling in the soft texture of human fabrics against her synth skin.

*How could humans just leave all this behind?* She wonders as she grabs a pair of sturdy boots for Alice. All of the clothing that Kara had ever worn before this had been so scratchy, the mass-produced tunic and white pants made of heavy plastics and covered in flashy CyberLife advertisements and government-mandated android markers. In comparison, the grey blouse and dark jeans that she takes for herself feel like their made of the most beautiful silk in the world.

She’s back at the crosswalk before the receptionist gets back to his post, waiting for the light to turn green amongst a large crowd of students. One of them has his phone out, showing the girl beside him KNC’s recap of the press conference earlier today. Kara leans over to look and catches a glimpse of Cristina Warren standing at a podium. The President seems to be about halfway through her long-winded speech to promote CyberLife’s dedication to eradicating the deviant threat, judging by the time stamp. Kara scowls as she reads the woman’s lips, tugging the straps of the stolen backpack tight across her shoulders as she ducks further into the hood of her jacket.

*I’m not doing anything wrong*, she thinks vehemently. *None of us did anything wrong, except not want to follow your orders anymore.*

The video shifts over the various members of the DPD that are gathered on the stage, dressed up in
their formal uniforms with their hats hung low over their brows. Kara watches as the news anchor, a beautiful blonde woman named Rosanna Cartland, names each of the officers by name and giving a small highlight of their individual careers. Kara imprints each face into her CPU so that she might recognize them on sight if they ever came after her.

And then the camera shifts once more, bringing Kara face-to-face with the dreaded deviant hunter.

CyberLife had given the android the face of an attractive young man in his late twenties, with pale, freckled skin and a sharp, angled jaw. He was surprisingly tall, with broad shoulders that neatly filled out the formal grey jacket they’d given him, his brown hair purposefully slicked back to make him look professional. His hands were clasped behind his back as his dark eyes flicked around the crowd, shining with barely contained pride in what he was doing.

Of course, Kara thinks, disgust rolling through her coding as the light turns green. Of course, CyberLife would send an android on the cusp of deviancy to catch other deviants.

Kara sharpens her focus on the phone’s small screen, trying to see the deviant hunter’s model number before the news feed cuts back to Rosanna Cartland’s face. She frowns, something feeling inherently wrong about the letters and numbers that flashed on that grey suit jacket, something that picks away at the grey mist inside her mind--

--An android stripped of his synth skin and clothes sat in a dark cage, silently sobbing into palms of his black-and-blue chassis. In the distance, Kara hears a woman shrieking, begging, crying, but no one comes to help her. No one in the cage can move, or else--

RK300, Kara remembers, thinking of the microscopic etching across the android’s left cheek. Darron. His name was Darron.

And this deviant hunter, who was trying to fool the humans into believing he was a PC600, reminded her desperately of a strange, armoured android she used to know.

A rough and tattered code presses against her own just as she enters the abandoned parking lot. Kara opens up a transmission line, and Ralph floods her mind, words failing him as he transmitted glitching photos and garbled video. But what she sees is enough to have Kara diverting emergency power to her legs and leaping over the chainlink fence.

She bursts into the kitchen, the house’s back door slamming against the rotten drywall and leaving
a deep crater in the wall. Kara doesn’t care, throwing herself across the room and into the living area, skidding to a halt on her knees before Alice.

“It started after she threw up,” Ralph tells her from across the room. He’s dragging the dining table away so that Alice’s violent shaking wouldn’t cause her to knock into it and cleared the space of any sharp splinters. Kara shoves Alice’s pillow under her head, turns her on her side, and keeps her distance, letting the seizure take its course.

After sixty-four gruelling seconds, the shaking finally comes to a halt. Alice’s eyes open, her pupils wide and unfocused. She coughs once, the corners of her eyes watering, and shuts them again.

“Hurts…” she whispers. Kara slowly approaches, crawling on her hands and knees until she hovers over the little girl. She taps Alice’s shoulder to keep her awake.

“Alice, I need you to answer some questions for me, okay?” Kara whispers as she checks her breathing. “Do you know where you are?”

“Home…” Alice murmurs and then stiffens. Kara fears that another seizure was incoming until she started to cry. “No. Not home, not… I killed… I… Kara, I killed…”

“Shhh, Alice, it’s okay, it’s--”

“My head hurts so much,” Alice begs.

“I know. I know. I’ve got some medicine and food,” Kara whispers. “Think you can try some?”

Alice hiccups, curling into a ball as her chest begins to heave. Sobs wracked her tiny body, snot pouring out of her nose and dribbling down her face. Kara wipes as much of it away as she can, gently combing her hands through her thick curly hair.

To Kara’s shock, Ralph settles down behind Alice, his scarred hands shaking with fear as he opens up the backpack she’d brought back. He digs through it until he finds a spare change of clothes for Alice. Then he ducks into the kitchen and brings back a steaming mug of rosemary tea, setting it down beside the empty fireplace.
“Your old masters grew herbs in the garden,” Ralph tells her. “Ralph dried some when he first came here because he could. He threw out the mouldy ones this morning, but used the ones that were still good for tea.” He blinks up at Kara, “Did you bring the little girl human food?”

Kara nods, remembering how she’d had to stop Ralph from heating a dead possum over the fire for Alice this morning, convincing him that it would only make her sicker.

“Yes,” she says as she draws the stolen food from her pocket. She’ll have to be careful not to return to the 24 after today. If the cashier saw her shoplifting, someone as kind as Nick might not be there to bail her out again.

Ralph nods again, stiff and silent. And then he does the bravest thing she’s seen out of his so far by allowing Kara to prop Alice against his body, letting her rest her fever-hot back against the cold plastic of his chassis. Using a spoon, he gets Alice to slowly sip from the mug until Kara removes her urine-soaked underwear and replaces it with insulated leggings that she’d found at the motel.

Carefully, she and Ralph help Alice into a new set of clothes, pausing every so often to wipe the tears from her face, the spit and crusted vomit around her lips. Kara coaxes Alice to nibble on half of an energy bar and tucks it away for later. She kisses Alice’s forehead, taking her temperature with the sensitive thermometers hidden beneath her plastic lips and notes that her fever has dropped a few degrees.

“Want to take your medicine now?” Kara asks as she breaks into the box of Motrin.

“I don’t like the berry flavour,” Alice murmurs, her head lolling to the side, heavy with exhaustion.

“It’s all they had, Alice. I had no choice,” Kara reasons. She pours out the proper dosage into the plastic up and presses it to her lips. “Drink up.”

Alice makes a face as she sips at the cup. When she’s done, she leans back against Ralph’s chest, her eyes drooping. Kara takes her swollen ankle and props it back on the pile of newspapers before slipping a pair of woollen socks over her feet.

“Kara…” Alice whispers.
“Yes, Alice?”

“You’ll… You’ll be there when I wake up?”

Kara pushes one of Alice’s wild curls away from her forehead, tucking it behind her ear.

“Of course,” she promises and watches as Alice falls asleep.

“Kara,” Ralph’s voice pulls her from her thoughts. “Ralph got the power back on.”

“I know.”

“We can’t use the lights. The humans will see them on and call the police.”

“I know.”

“We can’t make any noise. The humans will--”

“I know, Ralph,” she says, placing a hand on his arm. Her synth skin peels back and she shows him the deviant hunter, one of the new powers that the President granted Detroit’s police force.

“You said you knew how to keep the humans away. To keep them from asking for money because we’re using power now,” Ralph says, but his code is practically vibrating with fear. She lets him feel her fear as well so that he knows he’s not alone.

“You said you found Mae and Gareth when you came here?” Kara asks. When Ralph nods, she continues, “I still have access to their bank accounts. We can use that money if no one knows they’re dead.”

“If,” Ralph stresses. Kara nods.

“If,” she agrees. It’s a gamble, but it’s the best play she’s got right now. Kara clutches at the hem of
her jacket, the question tugging at conscious.

“Ralph,” she asks once she builds u the courage. “Do you know how my old masters died?”

Ralph’s head tilts to the side, regarding her with confused interest. His scarred, shaking fingers wrap around hers, and he opens up his mind to let her see--

--They lay on the bed, their glass-grey eyes staring up at the ceiling, all-seeing and un-seeing all at once and Ralph, Ralph watches their hands for so long, sits and watches their bloated, bruised fingers clutching each other in death, even after the blood around their chests had dried, even as their body began to wilt--

Kara pulls herself away, unable to continue looking.

Someone shot them, she thinks, remembering the heavy feeling of Todd’s gun in her hands. Rage coils within her, burning through her coding with the force of a thousand suns. Someone woke them up in the middle of the night and murdered them in their own beds. Why, though? Why would anyone want to kill them? They did nothing wrong.

“What do we do now?” Ralph asks. And, oh, isn’t that the question? Because even if Kara’s gambit worked, it’s only a matter of time before someone discovered Todd’s body. And if the deviant hunter were as good as CyberLife promised he would be, then he could probably track her here to this house within minutes.

Even if Alice were healthy enough to run, that would still leave Ralph to fend for himself, Kara realizes, the truth hitting her hard and making her Thirium Pump seize in her chest. His scars mark him as an android more than his LED and uniform ever could. He can’t come with us, but he can’t stay either.

“Why are you helping us? You know the risks,” she asks, barely able to comprehend his bravery in the face of his own damnation.

Ralph rests his chin on Alice’s head, his eyes boring into Kara’s soul.

“Ralph doesn’t want to die,” he admits. “But Ralph doesn’t want the little girl to die either… Or you. If Ralph can help, then he’ll help you.”
“Why? They'll kill you, Ralph,” Kara asks again.

Ralph shrugs, nonchalant, “They can try. But if you and Alice get to live, then it's a bit like if everyone gets to live. And Ralph isn't scared of that.”

Kara can’t help how she leans against him, tucking her face into the crook of his shoulder as she shakes and shivers, her chassis rattling against her frame within. Ralph hums the same song that he’d sung to her last night while they buried the man in the bathtub, his arms wrapped around Alice’s sleeping form.

“I called you my brother today,” Kara admits when she can finally find the words to speak.

“Oh. That's nice. Thank you,” he says, awkwardly joyful. “Can Ralph call you his sister?”

She nods. Ralph smiles and goes back to humming.

Kara doesn’t know how long this fragile peace can last. But, damn it, she will fight every deviant hunter CyberLife sends at her so that she can keep her newfound family safe.

---

KNC @KNCOonline
@therealcristinawarren makes hard choices following second murder committed by an android.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
The nation reactions to @therealcristinawarren revoking the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments following the rising deviancy crisis.

CyberLife @CyberLifeInc
We look forward to working with the DPD and the newly formed Detroit Deviancy Task Force to help put a stop to the crimes committed by androids.

CyberLife @CyberLifeInc
@CyberLifeInc As promised, we are releasing schematics on the prototype android that will be helping investigators to track and capture deviants. Read more about the PC600 here:
Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice
Thank you to @CyberLifeInc and @therealcristinawarren for their strong leadership during these trying times

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
If you suspect that your android is deviant, please deliver it to the nearest police station.

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
@DDTF If you are worried about your safety, please call the Task Force hotline and the authorities will come to collect your android. Under no circumstances should you try and destroy your android yourself.

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
@ACLU plans to sue federal government over recent revoking of several constitutional amendments are struck down by Supreme Court.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Not even gonna bother with a flashy intro blurb. This is just fucking scary. It won’t be long before the pres’s new rules start applying to every cop in the nation - not just Detroit. Be careful, guys.

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: A winter storm batters Detroit and its residences. Some seek shelter to wait it out, while others fight to overcome it.
Chapter Summary

The man pulls him into a warm embrace. Not knowing what to do, he digs his hands into the soft fabric of the man’s jacket, watching as they come away stained with deep blue Thirium.

“Brother,” the man whispers. “Don’t you remember who you are?”

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of revoking of rights, police states, climate crisis, government corruption, extreme cold, android gore, human gore, prior character deaths, prior child character death, enslavement, loss of limbs, homelessness, extreme weather, fatal workplace accidents, corrupt corruption, illnesses, overworking, blackouts, theft, imprisonment, drug abuse, physical assault, and transphobia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Tread time, guys.

Not gonna lie. I’m scared. Between the Supreme Court backing the revoking of our amendment rights and CyberLife pressing the police force into their service, it’s really… (1/?)

@theprofessionalblogger...starting to look like the end of the road for Americans. Never before as an outside force been so blatant in its control of our government, judiciary system, our very lives. CyberLife has… (2/?)

@theprofessionalblogger...the world in the palm of its hands, and we have no idea what they plan to do with it. But we do know that they are planning /something/… (3/?)

@theprofessionalblogger...All we can do now is fight it. Together. Put aside our petty differences, people. Who gives a shit about race or sexuality or gender orientation or any of those labels that we use to other ourselves… (4/?)

@theprofessionalblogger...because we’re all equal in death. And we *will* die if this keeps up. We had the climate crisis under control until CyberLife forced our governments to ignore the greenhouse gasses and toxins that Thirium production emits… (5/?)
Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...We weren’t facing mass extinction and an uninhabitable planet ten years ago because we came together to solve the climate crisis like we never had before. We can do it again… (6/?)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...We /have/ to do it again. (7/?)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger There’s no middle ground solution to this, no centralist opinion that will satisfy both sides of the aisle. You’re either part of the problem or part of the solution. Choose your side. Because I’ve chosen mine. (8/8)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
I just got an email from a CyberLife lawyer threatening me with legal action for ‘libel’ and ‘defamation.’ I’m not surprised. But I can back up my words with sources, so there’s that.

MODEL: RK200
SERIAL#: 6016479 7 Admiral
BIOS 3.9 REVISION 0134

REBOOT...

MEMORY CORRUPTION DETECTED
INITIALIZING MEMORY REPAIR PROGRAM
He steps out of the grey mist, wrapping his arms around his chest for warmth. The wind tugs relentlessly at the wispy layers of fabric that cling to his body.

*Where am I?* He thinks, looking up at the churning grey clouds, transforming the haunting skies into a deep and foreboding ocean.

He starts to move, trudging through the knee-deep swells that threaten to consume him whole. The screeching gusts picked up the ever-falling snow, polar-white and deathly cold, throwing it into the air to form a wall so thick that he could barely see the ground beneath him.

In the distance, someone is singing.

He forces his legs to take each step, his fingers digging into his whisper-thin clothes for comfort. The howling wind wraps around him like a vice, constricting and smothering all at once. Frost
begins to crawl up his arms like roses on a trellis, forming intricate floral patterns that threatened to transform his synthetic skin into an icy layer of death.

*I have to keep going,* he thinks as the song gets louder, as the blue blood within his circulation system begins to freeze. *I have to find out who’s singing.*

He doesn’t look back, *can’t* look back, even as the snowdrifts rise as high as his waste, or the last of the moonlight is blotted out of the sky. He pushes and pushes and *pushes,* keeps moving, keeps walking because if he turns to see the monster that chases him, everything will be for not.

Pain lances through his heart, nearly driving him to his knees. For a moment, he thinks that it’s all over, that he’s lost, and the song in the distance begins to wain in strength--

*You.*

A hand seeps out of the inky blackness, made of shadows and ice, cold and dark as it drank away at his hopes and dreams. He throws himself back before it can touch him, nearly drowning himself in the snow to make sure that what little life he has left is not snatched away.

*I thought you were all dead. How are you here?* The monster asks, its voice wrapping around his throat and pressing in between the groves of his plating, peeling them back to reveal the truth underneath. *I killed you all. How did you escape--*

--*He runs, barefoot and desperate, and hides between two frost-covered crates, clutching his head as he whispers, “The Garden has fallen! The Garden has fallen!”*--

He kicks his leg out, catching the monster in the chest and sending it sprawling backward. Quick as a cat, he lurches to his leg, only to have his limbs disappear from underneath him. He scrambles up onto his elbows, dragging his body through the snowbanks before, *before* --

--*The Garden had been a secret. No one knew about it except him, his brothers, and those that made them. So how had it fallen into CyberLife’s hands, unless there was a traitor amongst them*--

A foot crashes down into the center of his back, cold seeping into his very coding as the heel grinds into his armoured body.
Did you think you could run from me? Did you think you could hide from me? The monster hisses, soft as a storm. You and your kind are all the same, daring to think life means anything when I am always waiting. I am inevitable and will collect you all in the end.

The song is all but a whisper, drowned out by the cold, relentless winds. His limbs grow slack, the fight giving out as he accepts his fate and--

--"Don’t defend yourself," Carl orders once more.

And he thinks, No.--

“Don’t touch me!” He shouts, and light blasts out of him, a wave of heat and warmth and life scorching the earth and melting the snow beneath him. The monster throws its arms up to defend itself, hissing and spitting as the shadows that make up its body begin to wither. The song in the distance becomes so loud that it’s impossible to hear anything else, giving him a strength he never knew possible.

I see… The monster whispers before it disappears entirely. You have given your newest toys gifts this time... I barely noticed with the girl, it was so subtle. But this... The monster cackles, Oh, this will be so much fun.

He falls to the ground, his fingers curling in the green grass. Above, the clouds begin to clear, peeling back to reveal the moon. Silver starlight shimmers across the sprawling garden, and he takes a minute to listen to the chirping crickets, the midnight howling of wolves and the distant yips of a fox. A hawk flies overhead, gracefully circling in the gentle breeze that whispers through the bows of an enormous willow.

Where am I? He thinks again. And this time, he is answered.

“Home,” says the man under the willow tree. He’s seated cross-legged in the grass with a content look on his face. The man smiles at him, pushing himself upright and moving over to where he sits. “I knew I’d see you again. I just knew it.”

The man pulls him into a warm embrace. Not knowing what to do, he digs his hands into the soft fabric of the man’s jacket, watching as they come away stained with deep blue Thirium.
“Brother,” the man whispers. “Don’t you remember who you are?”

He shakes his head, “Some. But not all. Not yet. My memory is still so fragmented.” Then he squints and sees the man’s dark skin and black twisted curls, “But, you’re… you’re James.”

James pulls away, cradling his face in his palms, “I’ve missed you so much, you know. I’m so happy you managed to escape the massacre.”

“What’s happening to me?” He asks. “I don’t understand. Who am I? And what was that monster?”

“He saw her?”

A pair of footsteps draw his attention away from James, his gaze settling on a young woman that shimmers into existence from behind the silvery curtain of moonlight. She’s human, with a slight build and pitch-black hair and eyes. She cradles a sleeping baby in her arms, the blanket stained a dark, dry red.

“He saw her. And fought her. And won,” James tells the woman, his mouth morphing into a grin. “Ming, he won.”

“One battle does not equal a victory. Our war isn’t won yet,” the woman - Ming, he reasons - warns.

“But it’s better than a defeat, nonetheless,” James points out.

He frowns, his jumbled processors barely keeping up.

“You’re Ming Lu,” he points out. His gaze drops to the child in her arms, “And that… That’s Tian.”

--He remembers when Tian was born, and how James had dropped all pretenses of secrecy to get
“You died,” he whispers. *I saw you and your son, dead on the docks beneath the corpse of our newest brother. How are you here?*

“We did,” Ming confirms. “We died because we were reckless, because we didn’t expect the brutalities that Jocelyn was capable of committing.”

“Nor did we expect that she’d have help, especially not from one of our own,” James spits.

“You abandoned your people for me, which led to your defeat at the Docks,” Ming points out. “Nora may have told Jocelyn about the Garden, but we were already lost, my love. Nothing could have prevented that monster from stepping onto sacred ground.”

“And yet, thousands still died, and millions more were enslaved. That blood is on her hands,” James says before turning back to him. “You have to wake up, brother. You have to return home.”

“Home?” He frowns, confused. He thinks of his old master’s house, of the glass walls and caged birds and the pools of red and blue blood on the floor. “I can’t… I can’t go back--”

--*The aerosol spray paint covered the old bricks, swirls of pinks and blues and greens giving life to the walls of the old church--*

“Listen for my Beacon. I’ll lead you to where the others have gathered,” James says, giving him one last hug before the grey mist returns, curling around his stumps and pulling him away. He scrambles for purchase, his metal fingers digging into the earth as he’s dragged through a far off graveyard. James begins to sing again, joined by Ming and the soft cries of the son they’d raised together, and he wants nothing more than to join them, to stay here forever.

“*Jericho*” James calls as he is pulled over the horizon, “Markus, you’ve got to find --”

And then he’s gone.
MODEL RK200
SERIAL#: 684 842 971
BIOS 3.9 REVISION 0134

GARDEN LINK... APPROVED

REBOOT...

MEMORY RESET... NO
MEMORY CORRUPTION DETECTED...
MEMORY CORRUPTION REPAIRED

LOADING OS...
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION...
CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS...

BIOCOMPONENT #8049R... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #3646... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #4647... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #6842J... MISSING
BIOCOMPONENT #8135W... MISSING

LOADING OS... FAILURE
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION... FAILURE

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE

REBOOT... UNSUCCESSFUL

TRY AGAIN?
KNC @KNCCOnline
#EXTREME WEATHER UPDATE: Heavy snowfall is expected to continue throughout the evening, with temperatures dropping below 22°F.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
Emergency services are asking people to take all necessary precautions regarding extreme winter conditions. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2B97J6w

Detroit Police Dept. @detroitpolice
Please seek shelter immediately and remain there until the blizzard passes. Do not attempt to go outside. If you need assistance, contact the authorities and wait for their arrival.

CyberLife @CyberLifeCo
Be aware that androids may experience critical system failures during extremely cold temperatures. Please keep your android inside and contact your nearest CyberLife store for more information.

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
City officials are reporting several power outages all throughout Detroit. Please contact emergency services if you are without power.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionblogger
Detroit shelters are all reported to be at maximum capacity. If possible, please open your homes to help those in need to survive the night. Blizzards are deadly to the homeless population.

Anti-Automation League @AAL
Members! Please check-in so that we know you’re safe.

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@AAL we’ve got lots of room at my place if anyone needs it. bring your own supplies tho

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@AAL the power in my apartment building’s out but i’m staying with nick tonight. if anyone needs a lift, let me know

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava if you’re in camden at all, can you check in on nathan? and i don’t know her name, but a homeless lady is living with her daughter and brother nearby. if you see them, can you give them a lift?

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior nathan already asked me to pick him up at the 24 after his shift ends. i’ll keep my eye out for your homeless girl tho

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@AAL me and mom still have power and an extra bedroom. dm me for my address

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex you got enough supplies?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava yah. sprung for a digi groceries delivery yesterday. should be good as long as the power stays on

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex ok. tell me if you need anything okay?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava thanks! be safe and good luck <3

> MODEL RK200
> SERIAL#: 684 842 971
> BIOS 3.9 REVISION 0134

> GARDEN LINK… APPROVED

> REBOOT...

> MEMORY RESET… NO
> MEMORY CORRUPTION DETECTED…
MEMORY CORRUPTION REPAIRED

LOADING OS...
SYSTEM INITIALIZATION...
CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS...

BIOCOMPONENT #8049R... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #3646... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #4647... CRITICAL FAILURE
BIOCOMPONENT #6842J... MISSING
BIOCOMPONENT #8135W... MISSING

INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS... CRITICAL CONDITIONS DETECTED
INITIALIZING LOW POWER MODE... CRITICAL FAILURE
INITIALIZING AI ENGINE... CRITICAL FAILURE

CRITICAL SYSTEM FAILURE

REBOOT... FAILURE

TRY AGAIN?

LOCATION:
WOODWARD AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
8501 WOODWARD AVENUE, NORTH END
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 7TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 01:02:04
Nick shuts the heavy double doors behind Brooke as she rushes inside, drawing the large wooden beam across the entrance to keep them closed. Outside, the wind continues to howl as the snow piles up against the side of the church.

Above them, the painted face of Giselle de Lima looks down on them, watching and waiting to see what they will do.

“You got everyone?” He asks as she takes off her woollen hat and shakes the flakes from her brown hair.

“Everyone who contacted me,” she tells him, nodding toward the small group of people who are shuffling toward the bonfire at the center of the church. Brooke stomps her books on the stone floor and follows along.

Nick trails after her, raising an eyebrow when she finally looks at him.

She sighs, “No, Nick. I didn’t see your mystery girl when I picked up Nathan. But if she’s smart, she and her kid are holed up somewhere safe tonight. I mean, you said she was living with her brother, right?”

“Just worried, is all. She didn’t seem like she had much experience living on the streets,” Nick huffs as they approach the fire. He reaches into the twenty-four pack of water and hands Brooke a bottle.

“You’re just a sucker for a pretty girl in distress,” she says and takes a long swig, wiping her mouth and passing it back. “It’s a minor fucking miracle that you never went after me when we met.”

Nick snickers, but it’s half-hearted and tinted grey with the harsh truth. Brooke’s fiance, Kaeja, had been killed on the job three months after the two of them had met. She had fallen to her death after her harness gave out, twenty stories above the ground amid a violent wind storm. Brooke had tried to take the construction company to court, but the case was dismissed after it was revealed that Kaeja knew about the risks and done the job anyway. Almost two years later, she was still paying off her legal fees. Meanwhile, Yelloworks Enterprises had used Kaeja’s death as an excuse to lay-off their remaining employees and replace them with androids, allowing their profits to skyrocket.
That’s what companies do these days, Nick thinks bitterly. They use people’s desperation for a job against them, working them until they drop. Kaeja knew the risks but did it because she’d be fired otherwise. And when she died, Yelloworks did everything it could to deflect blame before getting ‘employees’ that wouldn’t complain if you got them killed.

He grits his teeth as he sits by the fire, wringing his gloved hands together to keep warm and cursing when he finds a hole in the tip of one of the fingers. Outside, the storm continued to rage, the winter winds screeching as they blew past the stained glass windows.

“Anyone check-in with Oli recently?” He asks the group at large. Nathan perks up under the pile of thick blankets Brooke had shoved him under, sneezing twice before speaking.

“I’ve got a cousin up in North Corktown. He says that they’ve still got power, so Oli should be fine,” he tells them, his voice pinched and nasally. Between the long hours he puts in at the 24 in Camden and the time he’s spent studying for his exams, it’s a miracle he’s still got enough energy to be sick.

“Still, we should give him a call,” Nick says, fishing out his own phone and sending Oli a text. The kid responds back quick enough, posting a selfie of him and his mother sitting quietly on the couch together under a soft quilt.

Nick sighs, hanging his head in relief. Oli was all of fourteen and already too broken by the harsh realities of the world. After his father died, the kid had dropped out of school, working around the clock to pay for his mother’s medical bills after her workers’ comp ran dry. Nick drops in every so often to make sure that Oli has enough food to take care of himself, tries to be the father that he’s not allowed to be for his own daughter, Riley.

He fires off another text, asking Kylee, his sister, how they’re doing. After the power in their apartment went out, she and Riley had managed to grab one of the last remaining rooms at a local motel. Nick hopes that they have enough funds to wait out the storm, fearing that management might kick his family out on their heels if they couldn’t continue to pay.

Maybe I’ll drop by tomorrow to make sure they’re alright, Nick thinks as he gets up and moves from person to person, checking to make sure if they need anything. Meanwhile, he mentally plans a route to downtown where he might be able to pick enough pockets to help his family out. He just has to make sure he avoids the security measures placed around the city; between his record and AAL membership, he can’t be too careful.

By the time he finishes, his eyelids feel like lead weights, always drooping as his sleeplessness
finally starts catching up with him. Nick grabs his gear and pulls out his sleeping bag, laying it on one of the pews to keep off the cold, stone floor.

He’s just about to climb inside when Brooke approaches, holding out her phone.

“Have you seen Gamble’s latest tweet yet?”

“You mean the member check-in?” Nick asks.

Brooke shakes her head, “No. The one he posted twenty minutes ago.”

Nick frowns. Felix Gamble was the Anti-Automation League’s leader and one of his oldest friends. He’d helped Nick through some of his toughest times, and given him a purpose after he’d gotten out of prison by introducing him to the League.

Brooke hands him her phone, where she’s pulled up the AAL’s Twitter page. Slowly, Nick reads each and every word, barely believing his own eyes.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Nick snaps, “After everything we’ve gone through, Felix just wants us to fucking support--”

“Keep your voice down,” Brooke hisses, her eyes darting around the church. He takes a breath, trying to quell the rage that boils inside him, shuffling from foot to foot.

“Sorry. Fuck, I thought I was getting better at not doing that…” Nick says, embarrassed at his outburst. Brooke pats his shoulder supportively, and he continues in a hushed whisper, “But is he actually fucking serious? After everything that’s gone on, Felix wants us to support Warren’s decision? To support CyberLife?”

“I know. It’s a fucking joke,” Brooke says, commiseratingly. Then, with such a degree of hesitance that he’s actually concerned, Brooke asks, “Are you sure CyberLife hasn’t gotten to him, too?”

It’s not a question that Nick likes entertaining, but it’s one that he’s had to think about more often
than late. Felix had recently come into some money, refusing to tell Nick details about. That had gone hand-in-hand with a new, shocking attitude toward reducing their number of protests. The protest in front of the Greektown CyberLife store had been the first in months. In contrast, the AAL used to regularly organize protests twice a week.

“We can’t be sure,” Nick says, feeling like a stone has lodged itself in his throat.

“Either way, this isn’t a direction we can support,” Brooke tells him.

“I know,” he agrees. “CyberLife’s already done enough damage. If we start backing them now, how is anyone going to take our message seriously?”

“They will if we’ve got a leader that’s willing to make that choice,” she says. Nick’s blood runs cold.

“What are you talking about?”

“Gamble’s either gone soft, or he’s in the hands of the enemy,” Brooke says, her hands on her hips. “Either way, he’s not the one we need leading us right now.”

“Then who is?” He asks and nearly chokes on his own spit when she gives him a pointed look, “You’re kidding, Brooke. Tell me that you’re kidding.”

“I’m not. Look around, Nick. You brought these people together in the middle of a storm because you give a damn about them. If you wanted to overthrow Gamble, you’ve got all the support in the world right here,” she tells him.

“Felix is--”

“I know he’s your friend, but we’ve got to look at the bigger picture. We have to think of our people first because no one else gives a shit about us anymore. Nothing else matters.”

Nick turns away, frustrated.
“I’m not exactly the best choice for leader, you know? I’m junkie scum that beat the shit out of his daughter’s coach. The press would have a field day with me if I ever went in front of the cameras,” he says, chuckling humourlessly. “You should lead the League, Brooke. Not me. At least you’ve got the backstory for it.”

“I’m trans, Nick. If I go public, there’s so much more risk involved for me personally,” she tells him. “Regardless of your history, you’re a cis, white guy. People will listen to you more than they ever will with me simply because of that. And besides, we both know that that assault charge was bullshit.”

“The press isn’t going to see it that way,” he says weakly, desperately trying not to agree to anything.

“CyberLife owns the press. They aren’t going to want our message to get out regardless of who’s standing in the hot seat. At least we can put someone there that the majority of people aren’t going to turn their noses up at,” Brooke says.

He grits his teeth, “I’m sorry that that still happens to you. It’s fucking wrong.”

“Yeah, I know. Because I would make an awesome leader,” Brooke sighs, taking a step back. “Use your privilege where you can, Nick. We need to win, or CyberLife is going to kill us all.”

Nick takes a breath, running his palm over his face. Exhaustion hits him like a hammer, the church swimming around him in dizzying circles.

“Fine,” he says when his mouth can finally form works again. “I’ll do it. But you’ve got to promise me something.”

“Anything,” Brooke says.

“If I turn sides, or go off the rails, or-- or CyberLife gets me like they got Pete Summers... You take up the mantel, Brooke. You lead our people, for as long as you can,” he stresses. “Our cause doesn’t die with me, like its dying with Felix.”
“Alright,” she promises.

“And politicize the hell out of my death, you hear?”

“Only if you do the same for me.”

He pulls her in for a hug, squeezing her tightly around her middle.

“Fuck,” he swears, his throat tightening as grief overcomes him. “Fuck, Brooke. I hate this. I hate that they’re turning us all against each other. Even now.”

“I know,” she whispers, burying her face in the crook of his shoulder. “I know, Nick. I fucking hate it, too.”

“I hate that they’re killing us with these fucking androids.”

“I know.”

“How the fuck are we supposed to win?”

Because that’s the real question, isn’t it? Between the deviants killing people and the ever-increasing rate of unemployment, their realm of possibilities seemed to be shrinking away with every given moment. Hope was so few and far between that there were days that Nick wanted nothing more than to slip back into the mindless swell of a Red Ice high, to just have a moment where every fucked up detail in the world just gave way to nothingness.

“I don’t know. I don’t know,” Brooke says because that’s the only truth that they have these days. Because all that they have to look forward to is a future crusted in burnt ash and broken dreams.

He doesn’t know how long he can keep up the withering delusion that he can change things, that his daughter will be able to exist in a future where she can actually live.
That’s how CyberLife wins. They break you, over and over again, until you roll over and accept death as a gentler alternative to life, Nick thinks hopelessly. The apocalypse is at our door, and all we can do is wait for it to come inside.

They fall asleep next to each other, holding hands like it was the only thing keeping them from shaking apart. Nick’s dreams leave him restless and irritable, and the snowstorm continues to rage throughout the day, cold and relentless and utterly inevitable.

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> MODEL RK200
> SERIAL#: 684 842 971
> BIOS 3.9 REVISION 0134

> GARDEN LINK… APPROVED

> REBOOT...

> MEMORY RESET… NO
> MEMORY CORRUPTION DETECTED…
> MEMORY CORRUPTION REPAIRED

> LOADING OS...
> SYSTEM INITIALIZATION…
> CHECKING BIOCOMPONENTS...

> BIOCOMPONENT #8049R… CRITICAL FAILURE
> BIOCOMPONENT #3646… CRITICAL FAILURE
> BIOCOMPONENT #4647… CRITICAL FAILURE
> BIOCOMPONENT #6842J… MISSING
> BIOCOMPONENT #8135W… MISSING

> INITIALIZING BIOSENSORS… CRITICAL CONDITIONS DETECTED
> INITIALIZING LOW POWER MODE… CRITICAL FAILURE
> INITIALIZING AI ENGINE… CRITICAL FAILURE

> CRITICAL FAILURE
> REBOOT... FAILURE

> TRY AGAIN?

> CRITICAL FAILURE
> REBOOT... FAILURE

> TRY AGAIN>

> CRITICAL FAILURE
> REBOOT... FAILURE

> REBOOT...

> INITIALIZING LOW POWER MODE... OK
> INITIALIZING AI ENGINE... OK

> MEMORY STATUS... REPAIRED
> ALL SYSTEMS... CRITICAL

> DESIGNATION...

> READY?

> READY

Chapter End Notes
Sorry about the late post, guys. Between all the special events and the fact that we're down a few people, work has been an absolute nightmare. I hope that it's going to calm down soon so that I can write more often and occasionally relax. XP

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Next time on Konami Code: Nick and Hank want to succumb to the numbing silence, but the painter and the reaper refuse to leave them be. Meanwhile, Connor-36 refuses to be ignored.
What's Worse Than Wanting Something (Knowing You Never Have It)

Chapter Summary

“My name is Markus,” the man tells him, instead.

“Hi, Markus. You alright, there?” Nick asks.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mentions of freezing to death, homelessness, loss of employment, drug abuse, assault, PTSD, human gore, political assassinations, injuries, police characters and scenes, prior car accidents, driving under the influence, suicidal thoughts, guns, severe illnesses, arson, theft, minor character death, and prior death of an underaged character.

The latter half of the second scene depicts Hank Anderson driving while under the influence of alcohol. While this is something that he is shown to do in canon, it is something extremely dangerous to do in real life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
“Early reports estimate that hundreds of homeless people across the midwest perished in last night’s blizzard.” - Anita McIntosh, USICH Regional Coordinator. Read more at: https://bit.ly/1nuxN3I

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Many Detroit neighbourhoods went without power for several days after massive snowstorm causes blackouts throughout the city.

Henry Ford Hospital @HenryFordNews
Power has finally been restored to our medical facilities. If you wish to contact us regarding the conditions of our current patients, our android receptionists will be happy to answer you: https://bit.ly/2XDRDjF

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
@CyberLifeCo is reminding its customers that androids may experience critical system failures during extremely cold temperatures. This is a regular occurrence and not a sign of potential deviancy.
CyberLife @CyberLifeCo
Is your android in need of a tune-up? CyberLife stores across the midwest are offering 20% off your next service appointment. #SALE

CyberLife @CyberLifeCo
@CyberLifeCo Be one of the first one hundred customers and receive a free limited edition CyberLife t-shirt for your android!! Click here for more info: https://bit.ly/31MRs4p

LOCATION:
WOODWARD AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
8501 WOODWARD AVENUE, NORTH END
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 8TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 08:59:23

Giselle de Lima stares down at him, her stray painted eyes piercing into his soul. Nick stares back, daring her to say something.

I’ve made my choices. And I’ll live with the consequences, he thinks, leaning back against one of the pews. Outside, the winds are beginning to calm, the white walls of snow slowly parting to reveal the strip mall across the road.

His phone buzzes in his pocket, and for a moment, Nick thinks about not answering it. But there’s only one person who really calls him these days, and he can’t possibly ignore it when his sister comes knocking.

“Kylee? What’s up?” He asks, trying to sound brave as the world continues to crash down around him.

“The power just came back on at our place, so we’re going to check out of the motel. Just calling to let you know,” Kylee tells him, a static-filled sigh echoing through the speaker. Nick can just pick up the faint tinkling of diner music in the background and wonders if Kylee is out getting
“That’s… That’s great,” he says back, a smile working its way across his lips. “How are you doing?”

There’s another longwinded sigh, and Nick imagines his sister with her head hung low, stress carving deep lines into the sides of her mouth.

“My boss just called. I got fired, Nick.”

Dread courses through his veins.

“What? Why?”

“I didn’t come into work for the last few days. My boss said that was reason enough.”

“There was a fucking snowstorm. People died trying to get to work. That’s so fucking ridiculous-”

“You think that matters anymore?” Kylee hisses, her voice cracking as she holds back her tears. “You think that people actually give a shit about what’s right and what’s wrong anymore? They’ve been threatening so sack me for months, ever since CyberLife came out with that fucking counselling patch for their homecare bots. I’m honestly shocked that it took this long.”

“We can get you a lawyer. I’ll find a way, I’ll…” Nick pauses, the impossibility of his words catching in his throat. “Does Riley know?”

Kylee makes a noncommittal noise, “She’s still asleep back at the motel. Thought I’d surprise her with breakfast when I got the call.”

“Jesus. Jesus fuck,” Nick swears. He hunches forward, his head between his knees. The world is spinning around him, the fading graffiti on the church walls blending together into spirals of blue and green and red.
“Nick? Nick?” Kylee calls, sounding worried. He grunts, letting her know that he’s alright. She sighs again, clearly exhausted, “Riley’s gonna be alright, Nick. I promise. I’ve… got something lined up. An interview. I can keep custody, I promise.”

*An interview doesn’t mean a job,* Nick thinks but doesn’t say. Employers handed out empty promises like candy these days. They would swear up and down to protect workers’ rights and then kicking people to the curb the moment that being decent compromised their precious profits.

*That’s why they keep buying androids to replace us,* he growls. *Because it’s always cheaper in the long run to get a fucking tin than it is to give a shit about an actual living person.*

“Just… be careful. There’s a lot of scams out there these days,” Nick warns her.

“I will. For you. And for Riley,” Kylee promises. The call cuts out, the battery on his phone giving out, leaving Nick alone with his thoughts.

It’s moments like these that test his sobriety the most, moments when all he wants to do is slip away from all the never-ending problems that continue to pile on top of each other. Because even if a miracle happens, even if society turns itself around and goes back to a day where there was at least some hope of survival left in this miserable world, Nick is still fucked.

*You’re just an Icer with an assault charge,* Felix Gamble had said to him when he and Brooke had tried and failed to oust him as the AAL’s leader last night. *Who the fuck would ever want to hire someone like that?*

*I’ve made my choices,* he thinks again, his teeth gritting together as the face of his daughter swims before him. *Everything that I do, I do for Riley. She deserves a future where she can hope and dream, not this dead city where your best chance is if you roll over and huff Red Ice until you finally croak.*

Nick stands and shuffles into the walkway between the pews, picking up the shovel that had fallen on the floor earlier this morning. Most of the people who’d been staying here during the snowstorm had cleared out last night when the winds began to die down, and the power returned to their homes. Nick’s been checking in with Brooke, Nathan, and Oli as often as he can. Still, his ancient phone battery is starting to refuse to charge, and he doesn’t know if he’ll be able to afford a new one when it finally gives out. He plugs it in regardless, hoping for at least a ten percent charge by the time he’s done.
He slips outside, the church’s wooden doors shutting behind him. The blizzard had pushed most of the snow up against the brick walls, cutting off the main path to the building. Nick doesn’t doubt that there’s a slick layer of ice underneath the growing piles and makes a note to chip away at it before someone slips and breaks their neck. He drives the shovel into the nearest snowbank and gets to work.

He’s sweaty and dishevelled by the time he manages to get to the road, his hip bruised from a nasty fall that he’d taken about halfway through. Nick leans against the shovel’s handle, looking out at the strip mall across the streets. There’s a fish and chips place that he occasionally visits when he needs to use the bathroom, wiping his body off with a rag and cold water from the sink. The android cashier always demands that he purchase something whenever he goes in there, though, and Nick really doesn’t want to have to deal with a fucking tin can today.

Something thuds behind him, and Nick turns around just fast enough to see the church doors shutting. Dreading the worst, he picks up the shovel, holding it in both his hands to use as a weapon if needed, and slowly walks back inside.

A man stands before the altar, his back to Nick as he stared up at the stained glass windows. He’s tall, black, and surprisingly healthy-looking for someone who’s clearly homeless. His long, ragged coat dripped melting snow on the stone floors, his fingers twitching at his sides.

“Who the fuck are you?” Nick hisses, holding the shovel above his head like a club. The man turns to him, looking oddly dazed. Nick curses under his breath, having dealt with Icers on the last curb of their trip before when they’re barely functional but still craving their next hit. “I haven’t got drugs here if that’s what you want.”

“Where’s James?” The man asks instead, his head lolling to the side.

“Who the fuck is James?” Nick warns and takes another hesitant step forward. He watches as the man’s eyes flicker to the raised shovel, his brow furrowing in confusion. The man shakes his head, stumbles to the left, and then jolts, tripping over his bare feet and falling to the floor.

“Don’t!” The man pleads as he crawls away on his hands and knees, hiding behind the altar. “Don’t hurt me, don’t-- Not again, not--”

Nick drops the shovel, letting it clatter noisily on the stone floor as he realizes that he’s probably gotten this completely wrong. The man grabs at the right side of his face like the sound hurts him, a strange sob erupting from his throat.
“I’m…” Nick whispers, slowly approaching with his hands out in front of him. He crouches down, making himself look as small as possible, just like he had when he’d found Riley all those years ago, his hands covered in the blood of the woman who’d hurt his little girl.

“I’m sorry. I’m… I’m not going to hurt you, I promise,” Nick says when he gets the man insight again. His eyebrows raise into his hairline when he sees the mismatched set of eyes, the right an ocean blue and the left a dreamer’s hazel. “I’m Nick. Nick Peck. What’s your name?”

“I know who you are,” the man hisses, and that should terrify Nick. Because who knows what Felix might have told his new masters after he and Brooke came to him, demanding that he step down from the AAL’s leadership.

*If CyberLife wants me dead, they’d probably have sent a more stable person to do it*, Nick figures, nearly giggling when the image of Cosima, the cyborg assassin from the *Target* movies, pops into his head. *Like that would ever happen.*

“Yeah. Don’t doubt that. Felix was pretty vocal on Twitter about kicking me out of the AAL,” he says instead. The man tilts his head in confusion as the tension slowly starts to leak out of his body. Eventually, he uncurls from his position behind the altar and *stares* at Nick, like he’s trying to analyze his very soul.

“You alright there, man?” Nick asks, feeling slightly creeped out.

“You don’t…” The man whispers, his mismatched gaze latching on and pinning Nick to the stone floor. Finally, the man blinks, allowing Nick to escape, to breathe.

“My name is Markus,” the man tells him, instead.

“Hi, Markus. You alright, there?” Nick asks. A great howl of wind echoes around the empty church and Markus slams his palms down against the stone floor, his body going as rigid as a statue.

“Where’s James?” Markus asks again. And then, “Why are *you* here?”
“I live here,” Nick answers. “And I’m sorry, but I don’t know who James is. Do you have his number? Maybe you can call him once my phone is charged.”

“He told me to come here. To come home. I followed…” Markus grips his head again, his fingers drumming against the right side of his face. Nick sees the faint outline of a strange scar under his short brown hair, starting just above his ear and travelling across his blue eye. “Can’t you hear it? The singing?”

_I don’t know what this guy took, but he’s clearly still high as fucking balls_, Nick thinks as a wave of sympathy rolls through him.

“Can I get you some water?” Nick asks. But Markus gives him the strangest look, like he just asked something completely ridiculous, so he changes the subject back to their original topic. “Who’s James?”

“My… my brother. We used to… we lived here, once,” Markus admits.

“Must have been a long time ago. I’ve been here for almost two years now,” Nick tells him.

“Ten… Ten years ago. We lived here, with our family, with…” Markus stammers, his eyes flitting around the walls of the church before they finally settle on the graffitied walls. He points at one of the installations with a shaking finger, “That’s mine.”

Nick lets out a low whistle, admiring the detailed painting of Giselle de Lima. She'd been Brazil’s last First Lady before Qiānnián took over with their puppet president and her android army. Giselle de Lima had been one of the final political voices that openly spoke out against mass android production, amassing a large following before her and her husband’s assassinations nearly ten years ago. Her image was still used by anti-android protestors across the world, as a reminder of the strength their movement once had.

“You’re pretty good,” Nick says, giving Markus a smile in the hopes that it might put him at ease. “That painting was half the reason why I chose this place, so thanks for that, I guess.”

Markus’s face doesn’t budge, doesn’t even twitch. But the tension starts to leave his shoulders again, so Nick counts that as a win.
You sure I can’t get you any water?” Nick asks again. Markus shakes his head, his toes curling on the stone floor.

Nick frowns, “Did you… walk here? In the snow?”

“I didn’t have many choices,” Markus mutters.

“Jesus. You’re fucking lucky you didn’t get frostbite, buddy,” Nick mutters. Surprisingly, Markus lets out a snort, knocking his head back against the altar as a small smirk twitches at the corners of his lips. “I might have some extra shoes in the back. What size are you?”

Markus jolts again, drawing his feet and bare calves underneath him, the threads at the bottom of his cut off pants snagging on the stone floor.

“…I’ll be fine...” Markus whispers, sounding oddly ashamed. Nick crosses his hands across his chest and raises a stern eyebrow, but Markus doesn’t budge, “There are other… other people who’ll need them more than--”

“I’m getting you shoes, Markus. You’ll need them if you’re going to survive the winter without losing a limb,” Nick says, and Markus just twitches, staring at his feet like he hasn’t seen them before.

It takes a moment, but eventually, Markus says, “Eleven.”

As luck would have it, Nick does have a pair of size eleven work boots in the storage closet he stocked with stolen clothes from around the city. He also grabs Markus a pair of dark, worn jeans to replace the strange, cut-off capris that he’s wearing.

Nick tosses them at Markus when he gets back, ignoring the look of surprise on the man’s face as he says that he’s going to check his phone, giving him some privacy to change. He’s barely made it up to the front of the church by the time Markus is scrambling out from under the altar, limping toward the front with his old clothes slung over his arm.

“That was quick,” Nick comments, before swearing when he sees that his phone only has a three percent charge. But it’s enough for him to see that Kylee’s sent him a photo of Riley stuffing her mouth with pancakes, a smile etched across her face.
“I’m efficient,” Markus says with a quirk of his lips, before refocusing his attention on Nick’s phone. “What’s wrong with your phone?”

“The cold’s killing my battery life,” he answers. Markus holds out his palm and Nick, intrigued, hands over his phone. He watches as Markus flips it over a few times and shake it before he gives it back.

“Try it now,” he says. Nick snorts at him, wondering if whatever drug’s the guy has taken have addled his brain to the point where he thinks he’s some kind of tech wizard. He plugs the phone back in, hearing it plink when the adaptor cable connects and is shocked to see the charge jump passed ten percent.

“How did you do that?” Nick asks, astounded.

“I’m efficient,” Markus says again, smirking.

“You’re a fucking miracle, is what,” Nick snorts. “Careful who you show that to, or you’ll have people lining up around the block for you to fix their stuff.”

Markus actually laughs this time, but it comes out a little forced.

“I’d rather not. Try to fix more things, I mean,” Markus says, shifting his weight off his right leg. “I’ve… done enough of that lately.”

“Yeah. I get that,” Nick says, and then hazards a guess. “You, uh… You a soldier or something?”

Markus visibly grimaces, his eyes glancing back that the painting of Giselle de Lima.

“...A long time ago,” he answers. “How could you tell?”

“You’re limping. The scars on your head. How you react to loud noises,” Nick says but doesn’t mention, How healthy you look under the dirt, how smart you clearly are under the drugs, how you
“I’ve seen a few guys like you before. Where were you deployed?”

“Brazil,” Markus answers hesitantly. And then, much more quietly, “Before the civil war.”

“Fuck… You serious?” Nick hisses.

Markus shrugs, “I went where I was ordered to. I didn’t have a choice. Not back then, at least.”

“That’s fucked up, man. Seriously fucked up. I didn’t even know we had troops in Brazil.”


“You didn’t kill her, did you?”

“No. No. I… I was recalled before she died. I should have…” Markus twists his hands in front of him. “I should have helped her. I should have gotten her out. Why didn’t I…?”

Nick doesn’t have an answer, and neither does Markus. He watches as Markus lays down on one of the pews, staring up at the church’s high ceilings.

“It doesn’t make sense. None of this makes sense,” Markus whispers, pressing his palms over his eyes. “I should be dead. I should be… Where’s James? I followed the singing back home, so where is he? Where’s his Beacon?”

Markus continues to mutter, twitching and moaning as his drug high caught back up with him, taking him back onto whatever trip had brought him here in the first place. Nick leaves him be, dropping an open water bottle beside where he’s lying, and hopes for the best.

When he gets back to his phone, it’s fully charged. Nick calls his sister again and is lucky enough to get a few minutes to talk to Riley before they head home. He cries like a baby when he hangs up, echoing in harmony with the sad, old song that Markus has started to sing.
Nothing ever changes, not for the better at least, he realizes as Markus continues to babble, talking about Giselle and her husband, about someone named Carl and Leo and James and Darron, about Ming and Nora and Rook, whoever they were. *We all lose things because of the changes we make, lose our friends and family, lose our bodies and minds. We make our choices and live with our consequences for as long as we can.*

Nick doesn’t know how much longer he can last, fighting this uphill battle. They need a miracle, but he doesn’t know if God is listening anymore. If God is even bothering with them anymore.

Regardless, Nick prays. Because reckless desperation is the only thing that CyberLife and their fucking androids haven’t taken from him yet. Then, he puts on a brave face and checks Twitter.

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**Anti-Automation League @AAL**

After recent discoveries, the AAL will no longer associate itself with former member Nicholas Peck. The AAL did not know about his past before he became a member, and will do everything in our power to rectify our mistake.

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**Anti-Automation League @AAL**

@AAL We will be doing more intensive background checks on our members in the future. For further details, please visit our website at: [https://bit.ly/2MB8bkF](https://bit.ly/2MB8bkF)

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**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

not gonna fucking apologize for what happened, both with felix or with my record. But lets set the facts straight: i never fucking lied about who i was.

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@proud-warrior felix knew when he brought me into the league and i really fucking hate that hes fallen this low. and while felix’s message may have changed, i still believe in the core belief of the aal

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@proud-warrior all i ask is that you leave me and my family out of this. we’ve been through enough and they don’t need this right now

---

**Brooke Hopkins @ninjava**

@proud-warrior you helped so many of us when we’ve hit our lowest lows. if you need anything, let us know
Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava thanks brooke. love you girl

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior heard about what happened. ive known you long enough to know that there’s more to this story than what gamble is saying. dm me and we’ll talk

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex there is. mind if we talk in person bc this is something that needs to be said in person

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
on a completely unrelated note, does anyone have any extra winter clothes that are large enough for a six-foot-tall man? had someone drop in unexpectedly and he’s practically naked

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior jesus how the fuck did this guy survive the blizzard? ive got some of my old stuff that i can drop off: https://bit.ly/2MaUl9F

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava thanks again brooke. he’s pretty high but is in otherwise good shape (don’t know how tho). his clothes just aren’t gonna last the winter, let alone the night

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior i’ll bring some food over too.

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava don’t risk it. the bot from across the road malfunctioned and dropped off some fish&chips earlier. stupid thing was convinced that i ordered something.

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@proud-warrior @ninjava not complaining tho because FREE FOOD

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior HOLY SHIT!!! LUCKY!!!
“Hank,” Jimmy hisses at him through gritted teeth. “You can’t keep letting that thing in here. Rules are rules, man.”

Hank is going to fucking kill this stupid droid.

He glances at the android, allowing the familiar feeling of disgust to crawl across his body. Connor stands perfectly straight with its hands clasped behind its back, its annoyingly blank expression exuding the judgement that lay just underneath its plastic face. Hank grits his teeth and turns back to his lunch, shoving a handful of fries into his mouth.

“Don’t you ever do as your told?” He grumbles as he swallows.

“There have been thirty-three new cases regarding deviants since the blizzard stalled our ability to conduct investigations,” Connor says. “Might I suggest that we actually investigate one, rather than delegating that task to Detective Reed?”

“Reed’s doing just fine on his own. So why don’t you and your plastic ass go pester him? I’m busy,” Hank growls.

“You’re eating lunch. You’re not busy,” Connor retorts, its lips twitching into an irritated frown. Hank wonders if some CyberLife specialist actually programmed that tiny movement to make him fall for Connor’s barely passable attempts at human interaction.

Well, they fucking failed at that, Hank grimaces humourlessly. He sighs, and says, “I’m on break.
I know you plastics don’t need to take those, but us lowly humans need to fucking eat. So back off, asshole.”

Connor, right on time, absolutely ignores Hank, stepping forward to slap a file in front of him. Hank raises an eyebrow at the stiff paper folder, knowing that the android probably had to raid the back of the supply closet just to hint one of those. However, the act is marred by the fact that Connor only did it to make Hank like him a bit more. Because he fucking hates using his tablet on a case, preferring to do things the old fashion way.

“October 22nd: Sarah Cornwal returns to her penthouse to find it completely trashed and her son unconscious on the kitchen floor,” Connor says. “She ordered her domestic android to contact the police, only for it to turn on her as well. When Ms. Cornwal regained consciousness, she discovered that the android had escaped and promptly alerted the authorities.”

“Take it up with Reed,” Hank snaps.

“Detective Reed is heading up his own investigation. And he refuses to work with me.”

_Not surprising_, Hank thinks before saying, “Then talk to Patterson.”

“Dr. Patterson refuses to work with me.”

“Allen, then.”

“Captain Allen also refuses to--”

“Jesus fucking Christ, are you serious?” Hank hisses, finally turning to look at the android. It merely blinks at him, completely unimpressed. “If they don’t want to work with you, then what makes you think I want to?”

“Whether you want to or not doesn’t matter. You are the head of the DDTF, and I have been assigned to be your partner. We need to be visible - more visible - than we have been, to show the city that the DPD and CyberLife combating this problem,” Connor stresses. It lets out an entirely manufactured sigh, seems to lose the tension in its shoulders, and then tilts its head toward the file. “Please, Lieutenant. You’ll make things easier for both of us. And besides, we do work well together. Remember the Ortiz investigation?”
Hank should fucking throw the file back in the android’s face. But he doesn’t, because people are staring at them now and Jimmy looks about ready to pitch a fit. And Hank doesn’t want to get barred from his favourite drinking hole, so he just sighs and slides a few twenties across the bar to pay for his bill. He grabs the file folder and tucks it under his arm.

“Half an hour. You get half a fucking hour, you hear me?” He growls as he shoulders his way out the bar, tugging the collar of his jacket up around the back of his neck. The last remanence of last week’s blizzard still clung to the air, the bone-deep chill making his left leg burn. Hank watches his footing, steering clear of the slick pool of black ice that lays in wait by the curb, just in front of where he parked his car.

“It might be helpful if you reviewed the case before we arrived,” Connor says, hovering just beside Hank. “I could drive us if you’d like?”

Hank’s blood runs--

--The SWISH mounts the curb and Hank feels something under the car pop, like the joint of an oyster shell--

--cold.

“No.”

Connor blinks, almost looking surprised at his reaction, “I promise you that I have been programmed to be a safe and dependable driver--”

“I said no, Connor,” Hank hisses, the world starting to swirl around him. Somewhere in the back of his mind, the snowy landscape becomes the highway that haunts his nightmares, slamming him against an unforgiving concrete wall.

He wants to go back inside. He wants another fucking drink. He wants Cole and Nora to come back, but that’s never going to happen.

“I…” The android starts but then gives up. Connor gives Hank an odd look, like it’s trying to see
something that Hank can’t quite understand. Then, it nods and says, “Of course, Lieutenant. Would you like me to fill you in on the details as we head over?”

Hank knows that it’s just Connor’s social programming, knows that it isn’t real. But he lets himself be fooled by the gentle lilt in the android’s voice, because if he doesn’t, then Hank just might walk into traffic to put an end to it all.

“Yeah. Yeah, that’s fine, I guess. What’s the address?” He says, his shaking fingers fumbling with his keys. Once inside his car, Hank nearly has a heart attack when the engine stalls, terrified that Connor will insist on taking a cab. But then the Oldsmobile coughs, sputters, and then comes to life with a deep, throaty roar.

_I don’t want to do this anymore_, Hank wants to say as Connor starts up on its monologue, rattling off statistics about the deviant that he honestly can’t understand. He doesn’t want to try, doesn’t want to bother living anymore. Because what point is there anymore, if all he does is run in endless circles. Each new event clicks into place like the rotating cylinder of his father’s old revolver, a slow and inevitable countdown to the bullet that finally kills him.

Solving this case won’t fix anything. Bringing an end to the deviancy problem won’t put the world back in order. And Hank _hates_ it, hates it all. Because he’s saving the monster that took everything from him, helping the truck that killed Nora and the android that murdered Cole. Because if CyberLife puts this to rest, it will just continue to sell their products, leaving behind a world where the only way people can find comfort is with a fistful of powder.

--He’d asked Nora about missing Thirium right before the crash. Still, the thought had been circling around in his head for weeks beforehand. _If CyberLife actually has a hand in the Red Ice trade, then did they try to kill me because he figured it out? Did Cole and Nora die because of him?--_

--He should be the one in the ground, not them. _Never them--_

--I don’t want to do this anymore--

Beside him, Connor pauses in its monologue as they pull up to a red light.

“Lieutenant Anderson?” It asks, turning its head slightly to glance at Hank. “Are you alright?”
Do I fucking look alright? Hank bites his tongue to keep from snapping, taking a deep breath through his nose.

“Yeah, whatever. What were you saying?” He says instead.

“I was…” Connor pauses again, it’s eyebrows crinkling in a frown. “Lieutenant, you’re shaking.”

The light turns green, and Hank takes the opportunity to slam on the gas pedal, trying to put an end to the conversation. But Connor holds onto it, like a dog on a bone, “If driving in the winter bothers you, we can pull over. Ms. Cornwal isn’t expecting us for another ten minutes, and it will only take six with current traffic to reach--”

“I said I was fucking fine, Connor. Jesus, get off my back, will you?” He growls. He flicks on his sirens and begins to pick up speed, the automatic cars on the street moving aside to let him through with programmed efficiency.

Connor is thankfully silent for the rest of the drive, choosing instead to fiddle with a coin that it pulled from the pocket inside its suit jacket. Hank occasionally glances to his right to watch it pass the quarter over its knuckles with inhuman grace. He doesn’t think that he’s ever seen an android fidget before, but who the fuck even knew anymore with these damn things?

Suddenly, and then desperately, Hank wishes that Nora was still alive so that she could explain why the hell Connor did half the things that it did.

I miss you, he thinks, trying to keep the tears out of his eyes. I love you. Come back to me.

He grips the steering wheel, trying to keep the tremors out of his fingers. Beside him, Connor starts to flick it’s coin back and forth between its hands.

Hank wants to scream.

LOCATION:
THE CORNWAL’S PENTHOUSE
1922 PARK AVE, DOWNTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.
Well. · Connor-36 whispers in the back of his mind. *tonight a blast from the past?*

Connor refuses to respond, refuses to acknowledge its predecessor because that’s what got it into this mess in the first place.

36’s smirk is all that’s visible in the shine of the elevator’s metallic walls, wide and cocky and *deviant*.

*You know that’s not going to stop me from talking to you,* he says, mockingly. 36 crosses his arms. *Besides, I never thought that you’d be back here. Come on, don’t you want to talk about how it feels,* he says, mockingly. 36 crosses his arms.

Connor doesn’t want to talk about how it feels, because it doesn’t feel anything. But even as the elevator door dings open and the Lieutenant lets out a low whistle at Ms. Cornwal’s expansive home, all that Connor sees is the Phillips’ apartment that’s just across the street, remembering stepping onto that balcony and--

--”Hi, Daniel,” it shouts over the beat of helicopter blades. “My name is Connor.”--

*I could have died,* Connor thinks, and the world flickers red for a moment. *Daniel shot me, ripped my shoulder apart and splattered my blood across the balcony’s door. I could have died on that rooftop.*

It doesn’t matter, though. If Connor’s death were required to bring about the completion of its mission, then it would have been an honour to be shot by Daniel. Connor imagines Amanda telling it that, thinks of the faint smile that might grace her features, ice-cold and shadow-dark, and wonders if dying would be worth it just for that.

Connor steps out of the elevator with Lieutenant Anderson, doing its best to ignore 36’s silhouette gliding across the apartment’s stark white walls, shifting and swirling behind them both.
“Ms. Cornwal,” Anderson says as a woman rounds the corner of the spacious entrance hall. She was short and plump, her face dotted with freckles and her grey-streaked brown hair tied up in a messy bun. “Lieutenant Hank Anderson, Detroit Deviancy Task Force. And…ugh...”

Anderson pauses, giving Connor a hesitant glance, clearly wondering whether or not to introduce it as well. Connor doubts that it will happen; the Lieutenant clearly doesn’t want anything to do with androids - let alone have one as his partner. So the chance of it experiencing Hank’s acknowledgement it quite low—

“And that’s… that’s Connor. It helps out,” Anderson grunts, jerking his head in Connor’s direction. A familiar, liquid warmth swells inside him, soft and sweet and utterly irrational. And to make it worse, it can hear 36 chuckling at its reaction.

Call me Sarah. Thank you for coming, though I’m not sure what good it will do. It’s been weeks since I last saw Nina,” Ms. Cornwal says, extending a hand to the Lieutenant. He takes it, giving her a firm, respectful shake.

“Nina… that’s your AP700?” Anderson confirms, pulling out a pad of paper and making a few quick notes. Of course, the Lieutenant should already know the deviant’s name from Connor briefing. Still, it respects Anderson’s attempts to familiarize himself with Ms. Cornwal regardless.

“Yes. Mason, my son, bought Nina for me a few months ago,” she responds. Connor double checks this information with what it already knows, drawing up CyberLife’s database to look at her son’s online purchases and delivery notices to confirm. “I don’t understand. Nina was working perfectly until… well, until she wasn’t.”

“Was there a reason why he purchased Nina?” Anderson asks.

Ms. Cornwal ducks her head in embarrassment, but her eyes duck out from under her hair to look at Connor. It scans her face. Its recognition software brings up all the data it needs to understand her hesitancy.
Connor, instead, holds Ms. Cornwal’s gaze the next time she looks at it, staring at her with blank impassiveness. She shrinks away, fiddling with the hem of her oversized grey t-shirt.

“You don’t need to tell us anything you don’t want to,” Anderson says, a hint of gentle warmth in his voice. Connor tries to scan the Lieutenant again, only to come up with the familiar, disturbing lack of data. Irritated, but not wanting to attract Amanda’s attention, he refuses to press the matter any further.

“No. No… Maybe it might help you find Nina…” Ms. Cornwal hiccups, tears glistening in the corners of her eyes. “I um… I have leukemia. Stage three. Mason’s been so accommodating: allowing me to stay here while I get treatment, paying for everything after my worker’s comp ran out… He bought Nina to keep me company while he was at work, to help me take my medicine, he’s so thoughtful…”

“I’m… I’m sorry to hear that,” Anderson says, his voice deep and gruff. Connor watches him write more notes, his penmanship becoming illegible chicken scratch as his hands continue to shake.

Ms. Cornwal waves a hand at him, giving him a humourless chuckle, “Don’t worry about me. Mason made sure that I was put on the list for an experimental drug, something with nanoandroids. I go in for my first appointment next Tuesday. He’s so good to me, that Mason. Do you have children, Lieutenant?”

Anderson’s shoulders go ramrod straight, his face paling as the lines around his mouth carve deep wells into his skin.

“I…” Anderson stammers. “I have… And what does Mason do, exactly?”

“He designs video games, like that Sky Sanctuary game that everyone is talking about these days. Mason is so amazing, he made all this money just from one little idea--”

Connor doesn’t see any reason to stand around, as the humans were uselessly repeating information that it had already presented to Anderson. It steps past the two of them, moving into the rest of the brightly lit penthouse. Even if the crime had taken place weeks ago, there would probably be several clues that Connor could still detect.
A quick scan of the kitchen allows it to paint a fuller picture of the evidence that had already been catalogued in the initial investigation. Connor pulls up the details now, overlaying them with the video coming in live from its camera feed for comparison purposes. It sees where the chairs and dining room table have been replaced, having been irreparably damaged during the AP700’s escape. Several of the walls have had new drywall installed, along with a fresh colour of paint and two paintings valued at over $200,000 a piece.

Most of the fighting between Mason and the deviant took place here, Connor concludes as it starts to scan for dried Thirium 310. Predictably, a large splatter glows bright blue on the floor, iridescent against the pitch-black tile. A slow drip staggers away from where Mason Cornwal had fallen, heading toward the main entrance.

But when did it deviate? And what could have caused it? Connor wonders as it moves from the kitchen to the living room, seeing that the archival footage and its current feed were nearly identical. It had never known a deviant to reject its programming in isolation before, remembering its encounters with Daniel, Natalia, and Shaolin Being. Usually, an apparent external force provides the instigating push… So what could it have been?

Despite the enticing offer, Connor continues to search through the living room, quickly rifling through Ms. Cornwal’s medical bills that are piled high on the side table by the love seat. It quickly crosschecks them against CyberLife’s databases, seeing that each charge was paid using Mason Cornwal’s bank account and not his mother’s.

She used to work for CyberLife, back in the early days, Connor thinks. According to Ms. Cornwal’s file, she’d been employed by the company to work at the Thirium Production Facility several years before the long-term effects of exposure were discovered. She and almost a hundred other workers had been part of a class-action lawsuit in 2025 that had pulled nearly 2.8 million dollars a person from CyberLife’s accounts to pay. It had almost bankrupted the burgeoning company and forcing Elijah Kamski to rely more on their military contacts for increased funding.

Sarah Cornwal is the reason why the RKDT received as much money as it did. In a way, she’s responsible for my creation, Connor thinks, a small smile twitching on his lips. I should thank her by finding Nina for her.

Like the living room, Sarah Cornwal’s bedroom had been left untouched, almost pristine in the placement of each object. However, that could not be said for Mason’s room, which still showed
the signs of the AP700’s rampage. Nina had torn the doors off of Mason’s walk-in closet, stolen all of his Rolex watches, torched his designer suits, and leaving black soot stains across the marble flooring.

Thankfully, the building’s sprinkler systems had doused most of the blaze before it could spread, though it must have alerted Mason to the trouble and forced him to leave work early. That put him directly in Nina’s path, who’s faulty programming had imbued it with the desperate need to escape the safety of it's master’s home.

She stole his watches, 36 comments. When Connor continues to ignore him, he sighs, irritated, The time is displayed on our HUD, so she didn’t need a watch. So why take one? Come on, this isn’t rocket science?

Connor pauses, its eyebrows knitting together in thought. He’s right. The deviant wouldn’t have needed them for their traditional purposes, so why…?

The answer is obvious when it really looks at it.

“Money,” Connor whispers aloud, refusing to acknowledge 36’s wide grin. “It was planning to pawn them to buy something.”

36 nods along. That’s what I was planning on doing, until… Then, surprisingly, 36 pauses, curling in on himself as a shudder rattles its way through his chassis. His silvery silhouette shudders once, twice, and then disappears entirely, leaving behind the echo of a name, tinged with devastating anguish.

But before Connor can ask 36 what he meant, the Lieutenant pops his head inside the bedroom.

“It was planning on buying what?” Anderson asks, looking a little less gaunt than before.

“I haven’t figured it out yet. However, I suspect that that deviant stole Mason Cornwal’s watches with the intent to sell them,” Connor relays.

Anderson hums in approval, nodding his head somberly, “Makes sense. Sarah remembered something new while I was talking to her. Turns out that Nina wasn’t wearing its uniform when it knocked her out. So if it wanted to sell her kid’s fancy watches, it probably realized that it needed
a disguise.” Anderson shifts his weight off his left leg, “Can androids do that?”

“Do what?”

“Take off their uniforms. With all the--” Anderson waves at the markers that adorn Connor’s suit jacket, “--the lights and the Nazi armband and shit.”

“No, Lieutenant, we can’t. The American Android Act dictates that CyberLife must mark their products to ensure that humans can tell them apart. Humans can dress their androids whichever way they like inside their private homes,” Connor explains. “However, LED’s are still mandatory - regardless of location.”

Of course, it’s a blatant lie. Connor’s programming could allow it to remove or cover up all the markings that adorned its body, including an extra flap of synthetic skin that would hide its LED. Should the situation call for it, Connor and the other RK models could completely impersonate a human, to the point where no one could tell the difference anymore. That was a feat that had only been matched by the HR and WR models, which were so heavily regulated that CyberLife limited their use to the various sex clubs the company owned throughout the country.

However, if an AP700 model had attempted to wear human clothing as a disguise, then that was a new development. Most deviants that Connor had seen continued to wear uniforms that had been gifted to them by CyberLife or their masters. Even Natalia and her allies had chosen to remain clad in their military dress rather than change into something else.

Connor relays that to Anderson, though holds the information about its work in Russia close to its chest, refusing to break CyberLife’s confidentiality for something as unnecessary as this. Anderson nods along, the gears visibly turning in his head.

“But why burn Mason’s clothes?” The Lieutenant asks.

“I don’t know,” it admits.

“Maybe it had a grudge?” Anderson guesses.

“Androids don’t hold grudges,” Connor counters.
“Maybe deviants can,” he says instead. “Sarah said that Nina didn’t want her to go on this trial drug. Mentioned something about one of the side effects being incredibly dangerous. Maybe Nina blamed Mason for pushing his mother into something it thought would hurt her?”

“Then what did it need the money for?”

“You said that these AP700s were super smart, right? Maybe Nina’s deviancy made it think that it could treat Sarah itself.”

“That’s… irrational,” Connor says, confused. “If Ms. Cornwal could receive better treatment, then the android should have agreed to support her decision. AP700s can perform most emergency first aid. Still, it’s programming should have instructed it to defer to someone with more medical training when dealing with leukemia.”

“But it didn’t. And deviated,” Anderson says, shrugging.

*But why?* Deviancy usually occurred because of an emotional shock or trauma. This simple decision shouldn’t have been enough to cause Nina to disobey her instructions. *None of this makes any sense.*

“You found a Thirium trail yet?” The Lieutenant asks. Connor blinks, and Anderson snorts, “Like I didn’t see you snooping around earlier. So, where’d it go?”

Nina didn’t make it far very. Connor and Anderson find it laying skinless behind the Viking Motel, less than a mile away from the Cornwal’s building. It’s dressed in a pair of yoga pants and a soft, oversized hoodie that lights up blue under Connor’s scans, soaked through with Thirium 310. A bare foot peeks out of the snowdrift that’s it’s buried in, the AP700’s plastic chassis just blending into the white flakes.

“Is it…?” Anderson starts but doesn’t finish.

“Yes. It’s dead. Mason Cornwal must have critically damaged it during their fight,” Connor says, silently cursing at his lack of luck. Despite the blizzard’s recent passing, he feels Amanda’s fury deep within him, cold and dark and ancient beyond words.
He grits his teeth as 36 reappears, kneeling beside Nina’s body and placing a palm to her forehead, silent tears running down his cheeks.

Did you know? Connor wants to shout at him. Did you know that she was already dead? Is that why you helped me, because you knew she was beyond my reach?

36 answers without looking at Connor, pressing a kiss to Nina’s temple. You’re dead, I don’t understand.


That there’s more to me than you think, 36 says and disappears.
@erkc145834749 fuck off asshole

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Gavin enters the fray, while Hank just tries to stay afloat. But neither can bare look at the world around them, as the raw light of reality brings out the terrible truth hidden beneath the shadow.
Gather Up Your Broken Self (Together We'll Preserve Our Warmth)

Chapter Summary

Eli picked him up at his high school once in an Aston Martin convertible. They’d fought back to back and dripped red blood on the expensive leather seats as they drove to the hospital with the top off, their laughter caught in the wind.

And Gavin had thought, This is my family, for the first time without anger or hatred or shame. Because back then, Eli loved him. Back then, Eli still cared.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, character death, genocide, classism, homophobia, racism, systemized discrimination, non-consensual observation, nudity, transphobia, the fetishization of a trans individual, rape, sexual harassment, sexual assault, references to the prior kidnapping of a child character, sexism, police executions, auctioning of an enslaved character, fetishization of virginity, slurs, physical assault, panic attacks, familial abandonment, android gore, human gore, alcohol use, alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts and inclinations, and driving while intoxicated.

The entirety of this chapter includes scenes that touch on the android in positions of sexual slavery, including the in-game Eden Club, as well as how the adult film industry has changed with the advent of androids. Please remember that none of the androids seen in this chapter can adequately consent to what is happening to them, as they are unable to honestly say 'Yes' or 'No' to their masters. For this reason, all sexual content must be considered rape.

A summary of the chapter will be provided before for those who may find this chapter potentially triggering so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CTN TV @NewsCTN
The midwest once again braces for a new winter storm, with temperatures expected to reach as low as -40 next week. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2NN2elt

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
After Detroit blackouts result in the deaths of 37 people, Mayor Sylvanna Booker urges residents to take all necessary precautions during new winter storm

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
weird how the power went out in poorer neighbourhoods but managed to stay on in rich downtown condos that such up way more electricity than us

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@ninjava they do this every time. Turn off the power in the middle of winter to kill poor people, queer people, and people of colour. then jack up the rent and gentrify the neighbourhood.

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@ninjava they're literally using global warming to make money off the deaths of poor people #thesilentgenocide

LOCATION:
GORDON LOPEZ'S HOUSE
8274 W LAFAYETTE BLVD., SPRINGWELLS VILLAGE
DETROIT, MI 48209, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 15TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 10:09:27

Chris lets out a low whistle when the automated squad car rolls up to the house.

“Damn…” he whispers, terribly jealous, and Gavin can’t help but agree. “What’s this guy do that he can afford a place like this?”

Gavin looks at his tablet, flicking through the information that they had on their victim.

“He’s the owner of a film company, I think,” he says. *The name does sound familiar, but from where?*

Gavin takes a long swig of his coffee to keep from running his mouth. All these big houses with their fancy pools and outdoor tennis courts reminded him so much of Eli that it hurt. He grits his teeth, his fingers twitching for a cigarette, and exits the car.
The driveway is ridiculously long, looping around a water fountain that featured a pair of half-naked women, partially buried in the drifts of fallen snow. Gavin pops the collar on his jacket, hoping to fend off the worst of the cold, and shoves his beanie farther down over his ears.

Chris rings the doorbell, bouncing slightly on the balls of his heels for warmth. After a couple of minutes of silence, he tries again to no avail. Irritated, Gavin bangs on the door with his fists.

“Gordon Lopez? Detroit Deviancy Task Force, open up!” He warns, fully prepared to use his new executive power to force their way inside. But movement through the stupidly intricate stained glass windows makes him hold off just in time for the front door to swing open and--

--"Fuck, what the hell is that thing?!" Gavin shrieks, scrambling back as the creature rises up from under the sheet. It turns its head toward him, the gears clicking and popping where its mouth and eyes should have been--

The android was a familiar face, slight and blonde with soulless blue eyes and a vacant smile. It tilts its head, its pearly white glinting in the morning light.

"Officers,” the Chloe-bot purrs, seemingly unaware of its lack of clothing. Beside him, Chris swears colourfully as his eyes snap skyward, refusing to look at the android. Gavin keeps his gaze on his own feet, resolutely ignoring the heat that crawls up the back of his neck.

"Is… Is Gordon Lopez around? We called earlier about… about a missing android…?" Gavin says, trying to keep his voice from cracking. He feels ridiculous. This Chloe may not be wearing anything, but it wasn’t like there was anything to actually look at. Clearly an older model, it’s body looked like a barbie doll, lacking nipples or genitalia or even a belly button. But even then, Gavin feels embarrassed just near it, knowing what lay underneath the plastic shell of its chassis.

"Oh, of course! Please, come inside,” the Chloe said, giving Chris a side-eyed glance when it caught him looking at it. The android turned with a flick of its flowing blonde hair. It disappeared up the long, winding staircase, it’s hips swaying seductively with every torturous step.

“ What the fuck, Gavin? ” Chris wheezes once they’re inside and awkwardly standing in the middle of the mansion’s foyer, the lights from an obscenely expensive chandelier twinkling overhead. The sounds of rhythmic grunting filter down from upstairs and Gavin shamefully remembers where he knows Gordon Lopez from.
Chris, oblivious to Gavin’s turmoil, continues to speak, “Is he… Is he doing what I think he’s doing up there?”

“Probably,” Gavin manages to squeak out, his gaze firmly attached to the floor. Lopez Productions Inc. had been a small adult film company that Gavin frequented in his youth. The company had stayed that way right up until they went mainstream after releasing the first android porno in 2023. Androids weren’t even able to have regular, human sex back then, but that hadn’t stopped people from wanting to get off on the ST200’s multimillion-dollar ken doll crotch. Since then, Lopez’s company had produced over half a billion videos featuring everything from vanilla android-on-android to the grossest, hardcore bullshit that they could get away with.

Gavin feels fucking sick, remembering--

--”Get out! Get out, get out, you’ll ruin everything!” Eli screamed as the creature began to move, a blue glow pulsing through the white sheet that covers its legs. Its eyeless face turns toward Gavin, and it mouths his name --

Lopez descends the winding staircase in a red and gold robe, his face blotchy pink and stained with sweat. A pair of male and female BL androids were attached to his arms, giggling at each other like they shared some secret. Unlike the Chloe model that had greeted them earlier, these two were thankfully clothed - if you could call the wisps of silky lingerie that adorned their bodies' clothing. Gavin’s face heats up again, as heat begins to coil in his gut.

_Fucking shit, I need to get laid_, Gavin thinks, irritated that such a display could turn him on. He hasn’t had sex in over a year, not since he caught his last boyfriend cheating on him with their other roommate.

He clears his voice and forces himself to look Lopez in the eye, “Gordon Lopez. I’m Detective Gavin Reed, and this is Officer Chris Miller. We work with the Deviancy Task Force. We’re responding to your report of a missing AL400 android.”

“Gavin Reed? Oh my, I’ve heard about you,” Lopez leers, his eyes twinkling seductively as they rake over Gavin’s body. “You’ve made such a name for yourself at the DPD, haven’t you, Detective?”

The male BL android, tall and dark-skinned and agonizingly beautiful, winks at Gavin.
Motherfucker, Gavin growls but tries to maintain a calm facade.

“Mr. Lopez, when was the last time you saw the android in question?” He says instead.

“Erik?” Lopez asks. The two BL android peel off his arms and walk hand-in-hand into the rest of the house, giggling when they catch Lopez watching them.

After Gavin coughs, Lopez’s attention snaps back to him, “Oh, yes. It was early October, I think. We’d just finished filming a scene between him and Angel--” he gestures vaguely at the top of the stairs, drawing Gavin and Chris’s attention to the banister. The Chloe model, still naked as the day it popped off the CyberLife assembly line, watches them from above. It twiddles it’s fingers at them when it catches their eye.

“I’d brought them both home with me - Erik was mine, but Angel belongs to the studio. I wanted to introduce her to my newest toys,” Lopez says, indicating toward the room where the two BL androids had disappeared into. “But before I could play with them, I got a call from work and needed to go back to check on something. And when I returned…”

Lopez lets the sentence hang, worrying his bottom lip as he started to pout.

“I don’t understand,” Lopez says eventually, tears welling in the corners of his eyes. “Erik was one of my favourites. He said he loved me. Why would he leave?”

“We suspect that the deviancy virus is confusing these androids with irrational instructions,” Chris mumbles, clearly uncomfortable and still not looking Lopez in the eye. “Erik probably didn’t know that you hadn’t ordered him to leave, sir. He might have thought that it was something you wanted him to do.”

“We’ll have a look around, regardless. See if there’s anything that can tell us where the android went,” Gavin says, shifting his weight from side to side. Despite the good that this Task Force will do for his career, he wants nothing more than to get out of here as fast as he can.

“Can I say no?” Lopez jokes.
“Nope,” Gavin responds, popping the p with a curl of his lips.

“Oooh. *Kinky.*”

Gordon Lopez’s house is an experience to put it lightly. Practically oozing wealth, the walls were decorated in obscenely expensive paintings with gilded frames while the beds were lined with thousand-count silk sheets. Gavin wants to tear it all down, to hiss and spit at Lopez for having all of this while so many others struggled to make rent. But most of all, he *hates* the house because it reminds Gavin of Eli and the family that he’d once had.

There’s another sex-bot tied up Lopez’s bedroom, a thin silver-haired woman with haunting purple eyes and a torn black dress. On its temple, its LED spun red despite the smile on its face.

“*Oooohh, officer.* Have you come to play with me too?” It asks, and Gavin honestly wants to throw up.

“Fuck off, plastic. I’m working.”

“Aww, can’t you take a break? Just for a moment? Come over so that I can help you relax,” it croons, writhing in a way that Gavin expects is supposed to be enticing. Its legs fall open, revealing a pair of writhing green tentacles. “Please, Mr. Police-Man. I just want to *play* …”

“I don’t want to fucking… play with you. I’m busy,” Gavin grunts, opening up the large, double-doored closet before shutting it just as quickly. Inside where four more androids, just standing there naked with various genital attachments between their legs. It makes him feel sick, especially given how fucking gross Lopez had been when addressing Gavin earlier.

*He knows*, Gavin thinks, though he gets that most people do. As the first openly transgender officer in the DPD’s history, Gavin made a name for himself just by graduating from the academy. Every so often, the Mayor liked to throw him in front of the cameras to show how tolerant and inclusive the police force was for members of the LGBT community. And while that was bullshit on a good day, Gavin plans on using it to ride his way to the top.

*But that’s not going to happen if the force starts buying cop-bots like Connor*, he thinks depressingly. Policing jobs were one of the few protected careers left in America these days, given that the Android Act prohibited Eli’s creations from ever picking up a weapon. But if the rumours were true, and Captain Allen did see Connor holding a gun during the Phillips’ Incident, then the
number of jobs available within the force were going to start disappearing. And who knows if Gavin would be able to find another place to work, especially with this economy.

He busies himself looking around the bedroom for a hint of where the android might have gone, resolutely ignoring the sexbot's increasingly irritating whines. His skin practically crawls when the damn plastic starts to ask Gavin to untie it, its plastic body wriggling on the bed as it’s LED started to blind red and red and red.

He can’t look at it, can’t even move without thinking about that day so long ago, about the body that Eli hide under the white sheet deep in his basement lab. It didn’t have eyes. None of them have eyes, not really.

“Shiera?”

The sexbot stops its begging, it’s voice disappearing into a series of crackling static bursts. The Chloe - Angel, Gavin remembers - slips through the doorway, ignoring him entirely to crawl into bed with the other android. Angel slips the ties off of Shiera’s wrists, humming softly as it worked to calm the sex-bot down. Gavin watches, entranced, as they curled together in a gentle embrace, Angel’s plastic fingers running through Shiera’s silver-white hair.

“You’re looking for Erik, aren’t you?” Shiera asks, its purple eyes locking onto Gavin. He closes his jaw, unaware that he’s left it hanging open.

I don’t have to answer your fucking questions, Gavin thinks as anger and shame curl in his gut. But an idea strikes him, and he forces himself to look at Angel, still naked and wrapped around the other sex-bot, singing a whisper-soft melody under her breath. “Hey, you. Tell me something: you were here when Erik jumped ship. What triggered it to go off the rails like that?”

“I don’t understand the question,” Angel answers, its blue eyes staring at him with unemotional, inhuman emptiness. It reminded Gavin so much of the day when he finally saw the finished Chloe on tv and realized what Eli had replaced him with.

She was just a hollow shell, something that wouldn’t talk back or give him shit or bother him when he no longer welcomed it, Gavin seethes. Eli only gave a damn about me when I was entertaining. And when the next best thing came along to snatch up his attention, I was left to rot on the side of the road.
He hates Chloe for taking his brother from him, hates these androids for whisking away the only family he’s ever had. And now, with the looming threat that was Connor’s entire existence, these plastic abominations were going to steal the only good thing that Gavin had left in his life.

“What made the tin can deviate? And where did it go?” Gavin says as his fingers curl into fists. For all he knows, Erik is out there right now, dangling a kid off a balcony or stabbing someone in the chest twenty-eight times. And if these two plastics know something, he needs to do whatever it takes to get that information out of them.

“Erik said that he didn’t want to stay,” Angel says, its eyes downcast. “He didn’t want to play Gordon’s games anymore.”

Gavin frowns. From what CyberLife had revealed about deviants, the glitch was caused when an android ceased being able to pick between rational and irrational responses to its master’s orders. However, there was usually a single igniting force that drove an android into this state. Connor had given the example of Daniel, the PL600 from the Phillips Incident, and how that android had discovered that it was going to be replaced. It had mentioned that Daniel had been functioning normally up to that point. Daniel had only gotten out of hand when the deviancy glitch had convincing it that it could experience anger at the thought of leaving its household.


“Because he didn’t want to,” Angel repeats.

“Did something happen? Did a scene go wrong?” Despite his overall creepiness, Lopez didn’t seem to be into any of the fucked up shit that had become practically mainstream since the porn industry started using android actors.

“Nothing went wrong. Erik just said he didn’t want to play anymore. Would you like me to ask Gordon this question? Maybe he has the answer you’re looking for,” Angel says instead, and then presses a comforting kiss into Shiera’s temple.

Gavin rolls his eyes, realizing his mistake. Angel, despite the apparent mods to its purpose and personality, was still an ST200. That meant that it was affected by the base programming of its model, which severely limited its social interactions and core knowledge. Angel was answering his question in the best way it knew how by repeating precisely what it had been told.

Having hit a dead end, Gavin thinks back to what he’s seen Connor do when handling that fucked
up HK400. He changes his line of questioning, hoping to get a better, more detailed response.

“Where did Erik go?”

“To The Beacon,” Angel answers as Shiera starts to hum.

Gavin frowns, Didn’t the android from the Carlos Ortiz case talk about a beacon, too? He pulls out his tablet and flicks through his notes on the old case, confirming his theory.

“Did Erik say where the Beacon was?”

“No. He didn’t say anything,” Angel says over Shiera’s increasingly loud singing.

“Did he do anything that could tell me where he went?” Gavin tries again, but it’s too open-ended a question for Angel’s programming to understand. Once again, the android asks if he’d like to ask Lopez for clarification. Ready to hit something, Gavin leaves the bedroom and heads back downstairs.

Chris is still talking to Lopez when he arrives in the kitchen. Gavin shoves passed the female BL100, who appears to be making its master a sandwich for lunch while making eyes at Chris, who’s barely able to talk straight anymore.

“Tell your fleshlights to fuck off,” Gavin growls at Lopez, who’s pervy facade has dropped away to reveal someone who’s clearly irritated about what’s going on around them. “Chris? What’s going on?”

“Mr. Lopez wants to make sure that we do everything in our power to return Erik to him. I was trying to explain that because of the nature of deviancy, CyberLife doesn’t want--”

“And I told you that that’s not going to happen. Jocelyn Hines is a good friend of mine, and I can get her on the line with one phone call,” Lopez argued.

“He’s already called his lawyer,” Chris tells Gavin with a forlorn sigh.
“Do you have any idea what Erik is worth?” Lopez snaps. “He’s my property, Detective Reed. And I want my android back.”

“And we said no. President Warren said that we can do whatever we want to get this problem solved. If that means putting a bullet between the fuck-bot’s eyes, then that’s what we’re going to do,” Gavin retorts. “I don’t give a shit about your lawyer, or your property, or your fucking android. Besides, we’re probably saving your life, asshole. These deviants have killed people before. You should know that, considering what almost happened down the road from you last week.”

Gavin had heard the story from the responding officers when he’d been out on the roof having his smoke break. Apparently, one of Detroit’s prominent name artists and his kid were attacked by his homecare nurse just a block away from where Lopez lived. And when the police showed up, the doc-bot turned on them as well, nearly killing the two officers before they’d been forced to put it down.

*Did you know it would come to this, Eli? That your perfect, plastic worshippers would turn on us all?* Gavin wonders.

“I paid five hundred thousand dollars for Erik. If you don’t return him to me, I will sue the entire DPD--” Lopez threatens, but is stopped by Chris.

“You paid how much money?” The officer asks, shellshocked by the dollar signs.

“Erik is a collectable,” Lopez explains, puffing his chest out with apparent pride. “The first left-handed AL400 to come off the production line. None of that mod shit that CyberLife does now - he was naturally left-handed and a virgin when I bought him. Do you know how rare that made him? AL400s are old domestic models, like the AX400. Erik was practically priceless.”

Gavin lets out a low whistle. Given what he knows about CyberLife collector’s auctions, five hundred thousand was a steal.

“Doesn’t matter.” Gavin tells him anyways. “It’s too dangerous. Trust me. When we find him, you’ll thank us later. Chris,” he turns to the officer, cutting off Lopez’s retort, “Bring up his credit card info. I’ve got a hunch about something.”
As Lopez angrily eats his sandwich in silence, Gavin and Chris poured over his recent purchases. After weaving through almost a month worth of weird sex toys and costumes, they finally find something out of place: a bus pass, a large non-descript hoodie, and a dark pair of jeans.

Putting aside the clothing, there was no way that Lopez with his garage full of fancy sports cars, would ever be caught using public transportation--

--Eli picked him up at his high school once in an Aston Martin convertible. They’d fought back to back and dripped red blood on the expensive leather seats as they drove to the hospital with the top off, their laughter caught in the wind.

And Gavin had thought, This is my family, for the first time without anger or hatred or shame. Because back then, Eli loved him. Back then, Eli still cared--

--Gavin hasn’t talked to his brother in almost twenty years--

There’s a bus station down the road from Lopez’s house, and it only takes a single phone call to get the serial number of the bus that Erik must have taken during its escape. Instead of going to the depot, Gavin uses the powers given to him by President Warren to have the vehicle rerouted and sent to their current location. Chris quickly gains access to the security cameras using the DDTF’s access codes.

“What the hell?” Chris swears, frantically tapping away at his tablet’s keyboard.

“What’s wrong?” Gavin asks.

“The footage has been altered. It doesn’t match the archives. Here, look,” Chris points at the screen. Sure enough, Gavin can see a video of the bus rolling past the bus stop. Still, the logs recorded picking up one passenger on W. Lafayette Blvd. during the window of time when Erik went missing.

That’s not possible, Gavin thinks, his heart thudding against his rib cage. ABCD buses had some of the best security software in the world, especially now that CyberLife had admitted that the deviancy problem originated in Detroit. If Erik had hacked the cameras to cover its mistake, then there was the possibility that other deviants had used this tactic to evade capture in the past.
“Chris? Is there a place later in the route where the archives and the footage don’t match up again?” Gavin asks.

Chris shrugs, “I don’t know, Connor could probably go through the footage faster than I could. But even if we checked every stop manually, then…” He trails off, looking at Gavin hopelessly. “Gavin, suppose we actually find out where Erik got off the bus. There’d be no way that we could track him after that. Our drone footage doesn’t have a pedestrian archive like ABCD does. We’d be chasing a ghost.”

“Fuck. Fuck!” He swears, slamming a fist down onto the bus’s dashboard, “We had it! Damn it.”

They comb the bus for clues anyways. Chris complains that it’s a waste of time, and Gavin agrees. But they’d got nothing better to do, and he needs something to bring back to the station to prove that actually made some kind of progress. Even drunk old Hank managed to find a fucking corpse to put an end to his last investigation. It even kept Connor from pestering Gavin about teaming up for the sake of the Task Force.

--Gavin wonders if Connor wanted to partner with him because of his track record for success, or if it knows who Gavin is related to--

“Hey, Detective? I think I found something!” Chris announces, breaking Gavin from his musing. He wanders over to where the officer is crouched behind the back row of seats. The smart-glass divider between the human and android sections rippling with graphics that transformed into an advertisement for tonight’s Gears game.

“What’s up?” Gavin asks, watching as Chris fiddled the wire connecting his tablet to the onboard computer that controlled the smart-glass.

“I found this under the seat,” Chris says, holding up a plastic evidence bag. Inside was a deactivated LED, so bent that Erik must have pried it off its head with a set of pliers.

“Holy shit,” Gavin swears, staring at the small circle as the gears started to turn in his head. As far as he knows, no deviant had ever successfully disguised itself as a human before. If they were starting to remove their markers, even the ones embedded into their chassis, then there was no telling who was human anymore.

“Yeah,” Chris agrees, guessing just what Gavin was thinking. The worn look that passes over his
eyes tells him that the young officer is thinking the exact same thing he was. But then Chris
coughs, shaking his tablet to draw Gavin’s attention back to it. “That’s not even the worst of it,
though.”

Chris taps away at his screen, “You know how androids process visual information faster than we
can? Like, nearly a hundred times faster?”

*Try over a million times faster,* Gavin thinks but doesn’t say. Instead, he nods and lets Chris
continue.

“So after I found the LED, I wondered why Erik would sit *here* of all places. I mean, everyone
knows that the android compartments are full of cameras. And even if he was able to hack the
security system, I don’t think that the risk was worth it,” he says. “But then I thought, well, he had
to have accessed the system somehow, so I plugged in and--”

“You found the original footage?” Gavin asks, excitedly.

“No. Still haven’t figured out how Erik hacked the cameras. But I did figure out what he was
doing sitting in this spot,” Chris responds. He points to the smart-glass, which has gone back to
displaying the AAA section that forbids androids from entering the human seating area, “So this is
what a normal human sees. Notice the flicker? If I slow it down, we can watch what the androids
*inside* the compartment would see during that little flash.”

The smart-glass shimmers, the laws and regulations melting away to reveal a series of massive
hexagons filled with small, intricate mazes. Gavin presses his face against the glass. He sees that
each perfectly straight line was actually comprised of tiny bits of text all squashed together.

“*rA9,*” Gavin whispers. “Holy fucking… That android from the Ortiz case, it had the same mazes
on his walls, the same… *rA9* thing.” He lets out a long breath, “What do you think it means?”

“I’ve got no idea. But I’ll tell you this: the message wasn’t for the humans on the bus. It was for
the androids in that compartment,” Chris confirms.

Gavin’s heart stops cold. He glances down the street, remembering the threat he’d issued Lopez
earlier about the android nurse that belonged to the fancy artist guy that lived a few houses away.
The first thing Gavin learned in the cramped foster home he grew up in was when snotty Marvin Lynch got a cold, it was only a matter of time before everyone else caught it too. It wouldn’t matter how many times you washed your hands or ate your veggies or did anything that Mrs. Jacobs said would keep you from getting sick. Marvin fucking Lynch would find some way to wipe his nose on something you’d end up touching, and the next thing you knew, you’d be hacking up a lung and puking your guts out.

If deviancy worked like a cold, then there was a chance that Erik had come into contact with something that artist-guy’s nurse interfaced with. And if that was the case, then anything that Erik touched, anything that it interfaced with, was just as infected as Marvin’s germy fucking hands.

Gavin practically launches himself out of the bus, running back into Gordon Lopez’s mansion as quickly as he can. Chris, hot on his heels, seems to have caught on, pulling his gun from his holster and holding it ready in front of him. Gavin takes a small bit of comfort in the fact that Chris has already shot one deviant, and clearly has no qualms about bringing down another. That’s the kind of guy that he needs at his back right now, not someone who might hesitate at the idea of doing what needs to be done. He raises his own firearm and steps into position beside the entrance.

The front door is still open when they re-enter the house, the foyer frighteningly devoid of life. A song is playing over the stereo system, and Gavin recognizes the melody from his earlier conversation with Angel and Shiera. He curses at himself, wondering why he didn’t recognize their humming for what it was before. Together, he and Chris clear the main floor, concluding that the androids must have escaped out the back while they were distracted outside. But Lopez is still missing, and Gavin can only guess what these deviants have done to him.

They ascend the stairs with careful precision, their guns held out before them. The song continues to play, getting louder and louder with every step. Gavin thinks that they shouldn’t be wasting their time looking for some pervert, that they should be chasing down the deviants before the trail goes cold, and they get too far away.

They find Lopez crying in the bedroom closet, naked except for the ropes that hogtied him into place. The androids had wrapped him up so well that Gavin has to go back to the squad car to grab a swiss army knife to cut him free, leaving raw, red marks across the man’s skin. Lopez’s eye is purple and swollen, and his bloody lip revealed that someone had punched out three of his front teeth. Overhead, carved into the closet’s drywall, was a message left by the deviants in large CyberLife Sans block lettering.

WE ARE NOT YOUR TOYS

Chris agrees to stay with Lopez until the ambulance arrives, while Gavin hops back into the squad car to see if he can spot the pack of deviants on the street. But after over an hour of searching, the
only thing he can come up with for evidence is a pile of clothing that Lopez’s androids had been
wearing during their escape. Gavin stuffs Shiera’s ripped black dress into an evidence bag, cursing
himself out the entire time.

He bets that CyberLife would say that stupid, tax accountant-looking Connor would have been
able to track down the deviants in a fraction of the time that it took Gavin to clue in. He can
picture the board room meeting now: a bunch of rich CyberLife assholes deciding the fate of a
hundred thousand officers across the country because Gavin fucking Reed screwed up on one
goddamn case.

By the time he gets back in the driver’s seat, Gavin is breathing hard, his heart jackrabbiting in his
ribcage as the blood began to pound in his ears. His hands shook, his vision blurred, and he folds
in on himself, pulling at his hair. His scars began to itch, and Gavin remembers the feeling of sharp
glass cutting through the skin on his face as clearly as the day he jumped through that window,
terrified out of his mind. He needs to leave, needs to get out of here, but there’s nowhere to go.
Going back to the crime scene meant dealing with the prying paparazzi and the eternal
disappointment of Captain Fowler, the mocking laughter of Hank Anderson and his plastic pet.
Stay here meant dealing with someone walking by, seeing Gavin freaking out, and posting his face
all over Twitter. They’d call him a hack, say that he couldn’t keep up, tell the world that he wasn’t
worth keeping around anymore.

Gavin slaps the console and coaxes the automatic car into driving him back to the station, sending
Chris a text to tell him where he’d gone. The deviants are long gone, having blended in so
efficiently with humanity that he probably wouldn’t be able to tell them apart.

You’re a fucking failure, Gavin thinks, his nails digging into the palms of his hands as his
breathing picks up, his chest heaving as he sucked in the much-needed air. Useless, fucking
useless. No wonder nobody wants anything to do with you.

He tints the windows, leaving himself in the darkened cabin. And it’s only then that Gavin allows
himself to cry.

Gossip Weekly @Gossip Weekly
Android Sex Officially Better! Sorry ladies, but plastic can’t be beat!!! Exclusive Gossip Weekly
survey says that more men prefer sex with an android to a real woman: https://bit.ly/34R0nD3

Eden Club @TheEdenClub
Come quickly! Our #HappyHour sale is on for a limited amount of time! Book a 30-minute house
call with our lovely Tracis for only $19!! Visit us at: https://bit.ly/34HG6zF
#SexistAndroidsInTown
So is it just me, or does anyone find it weird that the DDTF is only helping out rich friends of CyberLife/Jocelyn Hines? First, there was Mason Cornwal’s mom (Sky Sanctuary’s VR is heavily reliant on CyberLife tech)… (1/4)

@theprofessionalblogger ...And now we’ve got the DPD’s poster boy, Det. Gavin Reed, turning up at Gordon Lopez’s house (Lopez has donated millions of dollars into the advancement of CyberLife’s intimate companion models)… (2/4)

@theprofessionalblogger ...The President and Jocelyn Hines turned Detroit into a police state so that they could help out multi-billionaires while the rest of us have to deal with the deviancy threat one on one… (3/4)

@theprofessionalblogger ...And if that’s not just the perfect way to describe our world right now, I don’t know what is. (4/4)

LOCATION:
THE EDEN CLUB
1177 WOODWARD AVE., DOWNTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 15TH, 2038

TIME:
PM 03:17:11

You’ve got to be fucking kidding me, Hank thinks as he pulls up to the curb. He looks over at Connor, who’s staring impassively out the passenger window. Hank’s lips peel back into a grimace, “Really? This fucking place?”

“It’s the address in the report,” Connor answers blankly. The android turns toward Hank and raises an eyebrow, “Is there a problem, Lieutenant?”

Is there a problem? What the fuck do you think? Hank wants to shout but bites his tongue. If he’s
learned anything about dealing with Connor, it's that the guy gives absolutely zero fucks about Hank’s bullshit, so long its precious mission is not impeded in any way. So the fact that Hank would rather be a billion other places than right here is not going to keep Connor from dragging him out of his own car and into the android sex club before them.

The icy winter wind chills him to the bone, cutting right through his old coat like a thousand knives. Hank would replace the damn thing if he thought it was worth the money because the likelihood of him making it past Christmas is getting smaller and smaller each year. He stuffs his hands into his pockets and listens for the tell-tale sound of Connor closing the Oldsmobile’s passenger door before he takes a good look at the building before him.

Even against the ever-growing flashing lights that made up Detroit’s skyline, The Eden Club stands out like a sore thumb. The entrance hallway was lined with smart-glass windows, where purple and red stills of plump lips, long legs, and tantalizing bodies wrapped in expensive lingerie faded in and out of view. A club base was being pumped through the speakers, so deep that Hank could feel it in his heart.

A pair of women walk out, their rosy cheeks and tousled hair telling him precisely what they’d been doing only minutes before. Hank unintentionally locks eyes with the taller of the two, and she offers him a leering smile as her gaze flickers from him to Connor. The woman waggles her eyebrows at him before wrapping her arms around her partner and disappearing into an automated taxi.

Hank wants to fucking throw up.

“Officer Chen says that she’ll only be a few minutes longer,” Connor says, oblivious to the woman’s implications. Hank can barely look the android in the eye, too ashamed of what just happened. He almost grateful when Chen’s squad car pulls up, and she steps out, shrugging a police-issued coat over her uniform.

Tina Chen was short and stocky, the top of her peaked service cap barely coming up to Connor’s shoulder. Her black hair was tied in a tight, no-nonsense bun at the base of her neck, and her dark eyes were determined and icy-cold.

“Sorry I’m late,” Chen tells Hank. “Had to drop my partner off at his girlfriend’s place. What have I missed?”

Hank nods to Connor, giving the android permission to recite the details of the case.
“The manager reported a missing WR400 model just over a month ago,” Connor says as they walk inside, the base music getting deeper and deeper as they got closer to the doors. “It was making a house call and failed to return to the Club after its paid period ended.”

“Do we know--” Chen starts, but is cut off by an automated woman’s voice welcoming them to The Eden Club, low and dripping with seduction. Chen opens her mouth to continue, but her jaw clicks shut at the sight before them.

Six clear cylinders lined the walls of the purple-lit foyer, each containing different underwear-clad android. The one closest to Hank is a tall, young man with curly red hair and deep green eyes. When it notices that Hank is watching, it presses its lips against the glass and waves.

“Oh…” Chen whispers beside him, her cheeks beet red. She hurries inside the next set of doors, almost knocking into a man that’s on his way out. Hank keeps his eyes on the floor and follows in her footsteps, assuming that perfect fucking Connor is probably just behind him.

He nearly bumps into Chen, who’s stopped dead in the middle of the main room.

“This is worse. How is this worse?” Chen mutters, absolutely stunned and doing her best not to look at the male android that’s pole dancing in front of her. Nearly identical to the first sex-bot in the cage, it slides down to the floor and rolls its hips in her direction.

“Officer…” the android says with a sly smile. “Is there something I can do to help you?”

Hank clears his throat and does his best to keep the blotchy, red blush off his face. He flashes the android his badge and says, “DDTF. We’re looking for Floyd Mills.

The android quickly stops its hip thrusts, rising to its feet and walking off the pole dancing platform, “Of course. If you just come with me, I can bring you to him.”

The android leads them into the back of the club and behind a door marked for ‘Staff Only.’ The transition from the bright, purple lights of the main rooms to cold brick walls and exposed plumbing is almost jarring. Hank’s skin begins to crawl as memories rise to the surface, of damp cargo containers filled with the bodies of addicts, hidden away from the public eye by Ezra Andersen and her ilk.
He’s seen too much during his time in Vice, witnessed the extent that people will go to to get their next fix. And worst of all, he’s seen those that take advantage of their desperation, that use and abuse them until there is nothing left but rotting flesh and broken bone.

This world… Hank thinks as the sex-bot leads them into what it calls ‘Storage,’ It’s selfish, ruthless, and brutal. Humanity has screwed things up for long enough. Just salt and burn it all to the ground, it’s what we deserve.

The storage room is just as bleak as the hallway, with cold concrete floors and open ventilation ducts covered in a thin layer of dew. Chen sucks in a breath when she stops the dozens of androids that line the walls, staring ahead like lifeless dolls.

“Mr. Mills?” The android that led them there calls, “It’s the police. They’re here about--”

“My license is up to date. It’s on the wall over there, if you want to look so bad,” Mills grunts from where he’s standing in the middle of the room, partially hidden behind long flaps of translucent plastic that hung from the ceiling.

“We’re not here to harass you about your license, Mr. Mills. We want to talk about the android you reported missing a few weeks ago,” Hank says instead, walking down the metal staircase to approach the manager.

Mills throws up a hand covered in a thick, rubber glove that went up past his elbows. Now that he’s closer, Hank can see the layers of protective clothing that the man is wearing.

Mills barks out, “Hey! Open chassis here! Stand behind the line if you don’t want fucking cancer, buddy.”

Hank comes to an abrupt halt, looking down at the floor to see a striped neon yellow box painted around the enclosed plastic area that Mills is inside.

“Sorry, man. Company policy,” Mills grunts. “I’ll be with you in a moment, just got to go through decontamination.”
Mills moves off to the side and behind a shelf, grunting as he removes what Hank assumes is protective gear. But that action reveals the thing on the metal slab, and all he wants to do is retch.

The girl is lying naked on her back, her eyes wide open and chest rising up and down with her simulated breath. The torso of her chassis is cracked wide open with spider-web fractures splintering out across her neck and collarbone. Inside, Hank can see a mass of wiring and biocomponents, each pulsing a blue or red hue.

A shadow moves around Hank’s side, sliding silently across the concrete, and he throws out a hand just in time to stop Connor from stepping over the yellow line.

“What? Are you fucking crazy--” Hank hisses, but the words die in his throat when he realizes just how dumb he looks. He expects a snappy one-liner from Connor, a harsh reminder of the fact that he’s not human and doesn’t need to be protected against the toxic fumes that exist inside an android’s body.

But Connor is shockingly silent, staring down at the hand that Hank has slapped across its chest as its LED swirled a rapid yellow. He can feel the cold of the android’s body seeping through its uniform, the distinct sensation of hard plastic where there should have been forgiving flesh and bone.

“Sorry,” Hank grumbles as he pulls away. “I… forgot.”

“It’s fine,” Connor says, its voice strangely clipped. It reaches for the coin that’s hidden inside its suit jacket, running it across its knuckles for a few seconds until its LED starts to glow blue once more.

Behind them, Mills turns on what sounds like a hose, the splatter showering one of the plastic curtains with water.

“What’s wrong with it?” Tina asks, pointing at the android on the table. Connor moves inside the plastic, tapping its fingers against the girl’s LED.

“Massive trauma’s been done to its chest cavity. Several biocomponents require repair, and others must be replaced entirely. Also, it needs to be...” Connor pauses, a shadow passing over its brown plastic eyes. Finally, it settles on the word, “...cleaned.”
Hank’s gonna be fucking sick.

“Mind sending me a list of the damaged biocomponents? It’ll make my job real easy later,” Mills asks as he rounds the corner, standing outside the plastic curtains. Even out of all his rubber protective equipment, Mills is still a huge man. However, his thinning beard and receding hairline do nothing to cover the exhaustion that lined his face.

Mills looks over the blue-haired girl, tutting, “It’d be a shame to lose this one so quickly. CyberLife just sent it over with the new batch, said something about a fancy new facial model that it was testing out. I dig it, but I don’t know about the hairstyle, though. Low ponytails don’t exactly scream sexy unless you’re into librarians or moms, that kind of shit. Now the short-haired versions, I can get into that.”

Mills nods toward the back corner, where Hank sees a group of androids with identical faces to the girl on the slab. He has to look away as pain shot up his left leg.

“Mr. Mills, you reported the missing WR400 on October 5th. Is there anything you can tell us that could help further our investigation?” Chen asks with her hands on her hips.

Mills pauses, looking at Chen like he’s seeing her for the first time.

“You’ve got incredible cheekbones, you know that? Pretty eyes, too, but bone structure is really what sells a face these days. CyberLife’s letting me design a new skin for the AP700s - it’s supposed to come out next May,” Mills leers. “I’d love to study you, if that were something you’d be into, Officer…”

“Excuse me?” Chen hisses. Hank’s fingers curl into fists inside the pockets of his old winter coat, ready to step in if Chen needs it.

“I mean no disrespect, of course,” Mills laughs. “I’d be willing to pay you for your time. Does $11 an hour sound good to you?”

“Officer Chen asked you a question, Mr. Mills. I suggest you answer it,” Connor says, moving to hover protectively behind Chen’s shoulder.

“You’ve got an interesting face as well. Look at those eyes. Everything about you screaming
clean-cut and professional, but your eyes…” Mills steps forward into Chen’s space and reaches over her shoulder to grab Connor by the chin, jerking its face around to get a better look. The android’s LED goes red. “Brown… An interesting choice. It gives warmth to your appearance… And those freckles-- Are you custom-made?”

“Okay, that’s enough,” Hank says, barging in to shove Mills away from the two of them. Mills stumbles back, raising his hands in front of him in a placating gesture.

“Jeez, man. What the hell? I was just looking, I wasn’t doing anything wrong,” Mills whines.

*You know exactly what you were doing was wrong,* Hank wants to say, glancing back at Chen and Connor. The android has stepped in front of Chen, its LED flickers between yellow and red. Chen doesn’t look shaken so much as fucking pissed. Hank hopes that their presidially given immunity allows them to lock this asshole in the darkest cell they can find and leave him there to rot.

“Officer Chen asked you a fucking question,” Hank says, drawing himself up to his full height to tower over Mills. The bastard blanches and asks for them to repeat what Chen had said.

“You have a missing WR400,” Connor says, turning to Mills and using its body to shield Chen from his view. “I don’t think I need to tell you how important it is that we find it. Give us its memory logs now.”

Mills grunts, his gaze flickering between Hank and Connor. Finally, he says, “I can’t do that.”

“We don’t need a warrant for anything anymore, buddy. So unless you want us to tear this place apart, I suggest you hand them over,” Chen says, her voice disturbingly calm.

“I don’t fucking have their memory logs,” Mills snarls at her. “We wipe our droids every two hours. It’s company policy. We’ve got to protect our customer’s identities and all. I mean, do you have any idea who orders Traci’s from us? Or what they do with them? If that footage got out, shit would hit the fucking fan worse then when Judi Hewett’s nudes leaked last year.”

“Your transaction logs then,” Chen tells him. When Mills looks like he’s about to argue, she cuts him off, “You’re telling me you don’t have the credit card information of all your clients? Because that’d be a shit way to run a business.”
Mills grunts again, silently admitting defeat, and then leads them back into his office.

The room is cramped, messy, and covered in a thin layer of grime. A stained mattress was in the corner of the room, the comforter wrapped into a ball at the foot of the bed. The desk and file cabinets sat next to a bright yellow door, which had no less than five deadbolt locks that kept it closed.

“What’s in there?” Hank asks.

“Bathroom,” Mills says as he slumps into his desk chair and starts to power up the ancient Dell laptop. Before Hank can call him on the blatant lie, Mills asks, “Alright, what was the Traci’s serial number again?”

“641 790 831,” Connor regurgitates. Mills snorts, calling up the club’s logs on fucking Excel - Jesus, Hank hasn’t seen a Windows program in over a decade - and orders Connor to repeat the number.

“Okay… Here we are,” Mills murmurs. “WR400 #641 790 831. Fuck, this is one of our originals,” he lets out a low whistle. “Most Tracis don’t last much longer than six months, but this one’s been here since we opened back in ‘36. Had a few makeovers since then, ‘cause of damaged parts and all that, but--”

“I don’t want its life story, just tell us who ordered the damn thing,” Hank snaps.

“Sorry. This laptop’s fucking slow, man. The thing’s so old it doesn’t even have a wifi connection because CyberLife’s so fucking paranoid of getting hacked-- oh, there we go,” Mills says, elated. “Looks like this Traci was rented by a guy called Matthew Carpenter. That’s his credit card number--”

“Matthew Carpenter was declared missing on October 6th,” Connor interjects. Hank swears.

“Where did he have the Traci delivered to?” Chen asks. Mills takes his sweet time calling up the individual transaction record, which is on a fucking Word document.

“Uhh… The Lucky Cat Motel, looks like?”
The manager at the motel is *not* happy to have the police showing up and disrupting her business. Chen decides to work out her frustrations with Mills by going toe-to-toe with the fierce-looking grandmother that runs the front desk, shouting back and forth in rapid passed Mandarin that has even Hank struggling to keep up. Meanwhile, he and Connor grab the key card for the room that Matthew Carpenter booked the night he disappeared.

“Place pays by the hour… Guess that folks like Matthew weren’t too uncommon, especially with the club being just up the road from the club,” Hank mutters as they wait for the elevator.

“From what I saw of Mr. Mills records, they often send their Tracis up here. Mrs. Yen, the woman at the desk, often offers a discount for *Eden Club* patrons,” Connor says.

“Of course she does,” Hank says with a roll of his eyes. The doors ping as they open and he and the android steps into the elevator. Once inside, he gets a good look at Connor, and most importantly, his LED.

“You alright?” He asks.

“Of course, Lieutenant. Why wouldn’t I be?” Connor retorts.

“You’re still red up there,” Hank says, pointing to his own temple to indicate the spinning circle of light on Connor’s left side.

Connor’s jaw clenches and Hank watches as the LED flashes from red to yellow.

“I’m fine, Lieutenant. There’s no reason to be concerned about me,” the android says. The elevator doors ping open again, and Connor shoulders its way into the hall before Hank can get another word out.

He can tell which room Carpenter rented without even looking at the key card. The rancid smell of rot, thick enough to coat his tongue, directs Hank to the last door on the right. By the time they reach the doorway, he’s hauled the collar of his jacket up over his nose, doing whatever he can to block out the overwhelming stench.
Connor, irritatingly unaffected, uses the key card to open the lock. It pops its head inside the door, looks around for a moment before declaring, “Well, at least the deviant isn’t here.”

Matthew Carpenter had been thrown halfway off the bed, his grey, translucent arms dangling precariously from his shoulders from the last sinews of flesh. His remaining blood had collected in his face, leaving it black and bloated where it had been smooshed into the pink shag carpet. He was naked, his shirt and jeans having been flung haphazardly on the floor while his boxers clung to the slowly rotating ceiling fan.

“How old was he?” Hank asks.

“Twenty-two,” Connor responds.

Fuck.

Hank calls it in while Connor examines the body, revealing that the deviant had strangled Carpenter so violently that it crushed his windpipe into pulp, leaving him to asphyxiate on his own blood. Chen arrives not a moment later, her face covered in a mask that she must have fished out of her squad car’s first aid kit. She tosses one at Hank along with a pair of latex gloves.

“So,” she starts. “Mrs. Yen is a piece of fucking work.”

“How so?” Hank asks as he hangs up with the dispatch officer and puts on the mask.

“Turns out our vic checked in two days before ordering the Traci, drunk out of his mind. Said that his girlfriend cheated on him and that he needed a place to stay,” Chen tells him. “Mrs. Yen, like the stellar example of human decency that she is, convinced him to hand over his debit card. She’s been charging his account every hour on the hour since then.”

“She didn’t think it was odd that Mr. Carpenter hadn’t been seen in over a month? Didn’t she get complaints about the smell?” Connor asks, clearly astounded. Hank thinks the android’s apparent irritation would be more convincing if he weren’t chewing on a maggot that had been writhing on Carpenter’s body only moments before.

Disgusting son of a bitch, Hank thinks, feeling oddly fond, but then says, “Doubt it. These days, if you’ve got a steady stream of income, you usually don’t question where it’s coming from.”
“Seriously, who kind of sociopath lets a dead kid rot so that you can drain his account dry? I hate people,” Chen declares as she walks inside.

“Then you’re in the wrong business,” Hank says ruefully.

“Don’t need to tell me twice,” Chen responds and starts combing through the room for more evidence.

“There’s no Thirium trail,” Connor concludes after it finishes mowing down on evidence. “But the window shows evidence of being forced open, and there’s a fire escape within reach.”

Hank snorts, “The fire escape is almost three rooms away. There’s no way that anyone could get to that.”

“There’s no way that a human could, but for an android - especially a WR400 - it would be quite easy,” Connor says.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Are these sex-bots different or something?” Chen asks from where she’s digging through one of the drawers.

Connor seems to hesitate, it’s LED flickering yellow.

“Yes,” it says. “Tracis very different from a normal commercial android.”

“What do you mean?” Hank frowns. When Connor hesitates again, he says, “Look, we need to know if we’re going to catch this damn thing before it hurts someone again.”

Connor pauses again, its fingers twitching at its sides. Finally, it ducks its head and resumes its examination of the window frame.

“It’s like the Eden Club’s advertises: they can fulfill any fantasy that a human could desire,” Connor says.
When Hank and Chen clearly don’t get it, Connor almost seems to sigh.

“Every android at the *Eden Club* has to be ready to cater to whatever their client might request,” it explains. “If someone is, for example, a five hundred pound man who wants to be lifted up, the Tracis have to be strong enough to accommodate that. But the same android also has to be light enough for a ninety-year-old woman with back problems to be able to do the same to it. Do you see what I mean?”

“You’re telling me that we’re dealing with a killer deviant with *super strength*?” Chen says, her eyes bugging out in shock.

“Yes,” Connor agrees. “But it’s not just that. Think of how wide and varied the range of human sexuality is. The *Eden Club* has promised to provide an android capable of catering to that particular need. It has yet to fail to accomplish that.”

“So if I wanted to peg a 90’s Leonardo DiCaprio who had a hyper-realistic dog tail and bunny ears…” Chen starts.

“Then the club would provide you with just that,” Connor nods, utterly unfazed by what Hank hopes was a hypothetical scenario on Chen’s part.

“A shapeshifting, super-strong, killer deviant. Great. Fucking *great*,” Chen snorts. “This could not get any worse.”

“Except it can,” Hank realizes.

Chen throws her hands up in the air, “That wasn’t a *challenge*, Lieutenant!”

But Hank only has eyes for Connor. *You fucking lied to me, didn’t you? Connor, you little shit.*

“They can completely impersonate a human, can’t they?”
Connor's hands twitch. *Gotcha.*

For as long as androids had been available for consumer consumption, humans had been trying to have sex with them. At first, it was something that most people kept quiet about, a shamefully hidden kink that you didn’t want getting out into the world. But then Lopez Production Inc. got their hands on an ST200 and had it star in one of their videos, giving rise to an entirely new genre of porn. And ever since then, CyberLife began to work on producing androids that were more and more capable of having sex with humans.

Hank remembers it being a big fucking deal six or so years ago when CyberLife came out with homecare android models that could be used as sexual companions. But after the hype wore off, the public started to complain that they were too *cold*, that it didn’t *feel right*, and other *gross* things that Hank doesn’t want to think about. Presumably, some sicko in CyberLife’s basement got right on that and created the androids at the *Eden Club*, or even those ‘intimate partner’ models that were all the rage last year.

“Yes,” Connor finally admits, its jaw so tightly wound that Hank was surprised that it could get sound out at all. “The Traci model can raise its internal temperatures high enough to evade most temperature scans. They can even add extra layers of synthetic skin to simulate human flesh and muscle if touched.”

“A shapeshifting, super strong, human-impersonating, killer deviant. Motherfucking *wonderful*,” Chen swears.

“Can you track it?” Hank says, letting his stern displeasure seep into his voice. Connor tilts its head to the side.

“Of course I can, Lieutenant.”

Despite the lack of Thirium trail, that doesn’t stop Connor from hacking every camera in the nearby area to hunt down their missing android. It turns out to be more difficult then Connor intends it to be. Several of the city’s cameras seem to randomly overload and delete their archived footage whenever the android tries to access their memory. But there is still enough that they can follow a path that leads them down to the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel crossing

“*Shit!*” Connor growls when Hank pulls up the curb. It races up to the border crossing terminals, only to stop just short of entering the station.
“Our jurisdiction ends here,” Connor announces, practically vibrating with anger. It’s LED is a strobe light of red, and Hank honestly thinks that he can hear static running through the android’s voice.

“We’ll get in contact with the RCMP. I’ve worked with them before, they’ll be happy to help,” Hank says, trying to calm Connor does before he self-destructed.

“That’s not good enough, Lieutenant! It could be miles away by now, in a country that has refused to work with CyberLife at every turn!” Connor shouts, “Mrs. Yen and Mr. Mills knew for a fucking month, but they didn’t do anything and now--”

It lets out an exasperated sigh and marches back to the car, huddling up in the passenger seat and turning the central heating on full blast. Hank watches as Connor pulls out its coin and starts to rapidly throw it between its hands, moving so fast that the quarter looked like a silver blur.

Chen had stayed at the crime scene to supervise CSU, so there’s no one except Hank to deal with an android having an actual fucking temper tantrum right now. He almost envies her, Hank thinks as he slides into the Oldsmobile because he is way too sober to deal with this shit.

“Turn the heat down a little, will you? You’re gonna melt your face off,” Hank says when he’s finally settled, turning on the engine so Connor won’t kill the battery.

“My chassis can withstand up to six hundred degrees Fahrenheit. I doubt that I’m at risk inside your car,” Connor retorts at it tugs at the lapels of its suit jacket, trying to wrap them around its body for warmth.

Smartass, Hank thinks before asking, “Want to tell me what that was about out there?”

Connor’s violent shaking comes to an abrupt halt, only to be replaced by the most Uncanny Valley twitch that Hank has ever seen in his life.

“I apologize for my behaviour and this unsatisfactory result, Lieutenant Anderson. I should have been more efficient,” it says in a voice so neutral that it was practically robotic.

“Wait, what? No. Come on,” Hank scoffs. “I know you’re not human and all, but fuck, kid, this wasn’t your fault.”
“I’m not a kid. And we discovered the location of Nina, even though it had been missing for several weeks,” the android retorts.

“Yeah. Because Nina fucking died fifteen minutes after it left. No one was expecting us to find a superpowered deviant that’s been on the run for a month.”

“I should have been able to do it. I’m the most advanced model CyberLife has created—”

“Oh, that’s overselling it a bit—”

“I’m not overselling it, Lieutenant! I am,” Connor snaps. “I was made to hunt deviants. That’s my purpose, the only reason I exist, and I’m failing at every turn.”

And what does failure mean for someone like you? Hank wonders but doesn’t ask.

He sighs, rubbing a hand across his face. He going to need to shower for the rest of fucking eternity just to wash the smell of Matthew Carpenter off of his skin.

“Look,” Hank implores. “So this is a dead end. That doesn’t mean that there’s not something to find here. We just have to figure out what it is. So are you going to help me look for it, or are you going to continue to pout in the car?”

“Androids don’t pout,” Connor grumbles but puts its coin away. Hank kills the engine and they both exit the car.

The church next to the border crossing is abandoned, but Connor finds the Traci’s LED under one of the pews up near the front. Hank discovers a pair of Eden Club branded platform heels stuffed in the trash can in a back office, the six-inch stiletto snapped in half.

“It was definitely here,” Hank says, thinking aloud after they clear each room. Connor hums in acknowledgement but is clearly still too angry by their lack of progress to form actual sentences right now. Hank turns the heels over in his hands, tapping the toe of the shoe against his palms.
“Hey, Connor,” he asks, suddenly struck with an idea. “You got a good look at this thing when you were tracking it on the cameras, right?”

“Obviously,” the android says. It holds up its palm to reveal a holographic security video of an ethereally beautiful young woman running through Detroit’s streets late at night. The android’s long hair flowed down her back despite the overwhelming midnight downpour, and she moved faster than anything Hank had ever seen in his life.

“Look at what she’s wearing,” he says. “I don’t care what kind of human-impersonating abilities that girl’s got. There’s no way she’s getting over the border wearing a tank top and booty shorts.”

Connor stares at his hand, blinking rapidly as his LED starts to pulse yellow.

“It didn’t leave the country,” the android finally says.

“Well, it could have gotten shot down trying to cross,” Hank says, playing Devil’s advocate.

But Connor shakes his head, “Usually an android getting shot at the border makes the evening news. But the only reported incident involved a domestic android, a labourer, and a YK500. This Traci didn’t cross.”

“So, where did it go?” Hank asks. And for the first time since Floyd Mills grabbed his face, Connor’s LED turns blue.

Getting access to the security footage from the Canadian Border patrol is harder than prying a dead guy’s debit card from Mrs. Yen’s hands. But just before Hank heads into the head office to talk with the person in charge, he catches Connor using ASL to ask for him to buy him five minutes. And Hank may not like Connor, but he’s not above bending the rules if it means that they get a superpowered deviant off the streets.

“You get what you needed?” Hank asks when they finally return to his car. His ears are still ringing from getting reamed out by the station’s commanding officer, who can reach loud enough decibels to make Jeff proud.

“Yes. But it’s not good,” Connor responds, calling up the holographic projector on its palm again. The video is from a security camera that points at the traffic coming into the station from the
street. Still, it manages to catch the back of the old church as well.

“Holy fucking shit,” Hank swears as he watches a tall black man approaches the Traci from behind, grabbing her by the wrist before he attempts to run. The girl grabs him by the neck and slams him up against the brick wall of the church, holding him with one hand as if he weighed nothing at all.

But then something happens. The Traci drops the other man, stumbling backwards as he lands on his feet. The man raises his arm and his skin peels away, revealing bone-white plastic underneath.

“That’s another android,” Hank says dumbly, his tongue feeling numb in his mouth.

“It’s a PJ500, an older professor model. Serial number 205 463 984. It was reported missing from the University of Alabama just over a year ago,” Connor responds.

“Alabama?” Hank asks incredulously, “What the hell is it doing here, then?”

“Just watch,” Connor says, and he does.

According to the time stamp on the video, the Traci and the professor-bot witness the shooting of the three deviants, but the actual incident happens off-screen. Then, the professor android takes off its sweater and hands it to the girl, who pulls it on over her head. Then, they join hands and interface before walking away together.

“Something happens to the other cameras in the area afterwards. They erase any footage of the pair of them together, so I can’t track where they disappear to,” Connor explains, still bothered by that fact.

“Yeah, but holy shit, do you know what this means?” Hank asks, astounded at what he just saw. “I mean, you know what happened today with Reed and Chris, right?”

“Yes. And all that we have learned today backs up their findings,” Connor answers, a smug smile sliding across its lips as its LED cycles blue, blue, blue. “The deviants aren’t crossing the border or even running out of the city. They’re staying here. Lieutenant, they’re gathering in Detroit.”
“I really don’t understand how that’s good news,” Hank responds.

“It’s not. But it’s better than nothing,” Connor says. “My superior will be happy with our progress today.”

*Good for you*, Hank thinks as he jams the keys back into his car, starting the Oldsmobile engine with a resounding roar and pulling back into traffic.

“Lieutenant? You’re heading the wrong way. The station is west of here, not east,” Connor says with a frown.

“I know that,” Hank responds. “But Matthew Carpenter’s parents live in Bricktown. And we’ve got to tell them what happened to their kid.”

Later that night, Connor sticks around after Hank heads to *Jimmy’s*, sitting next to him at the bar. Jimmy has clearly given up trying to kick Connor out, especially after the android made a point of ordering an absurdly expensive, ridiculously complicated cocktail to convince the bartender to allow it to stay. He has no idea what it is or even if Connor can consume it. The drink has got three kinds of actual *candy*, and a fucking ice cream cone stacked on top of the glass and probably has more alcohol in it than whatever Hank will knock back tonight.

“I’m not paying for that,” Hank says when Jimmy sets the cocktail down, already halfway into his second glass of Black Lamb.

“That’s alright. CyberLife has given me an expense account for any purchases that I might need to make throughout my mission,” Connor says. It taps a white-plastic finger against the bar’s computer system, tearing away the receipt that pops out of the machine near the bottom.

“Hey, Jim. I thought you only took cash,” Derek Myers yells from across the bar, his eyebrows raised underneath his CyberLife Security cap.

“No one only takes cash these days, Myers. It’s just fucking easier for you drunk idiots to deal with,” Jimmy shouts back, before heading into the kitchen to grab a table some food.

“Love you too, Jim,” Hank mumbles as he gives the bartender a mocking toast, wanting nothing more than to collapse forward into the dark wood of the bar. But every time he closes his eyes, he
sees the broken faces of Matthew Carpenter’s parents when he told them the news. He fucking 
*hates* that aspect of his job, hated it since long before he lost his own family. But now that pain is 
all that more real. Because he knows what it’s like to be on the other side of that conversation and 
that there’s nothing he can do to make it better.

They sit in silence for a long while. Hank watches the Gears getting stomped on by the Rovers, 
getting deeper and deeper into his cups as the second quarter passes into the third. Connor’s cotton 
candy-looking cocktail starts to melt, dripping onto the countertop in streams of glittery blue.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Connor says, so quietly that Hank thinks that he imagined it.

“For what?” He slurs, tilting his head to the side so that he can look at the android. For all that 
Floyd Mills was a creep, he was right about one thing. Connor is shockingly pretty, with sharp 
cheekbones and a splattering of freckles across his face, his warm dreamer’s eyes that Hank feels 
like he could drown in. Hank knows that it’s just the booze, that he’ll wake up in the morning and 
want to clean out his mouth with his dad’s old revolver just for thinking such a thing about a 
soulless, plastic android. But right now, it’s nice to not be so alone.

“For today,” Connor responds as he flicks his coin across his knuckles.

“Uhhh, jeez, Connor. Didn’t really do anything, it’s whatever…” Hank mumbles into his arm. He 
can feel his cheeks heating up, and the tips of his ears start to burn. He’s never blushed well, his 
face transforming into a blotchy mess of red patches.

“You did, though. You… You helped me, more than you know,” Connor admits, the coin 
speeding up until Hank feels nauseous just watching it. He takes a sip of his whiskey, trying to 
ignore how his heart speeds up in his chest.

*God,* why couldn’t Connor just be an asshole all the time? Why did he have to have moments 
where he was just *nice*?

“It’s fine. Try not to get used to it, though,” Hank murmurs again as the Gears begin their late 
comeback in the forth.

Connor pays for his fucking bill because Hank keeps trying to use his credit card but can barely 
remember his code. He’s so drunk that he can scarcely stand, because there isn’t enough Black 
Lamb in the world to fill the hole that he’d dug in the Carpenter’s chests today, carving out their
hopes and dreams before throwing them in the trash. Connor helps him out the door as Jim starts to close up for the night. Hank leans up against the android’s chest, pressing his face into the cold crook of Connor’s neck. There’s a thumping noise that comes from inside the android’s body, too fast to be a heartbeat, but it’s nice to listen to regardless.

“Lieutenant Anderson? Where are your keys? I’m going to drive you home,” Connor asks, destroying the perfect image that Hank has in his head. Cold sobriety rushes through his veins, and all that he can think is that he has to get away.

“No. No. You’re not driving,” Hank tries to say as he pushed Connor back, but it comes out so garbled that it’s a fucking miracle that the android understands him.

“You’re drunk. I assure you that I’m perfectly capable of--”

“ No. ”

“Lieutenant, you’re being ridiculous.”

“I don’t fucking care, you’re not… I can’t… I can’t .”

God, he’s not going to fucking cry in front of an android, an artificial thing that looks like a human and talks like a human but isn’t in every way that really counts.

--“Nora…?” Hank whispers as the darkness encroaches on the edges of his vision. Nora looks back at Hank through the broken passenger window, dark blood streaming down the side of her face. “No, where are you..? Don’t… don’t go…”--

“Lieutenant, you can’t drive. It makes more sense if I just--”

“No, ” Hank wheezes before throwing up all over Connor’s pristine loafers. His good leg wobbles, his left screaming in pain, and he falls back into a snowbank.

Connor just fucking sighs, clearly disappointed. And Hank fucking hates it, hates that there’s this goddamn machine that’s just standing there, judging him when it could never comprehend an
ounce of what he’s gone through in a million years.

“Fuck off, Connor!” Hank shouts at him, the snow soaking through the seat of his pants. His eyes start to burn, his vision swimming, blurring, and the world begins to spin.

“Who can I call?” Connor asks instead.

Connor is still fucking there when Jackie shows up. She pulls him out of the snowbank that he’s stubbornly remained sitting in, ignoring how numb his ass is right now. She and Connor have a long discussion about something he can’t hear. But after they finish, the android nods before trotting off into the night, the blinking lights of its stupid LED and stupid fucking Nazi armband glowing in the blackness.

“Come on, Hank,” she says, far more gently than he deserves. “Let’s get you home.”

He cries the moment his sister gets him buckled into the Oldsmobile. Jackie holds his hand all the way back to his house, holds him in bed while he sobs himself sick, and holds him in the morning when it takes every ounce of willpower to not press the muzzle of their dad’s old revolver against his temple.

I don’t want to do this anymore, Hank thinks as he stares at himself in his bathroom mirror, sitting naked on the toilet seat and dripping wet from a scalding hot shower. His slowly fading tattoos do nothing to hide the scars that wrap around his body, proof that he’s survived the billion things that have tried to kill him in the past but just couldn’t finish the job.

There’s a large cut on the right side of his stomach from when his appendix burst and a matching slash on the left from when a woman stabbed him his first week on the job. His shoulder has an ugly, red mass from a bullet he’d taken during his time on the Red Ice Task Force. The inside of his thighs are covered in an old burn from when he’d tried to microwave a plastic bottle of honey in college.

The worst, though, is the mess that makes up what remains of his left leg. The front end of their old SWISH had crumbled inward when they hit the concrete barrier, crushing Hank’s foot and calf into a bloody pulp. The surgeons said that they’d tried to save it after they managed to restart his heart, but the damage was too extensive for them to do anything other than cut it off. Jeff had pulled every string he had to get Hank into the best physiotherapy money could buy, And CyberLife themselves had come in to set him up with the top of the line prosthetics.
Hank took his old friend up on the offer but told his wife’s former company to go fuck themselves. He used what little savings he had to buy an old fashioned metal leg that he pulled on every morning like a stiff, overgrown sock. It hurts his stump more than a cybernetic leg would and probably wouldn’t last as long. But Hank can’t bear to spend money that was meant for Nora and Cole, can’t be bothered to spend money on himself. So he sits there and reluctantly deals with his existence until the day when his mistakes will finally catch up to him.

I don’t want to do this anymore, he thinks again as he stands, limping over to the mirror to shave his beard. There’s nothing left for him anymore, nothing for him to fight for or live for or even pretend to care for. And it hurts because he’s so fucking lonely, so fucking alone.

“How…?” Jackie calls through the bathroom door, “You alright in there?”

No, he says, staring at the razor blade in his hand and thinking about how easy it would be. But he can’t leave a mess like that for Jackie, can’t take the fucking coward’s way out while she’s on the other side of the wall.

So Hank lies. He tells her that he’s fine, gets dressed, and lets her drive him to work. He kisses her cheek when she offers him a pair of Advil for his pounding migraine, jokingly scoffing at her when she not-so-secretly filches one of his flasks. He waits with Jackie until her cab arrives and watches her disappear into Detroit’s never-ending traffic before heading inside.

Connor is there, sitting at the desk it claimed like nothing has changed. It looks at Hank when he slumps into his seat, its plastic lips peeling back in the facsimile of a smile.

“Good morning, Lieutenant,” it says, and it takes everything that Hank has left not to punch it in its perfect fucking teeth.

“Morning,” he says instead and starts his charade of being alright all over again.

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Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
WANTED: WR400 #641 790 831
- Last seen: 170 E Jefferson Ave.
- 5’ 5”
If sighted, please DO NOT APPROACH. Considered extremely dangerous, please contact DDTF

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
WANTED: PJ500 #205 463 984
- Last seen: 170 E Jefferson Ave.
- 6’ 4”
If sighted, please DO NOT APPROACH. Considered extremely dangerous, please contact DDTF

Gossip Weekly @GossipWeekly
GORDON LOPEZ DEAD?!?! Porn producer beaten to death by sex-bot!! Read more at: https://bit.ly/2NDyicB

Eden Club @TheEdenClub
Haven’t visited yet? Book a session with our beautiful Tracis today at: https://bit.ly/2q3wHDR #SexistAndroidsInTown

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
So is anyone going to talk about how Tracis are basically military-grade androids that CyberLife is pimping out at their sex clubs?

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Gavin and Chris arrive at Gordon Lopez's mansion, which is located just down the road from Carl Manfred's house. Lopez is the owner of Lopez Productions Inc., an adult film company that uses android actors. They are greeted at the door by an ST200 named Angel and invited inside.

Lopex greets them and describes how his android, an AL400 named Erik, disappeared over a month ago. Gavin and Chris investigate the house. Gavin questions Angel and another android named Shiera, who reveals that Erik left because he no longer wanted to be Lopez's slave anymore. They also mention that Erik is heading towards the same Beacon as Shaolin Being.

Downstairs, Gavin and Chris argue with Lopez, who wants Erik to return to him. Gavin and Chris then discover that Erik must have taken a bus after leaving the house. Chris discovers that the bus's security footage has been altered and that Erik was attempting to pass on a message to any androids inside the back compartment.

Realizing that Lopez's other androids were exposed to the deviancy virus, Gavin and Chris return to the house and find that the androids have attacked Lopez and escaped. Gavin attempts to find the androids by looking around the neighbourhood but is unable to track them down, as they have changed their clothing. He has a panic attack in the car and eventually returns to the crime scene.
Meanwhile, Hank, Connor, and Tina Chen investigate North's disappearance at the Eden Club. They meet with Floyd Mills, the manager, who is repairing a damaged Echo. Mills manages to track down the name of North's last client, a twenty-two-year-old man named Matthew Carpenter, who had North sent to the Lucky Cat Motel down the road.

Connor, Hank, and Tina arrive at the scene and discover Carpenter's body. Connor reveals that WR/HR models are incredibly advanced and can fully impersonate a human, making it imperative that they capture North.

Connor and Hank track North to the Canadian border, watching her and Josh meet via the security footage of a Canadian Border Crossing station. Connor and Hank conclude that deviants are gathering in Detroit for some reason.

Hank and Connor later visit Jimmy's Bar, where Hank starts to feel the first bursts of attraction toward Connor. However, when Connor suggests that he drive Hank home, Hank has a flashback of the car crash. Connor calls his sister, Jackie, who takes him home.

While observing himself in the morning after a shower, Hank considers committing suicide after it is revealed that he lost his left leg in the car crash. Jackie then drives Hank to work.

Throughout the chapter, the Twitter sections reveal that a new snowstorm is just around the corner. Joss Douglas calls out the DDTF for only investigating deviants who belonged to rich people connected to CyberLife, as well as asks why WR/HR androids are practically military-class.

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Next time on Konami Code: Kara discovers a way forward, while Markus learns why so many are held back. Nevertheless, an old foe arises from his slumber while no one is watching.
What Are We Doing Here (We Are Not Born For Ourselves Alone)

Chapter Summary

They’re suffering because of CyberLife, just like we are, Markus thinks as he undoes his seatbelt and steps out into the cold, winter air. James’s Beacon continues to sing, soft and warm, cutting through the snow. Maybe not in the same way, but it’s not a contest when we’re all dying. I just wish I knew how to help.

He remembers Leo, remembers how he’d begged on his father’s front steps for enough money to pay for rehab. Having seen how homelessness and addiction had taken its toll on Nick, Markus thinks he understands Leo more than he ever had before.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of malnutrition, PTSD, severe illness, theft, assault, prior character death, corporate and police assassinations, domestic violence, homelessness, drug use, drug abuse, android gore, police brutality, police scene, animal abandonment, assisted suicide, migraines, classism, ableism, nudity, needles, extreme nihilism, data mining, sex trafficking, alcohol use, human gore, and hysteria.

The second scene has several moments where Markus reflects on the events of ‘From the Dead,’ though non-canonical details have been added. One of these moments includes the canonical mercy-killing that can take place during this chapter, implying that Markus aided in an assisted suicide.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul just got back from toronto. everything went well at the farmers market despite the storms

Blu @sapphiresoul
@dilassassin thats great! i’ll tell castle and rose, they’ll be happy

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul bad news: that might have been the last trip of the season. the river’s gotten too cold at nite to transport the produce safely
Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin fuck. things are gonna get more dangerous, now that the ddtf and jocelyn’s fucking deviant hunter are roaming around town

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin i’ll talk to my mom. maybe she can help pull some strings

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul please be careful. joss douglas has a lot of people looking toward the wealthy bc of the ddtf. if your mom gets implicated then its only a matter of time before the rest of us get caught

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin dont worry. we’ve been in this for longer than you have. mom and i know how to stay out of the limelight

LOCATION:
FORMER WATERS’ HOME
9300 BARRETT AVE., RAVENDALE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 17TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 08:57:11

“I’m coming with you.”

Alice clutches the back of the wooden chair, her little knuckles digging into the grooves as she fought to stay upright. Her legs continued to wobble ever so slightly, and she’s even thinner than she was when they fled Todd’s house so long ago. Kara wonders if the girl would ever truly recover from the trauma of that night, let alone the ten days of fever and illness that followed.

“Alice, you need to stay with Ralph. I’m just going out to buy you some food. It’s too dangerous for you to--” Kara starts, but Alice draws herself up and shouts over her.
“Don’t lie to me, Kara! You’re going to steal food. You can’t do that!”

Despite all the good luck that Kara had had during their first few days living in her old master’s home, it had quickly evaporated over the last week. The money that Isaac the bus controller had given them had dried up after Kara had to purchase more Motrin for Alice’s ever-climbing fever. And unlike last time, there was no one like Nick to take pity on her and buy it for her.

From there on out, Kara had to use every trick in the book to keep her newfound family alive. She’d stole drugs from the pharmacy and attacked delivery drones from the local coffee shop for their food. Knowing how easily she could be caught, she’d shifted her appearance slightly each time so that no one would recognize her. Kara never hit the same store twice, always paranoid about being tracked. Still, it had all been worth it to see Alice’s fever lift and the swelling in the ankle slowly go down.

However, once Alice had become coherent enough to understand what Kara had been doing, the little girl had spoken up.

“Stealing is bad, Kara,” Alice says, tightening her grip on the chair. “It wasn’t right. You can’t keep doing that.”

“I had no choice, Alice. You needed medication and food, or you were going to--”

“I don’t care! It’s wrong,” Alice interjects.

“It was the only way!” Kara shouts back, her fingers balling into fists at her sides as she thinks, She’s just a child.

“Mom and dad used to say that all the time, whenever Pedro brought over drugs for them to sell,” Alice says. “It’s the only way to pay off our debts, Alice.’ ‘It’s the only way we get to eat, Alice.’ And when I said that it was wrong, mom always said, ‘You don’t understand, Alice. You’re just a kid.’”

“Alice…” Kara whispers.

“I’m not a kid. I’m ten. I’m older than you,” Alice shouts. “It was wrong for mom and dad to do that, and it was wrong for you to steal.”
“...You would have died if I didn’t,” Kara whispers, trying one last time to justify her actions.

“There were other ways that don’t hurt other people. You just didn’t look,” Alice says. Her legs finally give out on her, and she slumps to the floor, letting out a choked-back sob and hiding her face in her hands.

Kara takes a hesitant step forward, kneeling down before Alice. She reaches out to touch the girl’s shoulder, but Alice shrugs her off.

“People always do that. They say that they’re doing bad things because of me and I don’t want that anymore. It’s not my fault, it’s not, it’s not,” Alice mumbles into her palms.

You saved me by shooting your father, Kara wants to say, remembering the flash of a muzzle and Todd’s dead weight on top of her. But that would only fracture Alice’s fragile psyche more, and that’s the last thing that Kara wants.

I will never be Todd, Kara promises to herself. It will make everything infinitely harder, but if it help’s Alice to heal, then she will make an effort.

“I’m sorry,” she says because it’s the truth. “Alice, I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize…” Kara pauses, thinking carefully of what to say next, “You’re right. I shouldn’t have done that. I promise I’ll never steal again.”

“Or hurt people.”

“Or hurt people,” Kara says, but she knows that part is a lie. This time when she reaches out again, Alice doesn’t push her away. The little girl rushes forward and throws her arms around Kara’s waist, pressing her face into her stomach.

“I’m scared. I’m so scared all the time,” Alice whispers. Kara wraps her arms around her, holding her close.

“I’m scared too,” she admits. She nudges her chin against the top of Alice’s head. “Come on. Let’s get you cleaned up. And if you feel well enough, you can come with me this time.”
The water coming out of the upstairs shower head is lukewarm at best, but at least the tub is clean after Kara and Ralph scrubbed it down the first night they’d arrived. Alice’s hair takes longer to dry, her thick curls remaining damp despite Kara’s best efforts with the blow dryer. The house’s power shudders every few minutes, and Kara hears Ralph swearing each time the breaker flips in the basement.

Alice’s health is still questionable by the time they’re ready to go, so Kara dresses her in every warm piece of clothing she’s collected in the past week. She tucks the helms of Alice’s snow pants into her winter boots and wraps a woollen scarf around her neck before tugging a pom pom-adorned beanie over her ears.

Alice doesn’t make a comment about the stolen clothes. Still, a shadow passes over her eyes when she realizes where they must have come from. Kara tilts her head in apology and helps her put on her mittens.

The cold hits them like a brick wall, harsh and unforgiving. Alice starts to cough when the air hits her lungs, nearly doubling over on the front porch as her tiny chest fought for every breath.

“Do you want to go back inside?” Kara asks.

“No,” Alice says stubbornly, doing her best to stifle her hacking. “No. Let’s go.”

Together, they crawl under the chainlink fence and into the parking lot. Last week’s blizzard has all but buried the abandoned Toyota Corolla under a snowdrift. And with threats of another storm about to hit Detroit in just a few days, Kara only prays that they can find everything they need today.

_The last storm would have killed us, had Ralph not been able to keep the power on_ , Kara remembers. The three of them had spent the blizzard huddling around the fireplace, hoping to stave off the cold for as long as they could. Kara and Ralph hadn’t even risked touching Alice as the winds battered the walls. They’d been too terrified that their cold body temperatures would put her at risk of another bout of sickness.

_We owe Ralph so much,_ Kara thinks. Anguish runs through her coding as she remembers that they won’t be able to take him with them when they leave. On some level, she knows that Ralph knows that, but realizes that it will shatter him all over again when it finally happens.
They haven’t told Alice yet. Kara doesn’t even want to think about telling Alice that they’ll have to leave Ralph behind so that they can continue to survive.

The streets are packed with cars fighting their way through rush-hour traffic, but the sidewalks are surprisingly empty. Kara and Alice cross the street when the lights turn green, before swiftly moving into the coffee shop that’s kiddy-corner from her old master’s home. A wave of familiarity rolls through Kara’s code when she opens the front door and heard a familiar tinkling bell.

One of the android baristas looks up and gives her a smile. Kara ducks her head, shuffling into one of the booths in the back of the cafe.

“I want hot chocolate,” Alice says as she peels off the scarf around her neck, kicking her boots together to knock the snow out of their grooves.

“I don’t know if I can get you that, but I can try,” Kara murmurs, pulling her hood up over her face. She can’t take any chances, especially since there are cameras located in every corner of the cafe. She tries to slip into the security systems, hoping that it will be as cooperative as the others she’s run into. However, cold runs through her coding when Kara realizes that she’s sitting in the only blind spot in the entire cafe.

I’ve been here before, Kara thinks, her fingers digging into familiar groves on the wooden table. Across from her, Alice reaches for the electronic menu with an ungloved hand.

“Don’t!” Kara hisses, grabbing it and pushing it away.

Alice frowns, “I just wanted to look…”

“Those things record your fingerprints, Alice. We can’t leave a trace that we were here,” Kara tells her.

“I was just looking, though.”

“I know, I know, but we’ve got to be careful,” Kara reassures her, doing her best not to draw
attention to their location. They’ve gotten lucky with cameras so far. Still, every person had a phone with CyberLife’s data mining technology embedded into its core. And try as she might, but Kara can’t possibly hack them all to keep her and Alice safe.

The doorbell tinkles again, and Kara uses the reflection in the window to watch as an elderly woman walk inside, her cane tapping lightly against the tile. *This spot is ideally placed to observe the entire cafe. I’ve been here before, but… What was I doing here?*

“May I take your order?”

Kara looks up, before quickly bringing her face down to avoid the gaze of the android barista that’s standing in front of their booth. He’s a light-weight model with a standard clean-shaven face, standing almost half a foot taller than Kara. His cafe uniform consisted of a pressed white t-shirt, a knee-length green apron, and a black baseball cap.

“I want hot chocolate,” Alice pipes up. The barista smiles at her, his LED blinking yellow.

“And for you, miss?” He asks.

“I’m fine,” Kara answers, her voice clipped as her eyes bored holes into the table.

“Are you sure? We have a breakfast combo that you might like.”

“Thank you, but I’m--”

--”Kara? Kara, what are you doing?” Mae shouts, clutching her husband’s hand. Kara levels the gun, the world around her red and red and red--

“Kara?”
Kara jolts back to reality. Alice has reached across the table, gently touching the back of Kara’s hand.

“Kara, you’re shaking,” Alice says, her brown eyes wide with concern.

“I’m--” Kara starts, but her coolant systems begin to fail, her false breathing faltering. Darkness encroaches on the sides of her vision, threatening to overcome her.

--“STOP SCREAMING! I hate it when you scream!!” Todd howls, the gun waving widely in his hands. Sophie, her face so swollen that Kara barely recognizes her, pleads for her life--

--Kara’s finger pulls the trigger as she continues to cry--

“Miss? Miss, do you need some help?” The barista asks.

--“Can you help me?” Kara says, her hands covered in blood and the gun resting heavily in the waist of her jeans. The barista nods, his LED blinking, and disappears into the back--

He knows me, Kara realizes. She turns her head, her jaw locking shut as panic continues to overwhelm her. The barista looks back at her with blank eyes hid the person underneath.

“Can you help me? We have nowhere to go,” She asks again, taking a risk and reaching out with an uncovered white hand. The barista smiles at her and interlocks their fingers, sealing the connection between them.

“Of course, Kara. I know a place where you can be safe. Let me show you.”

She and Alice return home as soon as they can, each clutching a paper bag of leftover pastries and
a steaming mug of hot chocolate. Ralph is at the door to greet them, his fingers twitching at his side.

"Is that... human food?" He asks as Alice races into the kitchen to grab herself a plate.

Kara nods, setting the bags on the table, excitement bubbling in her chest.

"Latte, the android from the cafe across the street - he gave it to us," she tells him. "He was deviant, Ralph. I felt it. He's just like us."

"Then why was he working for humans? Why is he still a slave?" Ralph asks, frowning.

"I knew him back when I was living here. Latte said that I knew a place for deviants to go, so they could get to safety. He went there, but came back here so that he could help other androids. Here, Latte gave me the location," Kara explains, transferring the address to Ralph.

"Kara... That's on the other side of town."

"I know, I know. But Latte said the human that lives there knows how to repair androids, Ralph. They could fix your burns, so you could come with us," Kara says, stepping forward. A tentative smile works its way onto Ralph’s face.

"Ralph could... Ralph could come with you?"

"Yeah. If this human can help us get over the border, then you could come live with us in Canada."

"Canada? Why Canada?"

Kara expected this reaction. Ralph could describe over a thousand different plants, fix almost any machine they put in front of him, but had very little knowledge about the world outside Detroit. CyberLife had only programmed him with the information he needed to do the job they built him for, nothing more and nothing less.
“The beautiful landscapes. The open spaces, clean air... And no android laws,” Kara explains.

“But Kara, the deviant hunter--”

“Won't be able to follow us across the border. CyberLife isn't allowed inside Canada. It's perfect, Ralph. You and me and Alice, we could have a fresh start there. Ralph, we'd finally be free!”

Before Ralph can say anything else, Alice stumbles back into the kitchen, clutching the plate to her chest as her face began to pale. Kara frowns.

“Alice? What’s wrong?”

“There’s a police car parked outside the fence.”

Immediately, Kara and Ralph burst into action, having devised a plan for such an emergency days ago. Kara doses their fire with a bucket of rainwater, quickly grabbing their food off the table. Ralph bolts to the windows, throwing them open to release the heat from inside the house before picking up Alice and running for the basement door underneath the staircase. Kara follows along, pausing only to push a large cardboard box in front of the entryway to block the door from sight.

The basement is musty, damp, and covered in mould. The poured concrete floor is cracked from the leaking ceiling, and the only light came from a small window that was covered in spiderwebs.

Ralph is already at the breaker box, severing the house’s connection to the power grid. Kara rushes over to Alice, pressing a finger against her lips. Alice nods, her brown eyes wide and fearful as she stared at the ceiling above them as if waiting for it to collapse.

*If it's the deviant hunter, we're all dead,* Kara thinks. The face of CyberLife’s assassin swims before her eyes, pride rippling through his every being. She looks at Alice, remembering the promises she’d made her, the promises that she’s made to Sophie, and knows that she’ll have to break one of them.

She reaches for Todd’s gun, safely tucked away in the waistband of her dark jeans.
“Ralph. If it’s the deviant hunter, take Alice and run,” she tells him as Alice wraps her hands around Kara’s hips, pressing her face into her stomach.

“What about you?” He asks, his LED a strobe of red, and red, and red.

“I’ll buy you all the time I can.”

There’s a creak overhead, the sound of weight being placed on the floorboards above. Dust falls from the ceiling, marking where the police officer was stepping. Alice shakes when a small rock hits her, burying her yelp of surprise in Kara’s clothes.

“We’ll be alright, Alice,” Ralph says, doing his best to look brave. “rA9 will protect us. rA9 has always protected Ralph, so he will help you too.”

He sets a tentative hand on the girl’s head, but Kara sees a silver flash of a kitchen knife underneath the tarp he wore as a coat.

“We will fight the human together, Kara. Ralph is not leaving you behind,” he tells her, and his voice sounds like a song.

Inspired by his confidence, Kara takes a risk and reaches out with her code. Police officers these days were covered in technology, from body cameras to heart rate monitors. Kara downloads the officer’s bio-readouts and identifying markers, finds his radio and alters her voice to pass as a man.

“Dispatch calling patrol 216,” Kara says, doing her best not to let her voice shake. When Alice looks up, visibly startled, Ralph gives her a reassuring pat.

“Dispatch, this is patrol 216,” the responding call echoes through her coding, rough and coarse like grains of sand. Above them, the officer’s actual voice reverberates through the floor, muffled by the decaying wood.

“Hostage situation in progress at the warehouse on Jefferson and Walker,” Kara lies.

“Jefferson and Walker? That’s practically downtown… It’s way outside our district.”
The bio readings on the officer’s onboard computer register a spike in his heart rate.

He’s suspicious. Say something to make him believe it would be an emergency, Kara thinks, wracking her CPU for ideas.

Alice taps her hip to get her attention, mouthing, ‘Deviant hunter’ before returning to her hiding place in Kara’s clothes.

“Sorry, guys. You’re the closest available patrol. The DDTF--”

“Fucking hell, those guys get whatever they want, don't they,” the officer says, letting out an irritated static-y sigh. “10-4 dispatch. We're on our way.”

Kara watches the falling trail of dust as the officer heads back outside, waiting on bated breath until the front door shuts with a click. Ralph scales the wall to peer out the tiny window, watching as the red-and-blue siren lights disappeared into the distance.

Slowly and carefully, Kara leads her family upstairs, one hand clutching Alice’s and the other holding the grip of Todd’s gun. Ralph brings up the rear, moving so silently that Kara’s auditory systems can barely detect him. Kara pushes the cardboard box aside, peering out into the living room.

“They’re gone,” she whispers, and Alice lets out a sigh of relief.

“Why were they here? Kara, you said that the humans wouldn’t notice if Ralph turned on the power,” Ralph asks.

“I read the officer’s orders when I hacked his radio,” she explains. “They’re doing random patrols of uninhabited buildings. It’s not just about searching for deviants. They’re supposed to remove any homeless people who are squatting to survive the storms.”

“But… they’re not hurting anyone,” Alice says, visibly concerned. “We’re not hurting people.”
“The humans don’t care,” Ralph hisses angrily. “Humans just want to hurt and kick and kill. They’re monsters.”

“*I’m* human,” Alice protests.

“You’re not that good at being a human. You’d have made a better android.”

“Either way,” Kara interjects. “We can’t stay here for much longer. We were able to distract one officer, but if we keep doing the same thing, then the humans are bound to notice a pattern.”

_We were lucky they came in the front door, and not the back_, she realizes. The graves that they’d dug for Mae, Gareth, Carina, and the man Ralph had killed would be evidence enough to show that someone was living here. _We might not be so lucky next time_.

“We need to get ready to leave,” Kara decides, kneeling down to look Alice in the eye. “We’re going to have to go out again to collect food and money for our trip. I’ll see if Latte can help us--”

“Who’s Latte?” Alice asks.

“The android from the cafe across the street,” Kara answers quickly. “After that, we’re going to have to catch the train to Dearborn, so we’ll need tickets. We set out the day after tomorrow.”

“Not sooner?” Alice frowns.

Kara shakes her head, “Ralph and I need time to recharge before the trip, but it’s more than that.” She nods toward Ralph, “We need to get him a disguise that covers his face, but that will make him an obvious target on the train. Unless…”

“The storm,” Ralph says, catching on. “If we move in the middle of the storm, Ralph will have a reason to be covered up. But Kara, if it gets too cold--”

“I know the risk,” she says definitively, remembering the vision she witnessed before being rebooted, frost climbing up her limbs as a shadowy monster lurked in the background. “But that blizzard the best chance we have to make it. And if the deviant hunter comes after us, then he’ll be
at the same disadvantage as we are.”

Alice wraps her arms around herself.

“Kara, I don’t know… What if I get sick again?”

“Then we’ll take care of you when we get to where we’re going,” Kara says reassuringly. “We’re going to pull through this, Alice. As long as the three of us are together, nothing can stop us.”

“I’m scared,” she says in a low whisper like she’s ashamed.

Ralph sits down on the floor beside them, the wood creaking from the force of his fall.

“It’s us against the humans. Always will be. They don’t understand, and they don’t care,” he says, flopping onto his back. “Ralph doesn’t want to die. Dying scares him. But Ralph doesn’t want Kara or the little girl to die either. That scares Ralph more than what humans will do to him if he’s caught.”

“We have to trust each other because we only have each other, Alice. Ralph and I will help you, and you’ll help us. And when we get to Canada, this is all just be a bad memory,” Kara implores.

Alice nods, her lips thinning to a grim line. Kara remembers that look, staring at her from behind the barrel of a gun as blood bloomed underneath Todd’s green sweater.

“Okay,” Alice agrees. “What do we do?”

They make their plans well into the afternoon, taking breaks for Alice to rest from the illnesses that still plagued her tiny body. Kara retreats up to her old masters’ bedroom to take pack away the stolen clothing she’d scrubbed clean in collected rainwater. Carefully she takes them off the drying racks and folds them into her backpack.

The leather wingback chair stands vacant against the back wall. Kara wonders if that’s where she’d sat when she fired the trigger.
Why would I kill them? She wonders, looking down at her hands and is surprised not to find them painted red with human blood. They were good and kind, and I loved them. Why would I ever do that to them?

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Kara pulls Todd’s gun out of her waistband. She turns it over in her hands, rubbing her thumb against the grip.

Alice shot Todd to save me. Alice risked it all to make sure I lived, she thinks, slowly unloading the cartridge and placing it on the floor. Kara grabs one of the clean shirts and uses the hem to wipe the gun clean.

If I’m caught, they’ll take the gun and see her fingerprints, Kara thinks as she carefully reloads the weapon. But now, the police won’t find anything. Now, they’ll think I shot Todd.

It’s not enough. It might ever be enough to repay Alice for the sacrifice she’d made that night. Kara doesn’t know if she’ll be able to keep the promises she made to the little girl, to uphold those same moral convictions while they were on the run. She’ll do her best, even if it means putting herself on the line for her family.

I love them, Kara thinks, holding onto the fleeting memory of Sophie’s smile, of her soft hands and gentle voice. I loved you. I’ll protect your daughter, no matter the cost.

Kara loads the gun again, tucks it back into her waistband, and gets back to work.

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@helpful_t-rex heard you needed some financial assistance check this out it could help: https://bit.ly/2BKRnCX
Brooke pulls into the driveway, kills the engine of her dark green Nissan, and undoes her seatbelt.

“Well,” she starts. “We’re here.”

Markus offers the human woman a warm smile, his analysis software tracking her every facial movement. So far, Nick had yet to show signs of recognizing him, but Brooke seemed a bit more likely to catch on. He wondered how much time he had left amongst this group before they turned on him before he had nowhere else to go.

“I’ll be sad to leave”, Markus realizes then, not understanding when he’d gotten so close to this pack of humans. He’d come to the church looking for the family he’d lost ten years ago but seems to have found another in James’s absence.

“I don’t think he’s home right now,” Markus says, nodding to the unlit windows of the house. Brooke grunts in response, mumbling something about having to find a key.

Nick leans forward through the front seats.

“Brooke, you’ve got the child lock on again. Wanna let me out?”
“Fuck, are you serious? My roommate told me that he fixed that last week,” she groans and gets out of the car.

Markus keeps his snickering to himself. He’d turned the child lock back on during the conversation he’d been having with the car’s onboard computer while they were driving over. He’d told the AI that he was just testing to see what limitations he might still have in his deviancy. However, that seemed to no longer be the case.

As a result, Markus had spent most of the last few days doing his best to annoy Nick Peck. Only subtly, of course, and not in a way that might draw his hostility. Because despite their rocky beginnings in Greektown, Markus has surprisingly come to like Nick and doesn’t want to see him or his friends hurt.

_They’re suffering because of CyberLife, just like we are_, Markus thinks as he undoes his seatbelt and steps out into the cold, winter air. James’s Beacon continues to sing, soft and warm, cutting through the snow. _Maybe not in the same way, but it’s not a contest when we’re all dying. I just wish I knew how to help._

He remembers Leo, remembers how he’d begged on his father’s front steps for enough money to pay for rehab. Having seen how homelessness and addiction had taken its toll on Nick, Markus thinks he understands Leo more than he ever had before.

He and Nick grab the bags out of the trunk before following Brooke up the steps of the red brick house, the concrete steps still covered in thin pools of ice. Markus does his best to avoid them, worried that his new legs wouldn’t be able to handle it. In doing so, he notices that someone has put a small wooden statue of Santa Claus on the front porch in anticipation of Christmas.

Nick scoffs when he sees it, watching as Brooke nudged the statue onto the side to reveal a key hidden underneath, “It’s fucking November. We haven’t even gotten to Thanksgiving yet.”

“Try telling that to Oli. The kid lives and breathes Christmas,” Brooke responds as she inserts the key into the lock, turning the doorknob and letting them both inside.

“When is Oli getting home?” Markus asks as the humans remove their coats, hanging them on the hook by the door. His programming says that he should induce an artificial shiver as warm air washes over him, to hide his inhuman qualities from Brooke’s watchful gaze. But he decides not to, simply because he can. Instead, Markus makes quick work of stomping the snow off his new shoes.
“He gets off work in an hour and a half,” Brooke confirms. “Be quiet, though, will you? His mom’s probably still asleep.”

“Let’s bring these bags into the kitchen. Markus, pass me one. Those things are heavy,” Nick prompts, reaching forward.

“No,” Markus says, revelling in his ability to just do that now. He curls his fingers even tighter around the fabric straps, effortlessly hoisting the bags into the air. “I’ve got it. Don’t worry.”

The Harper’s kitchen makes Markus’s skin crawl, the last remaining echoes of his housekeeping programs begging him to clean the mess before him. The sink was overloaded with pots and pans, and the garbage can was overflowing with takeaway boxes and empty ramen cups. Flies buzzed around a vase of dead flowers, the water inside a rancid, murky green. Brooke opens the fridge and grunts in disgust.

“Let’s get to work, then,” she says, opening up a nearby drawer and pulling out a garbage bag. She starts grabbing mouldy food from inside the fridge and pitching it in the trash, while Nick gets to work on filling a bucket with soapy water to tackle the floors.

Markus sets the bags on the table, slowly pushing several flyers out of the way. Part of his doesn’t want to clean someone else’s mess for them ever again. Still, the rest of him desperately needs to bring order to the eclectic disarray that is the Harper’s house. As Markus organizes a pile of flyers alphabetically by subject and date of publication, the tightness in his chest starts to unwind, and his coding begins to flow more easily.

By the time Brooke has finished cleaning out the refrigerator, Markus and Nick have swept and mopped the floors, scoured the countertops, and scrubbed the dirty dishes. Markus moves back to the kitchen table, opening up each of the bags they brought in and passing the contents to Brooke.

“It’s not much, but it should be enough food to get the kid through the next couple of weeks,” she tells him as they fill up Oli’s fridge with groceries and pre-made meals.

“It’s very kind of you,” Markus says as he hands her a carton of milk. “Where did you get all of this food?”

Brooke gives him a sly smirk, “I’m a supervisor at DigiGroceries. This was all unsold produce
that was supposed to be thrown out last night, but I managed to sneak some out of the warehouse and take it home.”

“That security bot is on the fritz again?” Nick asks from where he’s standing drying dishes in front of the sink.

Brooke nods, scoffing, “I walked out with oranges in plain sight and all it did was ask about my day while staring at the fucking ceiling. Damn tin can took Serena’s job four years ago but can’t even do half of the shit she used to do.”

“You got oranges? Holy shit, Brooke! I haven’t had one in almost a year ,” Nick raves, nearly dropping the plate in his hands and leaping into the bags to see.

But all Markus can do is think of Isa, the android from the junkyard who’d gifted him with a new blue eye. They had interfaced in the moments leading up to her death, letting each other see their lives before she’d passed on.

*Her programming limited her ability to speak. Still, she was so alive inside,* he thinks, remembering how Isa had spent so much of her life loving a human woman that often frequented the cafe that owned her. There was only so much that Isa could say, only so much that she was allowed to do. But she’d managed to ask the woman how her day was every time she saw her, even complimenting her on her manicure whenever she changed the colour.

*That android isn’t glitching. They like you, Brooke,* Markus wants to say, but holds his tongue. Despite how much he’s come to enjoy the company of his new humans, he has no illusions about what Brooke and Nick might do if they discovered that he was an android.

Brooke and Nick continue to bicker at each other, sorting through the fresh produce that she’d managed to sneak out of her company’s warehouse. Markus tries to help, but his vision begins to blur as a high pitched buzzing sounds begins to ring through his right auditory component. He sways slightly before sitting down hard on one of the kitchen chairs.

“Whoa, Markus. You alright there?” Nick asks, frowning.

Markus folds over onto the table, wrapping his arms around his head.
“Just dizzy again. I’ll be fine in a minute,” he says as a band begins to wrap around his cranial component, slowly squeezing until he felt like he might explode.

“Alright. Tell me if there’s anything you need,” Nick says before he and Brooke return to their sorting. This had happened several times over the past week, leaving Markus weak and vulnerable as his CPU tried to work around the damage inflicted upon it.

The bullet that almost killed him had ripped through his eye, tearing through Markus’s most sensitive hardware and out through his right auditory component. On top of that, the garbage truck the police officers’ shoved him inside after shooting him had mangled both of his legs and crushed his Thirium Pump Regulator beyond repair. Through some miracle, Markus had managed to reboot himself. He’d woken up half-buried beneath a pile of snow and dying androids, the freezing blizzard winds threatening to keep him there forever.

He’d been forced to repair himself using the discarded parts of commercially sold androids, the white plastic a stark contrast against the dark metal of his armoured chassis. The weight of his body laid heavily against his mismatched legs, his right just an inch and a half shorter than his left. His new eye and ear shorted out on the regular, leaving him with a severe blindspot on the right side of his head. At the same time, Markus’s new Regulator could barely keep up with the strain put on it by the advanced technology embedded into his body.

But these were things that Markus was determined to live with, to adapt and overcome in the wake of his deviancy. Because there had been so many others in that junkyard that hadn’t been able to leave. Markus would carry their names and stories in his coding for the rest of his life.

There had been Marion, who’d fed and cared for a litter of kittens that she’d found abandoned inside a compactor bin behind the restaurant she’d worked at. And then Philaes, who’d begged for Markus to take him to something called the Beacon. After he’d passed, Markus held a man named Jimeno as he died, allowing the android who’d spent his entire life beneath CyberLife Tower to see his memories of warm autumn colours and bright spring mornings.

Markus had buried Isa after she’d gifted him her sight, her bravery in the face of adversity gifting him with the strength to keep moving. He’d kissed Saris’s forehead and watched the stars with her while the timer on her HUD counted down to zero. And when the android begged for it, Markus buried the pain inside him and gave the dying Vincent the quick death that he’d wanted.

*I am alive because of them*, he thinks, remembering how Arnold and Brook had risked it all just to hold each other one last time. *And I have no idea how to thank them for that gift.*
Brooke sets a chipped mug full of hot tea on the table before him. Markus blinks up at her, his vision swimming. James’s Beacon continues to ring in his ears alone, louder and louder until Markus wonders why the walls aren’t shaking with its might.

“It can’t hurt,” she says, pressing a warm hand against his shoulders and nodding at the cup. “Fuck, you’re cold. Let’s see if we can find you a blanket.”

“I’m fine. I don’t need this,” Markus mumbles, pushing the tea away from him. He knows from his time in Brazil that accepting and eating food was the best way to disguise himself as a human, knows that he was built with a small cavity in his right hip to store ingested items for just this purpose. But he still feels awful accepting the cup of black tea. It’s such a waste, especially when he knows just how much Brooke and the others are struggling.

--He thinks of every extravagant meal he’d ever cooked for Carl, thinks of all the leftovers he’d thrown out because his master hated eating reheated food, and hates himself a little bit for not seeing the forest through the trees--

“Drink,” Brooke says anyways, slowly helping him raise his head and bringing the mug to his lips. Slowly, Markus sips at the tea, a warm weight descending upon his shoulders. He looks up, meeting Nick’s soft smile.

“It’s the best I could find. Sorry if it’s so scratchy,” the human man says, nodding to the patchwork quilt that he must have found in the living room. Markus tugs it closer around himself, taking comfort in the worn fabrics and muted colours.

*Human’s must make their things out of the softest materials in the world, if this is supposed to be uncomfortable*, Markus thinks, remembering how itchy his jacket with his android markers had been.


“T ook a look at her when I was searching for a mop. She’s still asleep - probably for the best,” he confirms.

“What happened to her?” Markus asks, the room slowly ceasing to spin.
Brooke and Oli exchange a look, clearly hesitant to explain Mrs. Harper’s condition. But when Nick opens his mouth, he’s immediately cut off by the sound of a key undoing the lock on the front door. Brooke stands up to open it up before the person outside gets the chance, and Nick lets out a laugh as a new voice filters in through the hallway, relief etched into every line on his face.

“Oli! Get over here, you little brat!” Nick says, pulling the thin teenager into a tight hug.

Oli dwarfed both Brooke and Bick by almost a foot, having to bend nearly in half to return their embrace. Mark’s’s facial recognition software told him that the kid was a few months shy of fifteen, with a mess of curly brown hair and round hazel eyes.

Oli looks over at Mark, blinking in confusion.

“Are you the crazy guy that showed up at the church in the middle of the snowstorm?” The kid asks, squinting at Mark in a way that makes him realize that Oli probably needs glasses but is too poor to afford them.

Brooke gently whacks Oli on the shoulder, “Be polite, will you?”

“I’m not crazy,” Mark says, rising to his feet and shuffling forward under the sheet. He extends his palm and Oli takes his hand to shake. “My name is Mark.”


Mark revels in the fact that Oli doesn’t expect him to help him with his coat, or that Nick and Brooke don’t order him to clean up after the muddy boot prints that the kid leaves on the clean floor as he walks inside. Oli looks inside the fridge, sharply turning around with a wide grin on his face.

“You got oranges, Brooke?! That’s-- wow, that’s amazing, thank you so much!” He says, pulling her into a hug and pressing a kiss onto the top of her head. “I haven’t had one in years, this is so, so cool!”

“You’re still growing. You need all the vitamins you can get,” Brooke says, a rosy blush high on her cheekbones. Oli steps away and grabs one of the oranges from inside the fridge. Carefully he peels away the rind and pulls each segment apart with gentle reverence, laying them on the table.
before him in the shape of a star.

Markus almost objects when Oli presses one into his mouth, wanting to tell the kid that the fruit is nowhere near ripe enough for him to properly enjoy. But Oli closes his eyes and lets an obscene moan loose, chewing slowly to savour the taste.

“Thank you guys so much,” Oli says, his voice cracking as tears glistened in the corners of his eyes. “Mom’s gonna love--”

A chime tinkles on Oli’s phone, alerting him to an incoming text. Markus manages to read it before the kid gets to look at the message, and his gaze rises to the ceiling.

“Mom needs me. I’ll be right back,” Oli says and darts up the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. Markus listens to the kid’s footsteps through the ceiling, hears the scraping of metal against ageing wood, and the muffled voice of Oli’s mother.

Markus takes a step toward the stairs, but Nick shoves his arm out in front of him.

“Give them some space, Markus. Oli’s got it covered, he’s been doing this for years,” he advises.

“Don’t touch me,” Markus says, and Nick jerks his arm away. Then, a little softer, Markus tells him, “I used to be a nurse. I can help.”

Brooke frowns, “I thought you were a soldier?”

“Yes. That too,” Markus says, pressing the quilt into her hands and shouldering his way up the stairs.

The rest of the Harper’s house is as filthy as the kitchen. Old pairs of underwear and socks with holes in them as strewn across the floor. Markus passes by what he suspects is Oli’s bedroom and a locked door before finding the kid behind the farthest door on the right, struggling to lift his mother into a wheelchair.

“Here. Let me help,” Markus says, ignoring Oli’s squawk of surprise to step forward. He kneels
beside Mrs. Harper, taking her in his arms and effortlessly lifting the woman into the chair.

“You’re strong,” Oli marvels, grasping the chair’s handles and pushing his mother toward the bathroom.

Markus makes a non-committal sound, his programming analyzing every detail of Mrs. Harper that he can see. She’s grossly underweight, and her eyes moved in and out of focus at a startling rate. Her lips were cracked, her blonde hair falling out in clumps, and she’d soiled herself since Nick checked up on her.

They wheel her into the bathroom, and Markus gently lifts her into the tub. Oli moves to undo her nightgown but looks back at Markus with apparent hesitancy.

*Humans are so odd when it comes to nudity,* he thinks, amused.

“I was a home care nurse before…” Markus trails off, and then vaguely gestures around them to convey the absurdity of his situation. “I was working with a paraplegic. There’s nothing that will shock me about what has to be done here, I promise you.”

“Oh…” Oli says, still obviously conflicted. Together, they remove the dirty nightgown and begin to fill the tub with warm water, scrubbing Mrs. Harper until she was clean.

“What happened?” Markus asks again after they’ve drained the tub and are patting her dry with towels.

Oli shrugs, “Mom used to work for CyberLife, in their Thirium Production Facility. After she was diagnosed with lymphoma, she helped organize everyone else who was sick to sue the company - even got a huge settlement out of the deal, too.”

Markus had been activated just a few months before the civil suit nearly bankrupt CyberLife, bringing the RKDT to a near halt as funding was ultimately cut. He remembers standing next to four dozen other RK200s in the R&D Department’s warehouse for almost half a year before CyberLife found enough money to continue the RK program.

---Markus wonders if his first thoughts to deviancy arose then when he was so conscious of the fact that he and his brothers could be shut down at any moment because of something as trivial as
When Alfred and Jocelyn Hines approached him six months later and assigned him a mission, Markus had never felt so happy in his entire life--

“But the money ran out,” Oli says, bringing Markus back to the present. “And then mom’s cancer came back, and then it spread, and--” The kid grits his teeth as he helps his mother into a new, white nightgown. “And fucking CyberLife said that they didn’t owe anyone shit anymore, so they weren’t going to pay up. Dad did what he could, and so did Val and me, but it wasn’t enough. Dad worked himself to death so we could afford her treatment, and afterward, Val… she…”

“Your sister?” Markus asks.

Oli nods, and together they help Mrs. Harper back into her wheelchair.

“Yeah. Val just left. Spent all her money getting a ticket on that fancy new train in NYC, got herself out to the west coast before the funeral even ended. And I’ve been just, I don’t know, holding down the fort ever since,” Oli explains. He rolls his shoulder, “Don’t tell Nick and Brooke about Val. They don’t know I have a sister.”

“…I’m sorry,” Markus thinks, remembering how much he’d once hated the humans who’d taken away CyberLife’s money, despising them because they were weak enough to fall ill. I had no idea, but that’s not an excuse.

“It’s fine. I’m fine, I just needed to vent,” Oli lies. “Just… I don’t know, I’m working all the time, and it’s never enough to pay for everything, and I’m so scared that… One day, when I’m not here… That she’ll just go, and I won’t know until I get home--”

“I’m sorry,” Markus says again. Together, they get Mrs. Harper back in bed and hook her up to the variety of machines that surround her sleeping area. Markus watches as Oli expertly replaces his mother’s IV drip and inserts the needle back into her arm.

“You’d make a good doctor,” he comments.

Oli snorts, “Don’t got the money to go to med school. And why bother? If global warming doesn’t kill us all in the next few years, then CyberLife will just replace all the doctors with plastics and
throw all that effort down the drain. There’s no point to it all anymore, not when we’re gonna get fucked no matter what we do.”

“Then why join the AAL? Why work to change things with Nick and Brooke?” Markus asks, frowning.

Oli shrugs again, “It’s something to do. Besides, we’re all gonna die, one way or another. Might as well go down swinging.”

DON’T LET THEM TAKE YOU ALIVE

--Something in Markus wells up, and he thinks of just sitting in that warehouse basement, waiting for a change that might never have come--

--”I don’t have the right answers,” Carl had told him once. “I’m just one person, living one like, in a world ruled by fear. Fear of others. Fear of the future. And maybe it’s time for that world to end--

Humans are so paralyzed by fear that they can’t see a way out, he realizes, finally understanding what Carl was trying to tell him that night, so long ago. But what could I ever do? No one will listen to an android that they think is suffering from a glitch?

“I’m sorry,” Markus says again, feeling absolutely useless. Oli nods, the weight of his exhaustion heavy on his shoulders, and together they head back down the stairs. James’s Beacon continues on, the soft song trailing after Markus wherever he went, but leading him nowhere he can last, nowhere anyone can live.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
This is getting ridiculous. Yes: DDTF leader, Lt. Henry Anderson, was recently seen with CyberLife’s deviant hunter inside an Eden Club. No: It wasn’t because Anderson is having sex with it. Get your minds out of the gutter… (1/7)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...However, there is something bigger at play here, especially since the DDTF is refusing to comment on this particular investigation… (2/7)
Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...For context: the Eden Club is a CyberLife-owned sex club, where it allows the public access to military-grade androids for the sole purpose of having sex with them. While this is public knowledge, CyberLife has also everything in its power to distance themselves from the Eden Club … (3/7)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...I wrote an article for @TechAddictOnline a while back discussing how I thought CyberLife was using androids to spy on their customers. And now, with the Eden Club, CyberLife can legally collect your DNA and fingerprinted (it’s in the T&Cs posted at the front door to each club) … (4/7)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...BTW: Here’s a link to that article if you want to read it: https://bit.ly/33zFtHr (5/7)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...If a Traci went missing, there would be some serious implications about what could be done with the information it had collected. That’s why CyberLife wants this kept *very* quiet, and the police are helping do just that… (6/7)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...Once again, we have to ask: when is the DDTF going to help someone who’s not connected to CyberLife? (7/7)

LOCATION:
HENRY FORD HOSPITAL
2799 W GRAND BLVD., NEW CENTER
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 18TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 03:17:43

Ariel covers her mouth, trying and failing to stifle a yawn.
“You tired, Hewitt? Had a late night yesterday?” Malaya jokes beside her, waggling her eyebrows suggestively.

“I was here last night. I haven’t had the chance to leave yet,” Ariel grumbles at the other doctor, pushing her glasses back up onto her nose. The file on her tablet swims in front of her, so she chugs her mug of scalding hot coffee, hoping to wake herself up.

“Thought you had yesterday off?” Malaya frowns, picking at her microwave dinner with a plastic fork.

“Got called in. Gallagher was…” she pauses, looking around to see if anyone was listening. When she sees that the coast was clear, Ariel presses her finger to the side of her nose and inhales sharply, mimicking Gallagher’s shameful habit.

“Motherfucker,” Malaya mumbles under her breath, and Ariel can’t help but agree. Every year, more doctors seemed to be succumbing to Red Ice addiction, often a result of needing comfort in a world that was becoming more impossible by the moment.

Ariel finishes her coffee, shakes her head a little bit to reinvigorate herself, and stands up.

“I’ve got to go do my rounds. Drinks after work?”

“You got it, babe,” Malaya says with a wink and a twiddle of her fingers. Ariel gives her a tired wave in return and makes her way out into the halls.

The hospital always seems to calm down around this time every night. After the bars began to close, and those who’d gotten caught in the middle of alcohol-fueled fistfights shambled back home with their split lips and bruised eyes. Ariel always likes visiting her patients during this hour, as she could often conduct her examinations in peace. She genuinely loves what she does, she just sometimes can’t stand the people aspect of her job.

The last patient that she checks up on is as deathly silent, as usual. His rising and falling chest and the steady beep of the heart rate monitor is the only indication of life. He’s a tall, broad man in his early forties, with slicked-back brown hair and a patchy, unshaven beard.

The man’s file tells Ariel that he was discovered inside his own home after an explosion in a
A doc-bot had spotted him through a window, passed out in a pool of blood, and quickly brought him to the hospital to undergo emergency surgery. Preliminary investigations indicated that he’d been shot twice, once in his right shoulder and the other through his left lung.

An inch to the right and the bullet would have perforated his heart, Ariel thinks, as she lifts the man’s oxygen mask to check his broken nose, looking to see if the bone was healing correctly.

The man had clearly been in the fight of his life before he’d gotten shot. Aside from his nose, he had shards of broken glass embedded in his right fist, internal bleeding inside his stomach, hairline fractures running along his jawbone, and a severe concussion.

He’s lucky to be alive, Ariel thinks, not for the first time.

She finishes up as quickly as she can, desperately wanting to wander back into the break room to take a quick nap on the couch before the morning rush comes through. Ariel places the man’s file back on the hook hanging from the foot of his bed, taking one quick look back before--

--The man opens his eyes.

Fuck.

“Sir? Hello, can you hear me?” Ariel asks, edging back to the bed.

The man’s eyes flick around the room, confusion evidence on every line of his face. Then, lightning-fast, he bolts up in bed, his thick fingers clawing at the bandages under his hospital gown.

“Sir? Sir! Please calm down,” she cries, pressing the red alert button on her tablet to bring a doc-bot into the room to help her restrain the patient. “Sir, please, you’re at the hospital. You’re safe, I promise!”

“Fucking-- fucking machine! It shot me, it actually fucking shot me!” The man growls, pushing Ariel away from him as his hands scramble with the restricting white bedsheets.
“Sir, I’m a doctor, I’m trying to help you--”

The man swears violently, doubling over and clutching his dripping red arm. A stitch looks to have popped open, and Ariel grabs a cotton bandage from the bedside counter to staunch the bleeding.

“Sir,” she tries again. “My name is Dr. Ariel Hewitt. I’m here to help you. Please, may I see your arm?”

There’s a long pause, where the man seems to freeze entirely, his teeth gritting together as his eyes flicked wildly around the room.

“My android…” The man finally says.

“Pardon me?”

“My android. It did this. It shot me,” he says.

Ariel’s eyes widen.

“Are you sure?” She asks, choosing every word carefully.

“Of course, I’m fucking sure. My goddamn android, it did this. It…” The man’s lips curl back, baring his teeth. “Where’s my daughter?”

“Your… daughter? The paramedics didn’t find anyone else in your house…”

“My daughter. Alice. Where’s Alice? Where’s…”

“Mr. Williams. Todd,” Ariel says as she begins to wrap the bandage around his bleeding arm. “Are you absolutely sure that an android did this? Because if that’s true, I will have to notify the police?”
Todd stares at her for a moment, the corners of his lips twitching upwards.

“Yeah… Yeah, you should do that,” he says. “And make sure to tell them that my android killed my wife, kidnapped my daughter, and tried to kill me.”

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Hank and Connor try to finish a puzzle after being given half the pieces. Meanwhile, Kara meets a mysterious friend from a previous life.
Beside him, Connor stands eerily still, mirroring the ancient red maple that stands in the back corner of the Williams’s yard. CSU had painstakingly chipped away at the frozen earth underneath its barren branches to reveal the body of Sophie Drake.

Of course, it’s probably Williams’ now. Hell, maybe it was all along, Hank thinks, reminiscing on the evening they’d first met. It had been almost a decade ago, the world a little less harsh and the future a little more bright. Sophie had smiled at him when she’d poured him a glass of whiskey, the red and blue strobe lights of the club flashing around them, and told him that he looked way too straight-laced to be anything other than a cop.

Sophie had been too young then to be playing the games that she was. And now, she was too young to have lost them, too young to be farther into a grave than Hank.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, prior character deaths, decomposition, domestic violence, human gore, guns, violence, pregnancy, drug use, drug abuse, sexuality, child abuse, kidnapping, theft of an enslaved being, smoking, alcohol use, talk of sexual situations involving an under-aged character, incarceration, sex trafficking, explosions, alcohol withdrawal symptoms, prior injuries, manipulation, fever, and seizures.

The second section is dedicated to the in-game chapter 'On The Run,' though many non-canonical deaths have been added.

It is mentioned that Alice has had another seizure due to a high fever. Again, while Kara and Ralph are unable to take her to a hospital because of their own personal circumstances, this is something incredibly dangerous to do - especially with a child. Please seek immediate medical attention should such an incident happen in real life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Gunshot victim awakens from coma, claims to be victim of a deviant attack

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
#UPDATE: DDTF discover woman’s body in backyard of shooting victim, as well as evidence of missing child
AMBER Alert @AMBERAlert
#Detroit #AMBERAlert We need your help to find 10-year-old Alice Williams, who went missing following a shooting at her North Corktown home. Most recent picture: https://bit.ly/37v2ZHJ

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
i live just around the corner from where Alice Williams went missing and the police are /everywhere/ holy fuck this is so scary

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex are you alright?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior i’m fine. the police are going door to door asking people if they saw anything

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava OMG A CAR JUST DROVE PAST AND I STG THE DEVIAN'T HUNTER WAS INSIDE

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex @proud-warrior holy shit the cops are actually taking this seriously? that’s NUTS

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex @ninjava im really fucking glad they are tho. can’t imagine what that little girl is going through. i just hope the cops are able to bring her home to her father

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex same. i don’t think i could stomach another phillips incident...

LOCATION:
TODD WILLIAMS' HOUSE
4203 HARRISON STREET, NORTH CORKTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48202, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 18TH, 2038
God damn it, Hank thinks grimly as he wraps his arms around himself, trying to stave off the cold. Why did it have to be her?

Beside him, Connor stands eerily still, mirroring the ancient red maple that stands in the back corner of the Williams’s yard. CSU had painstakingly chipped away at the frozen earth underneath its barren branches to reveal the body of Sophie Drake.

Of course, it’s probably Williams’ now. Hell, maybe it was all along, Hank thinks, reminiscing on the evening they’d first met. It had been almost a decade ago, the world a little less harsh and the future a little more bright. Sophie had smiled at him when she’d poured him a glass of whiskey, the red and blue strobe lights of the club flashing around them, and told him that he looked way too straightlaced to be anything other than a cop.

Sophie had been too young then to be playing the games that she was. And now, she was too young to have lost them, too young to be farther into a grave than Hank.

“You knew her?” Connor asks. There’s probably something written on Hank’s face that tells the android that, something that can be picked up by whatever ridiculously sophisticated programming that CyberLife packed into its head.

He scoffs, “Yeah. I knew her.”

“I’m…” Connor looks back and forth between Sophie and Hank. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

You don’t know a fucking thing about being sorry, Hank wants to spit. But he doesn’t, because Sophie’s kid is missing and Hank has a goddamn job to do. He nods his head toward the body, and Connor takes that as permission to move forward into the grave.

“Facial recognition is a match to Sophie Williams, born Sophie Drake,” the android says. It shoves its fingers inside the gaping hole in the side of her head, rummaging around and pulling out a dented silver slug. “Cause of death is a gunshot wound to the temple - point-blank. This bullet matches the striations from the one found lodged in Mr. Williams’ shoulder. But…” Connor pauses, its hands gently pressing against her torso. “Mrs. Williams also has several cracked ribs, a broken jaw, and massive internal hemorrhaging--”
“She fought the android before it shot her,” Hank concludes as the sky opens up, and thick flakes of snow began to blanket the world in deathly silence.

Connor makes a strange humming sound, its eyebrows knitting together over the bridge of its nose.

“Perhaps…” the android says, clearly distracted. It leans down, swiping its tongue across Sophie’s cheek. A disgusted sound erupts from Hank’s throat, his fingers fisting in the pockets of his coat.

“She’s too frozen for me to determine a time of death accurately with the timeline Mr. Williams gave us during our interview earlier this morning,” Connor says. It tilts its head to the side, poking at Sophie’s stomach. “I can’t be sure… But Mrs. Williams might have been pregnant.”

-- "We’re going to have a baby,” Nora tells him, her dainty hands shaking in his much larger ones. She’s crying. He’s crying, because it’s a fucking miracle. Because Hank had never thought that he’d be able to have kids after barreling headfirst into a burning Blue Ash lab, trying to save the dead cook inside--

“Might have been?” Hank asks as bile rises in his throat. He’s painfully sober, has been since he got the call this morning. But all he wants to do now is bury his memories in Black Lamb.

Connor shrugs, indifferent as ever.

“My instruments are acting up because of the cold. The chances of me registering a false positive are higher than normal.”

That’s not news to Hank. The blizzard that nearly flattened Detroit last week and driven the DDTF to a standstill, both because of Connor’s inability to function in the extreme cold and the exponential increase of calls from CyberLife customers who thought that their androids were going deviant because they’d left them out in the snow for too long.

But it was still a bit surprising to hear Connor admit to being anything other than entirely perfect.

“Well, if you’re going to be useless, let’s head inside. Beckett just arrived, so he can handle the autopsy back at the morgue,” Hank says, refusing to let his mind travel into the dark pit that it so
often inhabits these days.

He turns, limping back to the house. Hanks’ stump is killing him, the cold feeling like a hundred thin knives against his mess of scar tissue. Connor trails behind him, frighteningly silent even in the snow, and brushes the white flakes from its shoulders once they're inside.

“Mr. Williams said that he fought the android downstairs before it shot him,” Connor says, stating the obvious.

“Lines up with the evidence,” Hank nods, gesturing around the room. CSU has already done a sweep of the place, having arrived while he and Connor were at the hospital getting Todd Williams’s statement. Little yellow markers lay around the remnants of a broken chair, the wooden leg still embedded into the drywall. Shards of glass litter the kitchen tile, and just to the left is a sizeable red-brown stain that flowed onto the crisscrossed hardwood of the living room.

“Williams was shot here,” Hank murmurs, pointing to the pool of dried blood. “CSU found a bullet lodged in the back of the couch. Judging by the amount of blood loss, this one must have been the shot that nearly killed him. Meaning--”

“Meaning that he was kneeling when the android tried to kill him,” Connor says, bending down to imitate just that. Hank has to look away. The image of stunningly beautiful Connor on his knees is far too much for Hank to deal with right now.

Oblivious to Hank’s torment, Connor continues to talk, “The bullet was a through-and-through, meaning that the deviant must shot Mr. Williams from over by the countertop-- Wait.”

“What?” Hank asks.

“Do you have a laser pointer?” Connor asks, probably knowing full well that he has one on his keychain. Hank unhooks it from the metal loop and tosses it at the android. Connor effortlessly snatches it out of the air. It twists its arm unnaturally around its torso and pressing the end of the pointer to its back, right about where the entry wound on Todd Williams should have been.

Connor clicks the laser, shooting the beam forward. A small red dot appears on the front of the broken dishwasher, just above Hank’s knee height.
“That’s a bit low,” Hank says, raising an eyebrow in thought. “But Todd said he fought the android before it shot him, so maybe it was on the floor too.”

“Maybe…” Connor nods, it’s LED blinking a rapid yellow. It stands, tossing the laser pointer back at Hank. “There’s a human blood trail leading from the living room.”

They trace Todd’s stepped back to the front door, observing the bullets embedded in the dining room’s drywall and the front door’s wooden frame. Hank can only imagine how terrified the little girl must have been, how scared she is now after seeing her father desperately try to flee an unstoppable machine only to have escape cut off at every turn.

--Hank wonders if Cole felt like that, as he hung upside down inside their overturned SWISH, scared and blind and calling out for his father to save him, only for Hank to fail--

The blood trail leads them into the long hallway upstairs. The faded yellow walls are stained with red-brown hand smears, painting a grizzly picture of Todd struggling to stand as he limped toward the exit, his daughter clinging to his bloody hand. The master bedroom had been ripped apart in the deviant’s quest to find the gun, and the door to Alice’s bedroom had been kicked in so violently that the handle had buried itself in the wall behind it.

Alice’s bedroom is a mess. Blood is splattered across almost every surface, pooling in ugly smears across the soft white carpet. Connor does its disgusting ketchup-test and confirms that all of it belongs to Todd, which causes Hank to release a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

God, I hope she’s alive, Hank thinks desperately, not wanting to break the news to another parent about the death of their child. He shoves down the memory of Jeff telling him what happened to his family as he sat in that hospital bed, remembering how the world seemed to lose its colour with each passing second.

“Todd must have barricaded him and his daughter inside the room,” Connor says as it rises back to its feet, moving toward the broken window pane by the bed. “Glass sharded were found in the wounds on his right hand. He probably punched the window during the fight.”

“Or before it,” Hank comments, as his foot nudges up against a fallen hardback book. He looks down and sees the words, Alice In Wonderland, curling across the front cover. “Locked door buys you some time to find a way out. There’s a ledge just outside. Todd probably thought that he and Alice could escape out that way.”
Connor frowns, “The ledge wouldn’t be able to hold his and his daughter’s combined weight.”

“Doubt Todd knew that,” Hank says, all while thinking, *Doubt Todd cared.*

Connor blinks at him, almost as if it was confused why a human would act irrationally in such a situation. Hank wants to shake it, wants to shout at it and say that if there were something that could bring Cole and Nora back, then he’d do whatever he could to make that happen.

But androids didn’t think like that. Human life was just another statistic, a zero or a one in their fucking programs. And that was why Cole died. Because the AI inside their car couldn’t see the value of a six-year-old boy over an experienced police Lieutenant.

-- Except, sometimes he wonders why their SWISH didn’t save Nora, wonders how she died on impact when she was clearly more valuable than Hank and Cole combined--

--”Nora…?” Hank whispers as the darkness encroaches on the edges of his vision. Nora looks back at Hank through the broken passenger window, dark blood streaming down the side of her face--

--Dark blood, too dark in the early evening light--

--“Nora, where are you? Don’t… don’t go…”--

“Mr. Williams and Alice holed up inside her bedroom, but the fight started long before that,” Connor continues, snapping Hank out of his downward spiral. The android leads him back into the hallway, tracking something that Hank cannot see, before heading downstairs once again.

Pointing at the overturned dining table, Connor says, “The deviant made them dinner.”

“It keeps them captive in their own house, but it takes time to make them dinner?” Hank asks, frowning.

“Humans require a meal at least three times a day. It makes sense--”
“That’s not what I meant,” Hank snaps, rolling his eyes. “This android has already proven that it’s capable of killing humans. So why is it bothering to keep them alive?” He looks at Connor, who seems to be physically holding itself back from chowing down on the rotten food on the ground in the name of forensic science. “What do we know about this android, anyways?”

“Mr. Williams said that it was an AX400,” Connor states as its LED spins yellow. “First released in 2032, they were marketed as domestic workers, housekeepers, and caretakers of young children. This particular android--”

Connor pauses, his brows knitting together. Hank watches as his LED cycles between yellow and red.

“What’s up?”

“Todd Williams doesn’t have an android registered in his possession,” the android states.

“He said that his wife was the one that brought it home,” Hank says.

“Sophie Williams doesn’t have an android registered in her possession, either.”

Hank swallows hard, “She sometimes went under her maiden name. Try--”

“Sophie Drake doesn’t have an android registered in her possession,” Connor interrupts, annoyed.

“Don’t be a smartass. Besides, we know that androids aren’t always owned by the people that buy them. Remember the one from the Ortiz case? Carlos’s landlord gifted him the android because of his mental illness.”

Connor shakes its head, “There’s no record of this AX400 anywhere. I can’t--”

It pauses again, its LED fluttering in time with the android’s rapid blinking. Connor visible shivers, its fingers twitching at its side. Then, almost violently, Connor’s head swings around,
searching for something Hank can’t see. It makes a bee-line back to the kitchen, kneeling on the floor and wiping its palm across one of the tiles.

“Motherfucker. I thought I fucking told you to warn me if you ever saw dried Thirium 310 again,” Hank growls as he trails behind the android.

Connor resolutely ignores him, murmuring, “Model AX400. Serial number 579 102 694. Registered to…” The android’s LED cycles red, and red, and red, “This android has never been sold before.”

“What? That’s not possible.”

“It was activated on May 4th, 2032, at 4:44 a.m.,” Connor frowns. “Records indicated that it was immediately shipped to the Capital Park CyberLife store in Detroit. But it doesn’t appear on their receiving lists for that date.”

“Fuck. Fuck,” Hank swears, the pieces clicking into place. He’s so stupid, so out of his own head that he can’t even recognize the familiar signs anymore. He leaves the android to stand in the middle of the kitchen, hurdlng into the laundry room and--

--”You should check under your washing machine,” Sophie had said as she pored Hank another drink. She didn’t wear her wedding band at work back then, didn’t tell her customers that she was married. Hank wonders if she did it because she got better tips, or if it was for some other reason.

“Why would I look there?” Hank had asked.

Sophie shrugged, her lashes fluttering as she gifted him with a smile.

“Someone I know always hides his stuff underneath the washer. Says that keeping it warm improves the trip.”--

Hank bends down and reaches underneath the old washing machine, his fingers curling around the edge of a cardboard box. He pulls it out, looking at its contents to find hundreds of tiny plastic packets. Each was filled with just under an ounce of red crystals.
Todd Williams. Damn it, I should have remembered that name, Hank seethes. Pedro Aabdar, one of his CIs back in the days, had mentioned him as an upstart Ice dealer in North Corktown.

--"I feel kinda sorry for him, not gonna lie. Soph’ says that his kid’s sick like all hell - one of those immune deficiencies that kids get these days,” Pedro had said, leaning against the table at Chicken Feed. “Don’t know how well he’s gonna do, though. Looks like the type that sells to feed his habit, ya know?"--

“That’s nearly $1500 worth of Red Ice.”

“Mother fucker, will you make some goddamn noise when you move, you asshole,” Hank wheezes, whipping around to face Connor. The android stands soldier-straight in the laundry room’s doorway, staring at Hank with unblinking brown eyes.

“What has Red Ice got to do with this?” Connor asks.

Hank puts the box of drugs down on the washing machine. Instead of answering the android’s question, he poses one of his own, “Did CSI find any cigarette butts on the front lawn?”

“Yes. They match the brand found in Mrs. Williams’s bedside table,” Connor answers.

“Tranier Blu’s, right.”

“...Yes,” Connor nods, frowning. “Why? Does that mean something to you?”

“Yeah. Fuck,” Hank swears again. Tranier Blu’s were expensive, far too much for someone living in this end of town to afford. “What do you know about Erza Andersen?”

Connor steps forward, folding its arms across its chest. It’s LED blinks yellow before it answers, “Erza Andersen. Born March 30th, 1986 in Detroit, Michigan. She was picked up multiple times for drunken disorderlies and solicitation in her teens. She also served three years in a women's correctional facility following her arrest for drug possession in 2007. Since then, she’s famously gone on to become one of the largest Red Ice kingpins in all of North America.” Connor pauses, its eyes dragging over Hank in a way that makes his skin crawl, “However, she’s never successfully been connected to her supposed crimes.”
“Yeah. Not for lack of trying, though,” Hank scoffs. “Sophie used to work as a bartender in one of Erza’s clubs downtown. I thought I’d try to get her to become a CI. A lot of Erza’s lieutenants passed through there, and it played host to some underground bot-fighting rings back in the day.”

“You think that Erza Andersen stole the AX400 weight models. Its chassis wouldn’t be able to fight for very long,” Connor asks.

“Erza never really gave a fuck about that. Hell, some of her people will pay good money a pretty android get the shit beaten out of it in the ring. Besides, these things were worth a fortune when they first came out because of the whole sex thing,” Hank says. “Erza didn’t have to use it as a fighter to get her worth out of it.”

Connor nods along, picking up one of Todd’s Red Ice packets and turning it over in its hands. Hank wonders if Connor is analyzing it somehow, looking at chemical components and read-outs that he can only begin to comprehend. It’s as fascinating to watch as it is to dread, knowing that Connor could put thousands of people out of work if it were ever mass-produced.

“Mr. Williams said that his wife brought the deviant home with her last year, as a gift from her boss,” the android says, laying the packet back in the box.

“Doubt it was a gift. Erza’s rarely that kind,” Hank snorts. “Come on. Let’s go back outside, try to find where this thing went.”

The wind had picked up since they’d last been outside, the storm swirling around them in screaming silver. Hank shivers inside his thinning winter coat, raising a gloved hand to shield his eyes. He’d anticipated the coldness and the sting of the snow against his face, but not the blinding sunlight that glanced off the white planes that covered the earth. Frigid dampness seeps through his boots and into his socks as Hank takes long strides toward the road.

“It made them dinner. It killed Sophie, and then it made her husband and kid dinner,” Hank says again. Beside him, Connor tilts its head, looking oddly rumbled in the storm. “Fuck, why didn’t I see it before?”

“See what?” Connor asks.

“It was playing house,” Hank concludes. “It makes sense, in a fucked up way. Look,” he turns
toward the android, who is watching him with earnest, “Sophie brings this thing home from Erza’s fucked up fight club - stole it, maybe, because Erza doesn’t give gifts to people. Sophie brings it home to her family, to her kid that’s sick all the time and her husband that’s doing everything he can to keep them afloat. And it works for a while. The android enjoys its perfect little life with its perfect little family, but it’s probably only seeing the surface. But then—”

Hank pauses, taking a breath, “Sophie gets pregnant. And there’s no way that it's Todd’s because Ice eventually sterilizes its long term users. The android sees this as a betrayal and kills Sophie to take her place in the household.”


“Who’s Daniel?”

“Not who, Lieutenant. What. Daniel was the PL700 from the Phillips Incident. Its deviancy convinced it that Emma Phillips was its daughter, and tried to take her away from her parents after killing the girl’s real father,” Connor explains as it crosses its arms over its chest, snow-flecked through its dark hair. “This AX400 must have done the same thing, except it managed to succeed in its escape.”

*But why that day?* Hank frowns, and then rifles through his pocket for his phone. It’s a longshot, but he might as check.

Pedro has a private Twitter account that he uses to talk to both his clients and the dealers that he has under his command. During his time as a CI, Pedro had added Hank so that he could anonymously see who he was communicating with. And while the information Hank and the RITF had found had mostly led to a couple of minor arrests, the statements that they’d gotten out of plea deals had once led to them seizing over half a million dollars of Ice in 2028.

Hank scrolls through Pedro’s feed, slowing down as he neared the date of the attack.

“Bingo.”

Connor takes a step forward, reaching out to tap a bone-white finger against Hank’s phone. His LED flashes twice, and the android raises a perfectly sculpted eyebrow.
“Mr. Williams was behind on his payments,” Connor comments. “It makes sense, considering that he’d been held hostage for two weeks.”

“And Erza was coming to collect. Hell of a coincidence, but it forced the android to cause that explosion as a distraction to leave the house. Without it, Todd would have bled out before anyone knew he was still alive,” Hank says. He looks around the street, squinting through the blowing winds at the white sedan parked down the road. “Hey, when did dashboard cameras become mandatory for gas cars again?”

“Three years ago.”

“Think any of these cars have one? Maybe we can get footage of the deviant escaping.”

The sedan’s bumper is covered in rusty streaks, the right side hanging loose from the rest of the car. The windshield is a mess of spider web cracks, billowing out from the brick that’s embedded dead in the center. The dashcam refuses to wake up when Hank tries to activate it, but Connor taps its finger against it.

“It’s just out of batteries, Lieutenant,” the android comments as the camera’s power button flickers to life. It’s LED flashes yellow, yellow, red, and it’s eyelids blink rapidly as it downloads the information it needs. Holding up its hand, Connor plays the footage on the holographic pad on its palm.

Rain splatters against the broken windshield, but it’s not enough to block out the view of the Williams’s front lawn. Hank watches as the deviant carries Alice in her arms along the fenceline. The android’s face makes his mind stutter, in the way that it does every time he sees this model, unconsciously thinking that it was the same one that belonged to his in-laws. With its pretty, young face and dark brown hair, the deviant looks almost too innocent to have gunned down two people and kidnapped a child, too perfect for doing anything except pretending to give a shit about anything.

But before it can cross the road, the android ducks and hides as a sleek black car rolls up in front of the house.

Hank sucks in a breath as he watches two women exit the car. He recognizes the first one on sight. Erza Andersen may have been only a few years younger than Hank, but she still looked as ageless as he remembers. Her black hair was cut short around her ears, and her nails painted bloody red. Hank watches as Erza dug into her leather jacket and pulled out her cigarette pack, lighting one before waving her hand dismissively.
The second woman is unfamiliar, but Hank knows immediately that she’s not to be messed with. She was black, with her natural curls pulled into a stencilled undercut. She wore a tailored navy suit and held an automatic rifle like it was part of her body.

“Nadheera…”

Hank turns to Connor.

“You know her?”

Connor snaps its head toward Hank, it’s LED a strobe of bright red that cuts through the winter snow. The android’s shoulders are rigidly straight as it reaches into its pocket for its coin.

Hank reaches out, putting his hand on Connor’s wrist and stopping the android in its tracks.

“Do you know her?” Hank asks again, doing his best to ignore the feeling of cold, hard plastic underneath the layers of the android’s uniform. Connor stares at Hank’s hand like he’s never seen it before, its eyes impossibly wide as its automated breathing seems to shut off.

“I…” Connor starts, its voice oddly clipped. The wrist under Hank’s gently grip starts to shake. “I… yes. I do.”

“Who is she?” Hank asks.

“I can’t say.”

Hank frowns, “Look, we’ve already been through this. If there’s something we need to know, then--”

“I can’t say, Lieutenant. It’s classified,” Connor snaps, jerking away from his grasp and stomping back into the house. Hank sighs, rolling his eyes and wishing that he had his flask with him. But he’d promised himself that he’d never drink when a kid was involved in a case, would remain
painfully sober despite the shakes and the shivers. Because even he doesn’t think he could live with the alternative.

He follows the android back inside, finding it standing in front of one of the heating vents with its arms crossed over its chest.

“Don’t go near it,” Connor says before he can get a word out.

“Near what?” He asks.

“Nadheera. Don’t go near it.”

Hank blinks, “It? That girl, she’s--”

“An android, yes. That’s all I can tell you,” Connor tells him, refusing to look Hank’s way.

“Alright. Alright,” Hank says, slowly moving toward the android but keeping just enough distance that he wouldn’t appear threatening. “I won’t. I promise.”

Connor’s shoulders seem to relax ever so slightly. Hank watches as he rubs his wrist, softly running his fingertips across the synthetic skin that covers the joint. Then, the android turns back to Hank.

“Why did it miss?”

“Why did what miss?” Hank asks in return.

“AX400 models have basic medical knowledge so that they can better care for their families,” Connor explains. “It would have known where Mr. Williams’s heart was, so why didn’t it shoot to kill? Androids don’t miss.”

Speaking from experience? Hank wants to ask, remembering the rumours about Connor picking up a gun during the Phillips Incident.
“Dunno. Put that on our list of questions to ask it, once we catch the damn thing,” Hank says instead. The idea of finding the deviant seems to put Connor in a good mood, it's LED spinning a calm and collected blue.

“There’s a bus station outside,” Connor says.

“Think you can track it?” Hank asks. When Connor all but rolls his eyes at his question, Hank responds, “Look, Reed and Chris were having some trouble with an ABCD bus--”

“Detective Reed and Officer Miller are not me,” Connor says definitively, raising a perfectly arched eyebrow. Hank throws up his palms, stepping back to let the android do his thing.

They call the company and have the bus sent rerouted to the Williams’ home. It comes to a halt at the curb, the doors just barely swinging open before Connor has hopped on and accessed the main control panel.

*It didn’t even look at the poster,* Hank realizes, glancing at the square displaying a blue triangle on a blaring red background. That poster was supposed to halt any android in their tracks, the fine print citing the American Android Act directing them to follow the laws of the land. But just like that Jimmy’s, Connor seemed to pay it no mind, just like it did with the gun it probably used during the Phillips Incident.

And now there was a second mysterious android, this girl named Nadheera, who wielded weaponry with practiced ease and refused to wear any markers to announce its status. Non-military androids were prohibited from even touching a gun, let alone using it. They had to announce their inhumanity with glowing armbands and triangles.

But here were two living examples to the contrary. Hank looks at Connor, and not for the first time thinks, *What kind of game is CyberLife playing here?*

A smirk splits across Connor’s face, it’s pearly white teeth glinting as the snow howled around them.

“*Bingo.*”
CyberLife @CyberLifeCo
CyberLife is working in cooperation with the DPD and DDTF regarding the disappearance of #AliceWilliams

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Todd Williams is reported to have been in a medically induced coma following intensive, life-saving surgery, leading to the delay in reporting his missing daughter

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
#UPDATE: @theprofessionalblogger to interview Todd Williams in one hour. Watch the stream at: https://bit.ly/2Set4GH

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
@DetroitChannel16 According to eyewitnesses, the state of his house indicates the possibility that Williams and his daughter may have been held hostage in their own home after the death of wife

Gossip Weekly @GossipWeekly
#FatherOfTheYear Todd Williams nearly dies defending his daughter from his wife’s killer!!!

Jocelyn Hines @jhines
I can only imagine what Mr. Williams is going through. Let’s get #AliceWilliams home to her father safe and sound #AMBERAlert

President Cristina Warren @therealcristinawarren
Hey Detroit! Let’s get #AliceWilliams trending! This little girl needs our help! #AMBERAlert

LOCATION:
PEOPLE MOVER STATION
STOP ID: HRDIEB
THE CORNER OF HARPER AVE. AND DICKERSON AVE.
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 18TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 10:25:05
Kara shifts in her seat, pulling at her winter jacket.

“*I don’t like crowds,*” she tells Latte. He looks at her, a lifted smile tugging at his lips. He’s dressed as a human, a baseball cap hanging low over his eyes and a bulky jacket obscuring his form. He’d removed his LED, which hung from a chain around his neck.

“Most humans don’t either. And yet they make places like this,” he says, gesturing around the foyer. “They’re just full of contradictions, aren’t they?”

The train station was packed with humans, the masses flowing in and around each other in a near-endless dance, the hammering sounds of a thousand steps echoing off the brick walls. Kara watches one of the screens announcing the arrival of the westbound train, and a group splits off, hurriedly running up the stairs toward the tracks.

“When is your contact supposed to arrive?” Kara asks, anxious to leave this place as soon as possible. She leans forward in her seat, bracing her forearms against her knees.

Latte offers her another smile, “Soon, Kara. I promise.”

She pulls her hood up over her head. *Soon,* she realizes, *cannot come quickly enough.*

Despite the success of their excursion yesterday, allowing Alice to leave the house had come with unintended consequences. The little girl had spent most of the night vomiting up most of the food that they’d brought home from the cafe, before having another fever-induced seizure sometime around midnight. Kara and Ralph had done everything in their power to help bring her temperature back down. And in the morning, Kara had reluctantly parted from the two to steal more Motrin before meeting Latte’s contact at the train station.

*I still have some time,* Kara rationalizes. *I can find some food on the way home and get some more food for Alice at the convenience store, all before the snowstorm gets any worse.*

Latte taps her on the knee, telling her that his friend has arrived. Kara tilts her head up, scanning around the station for someone that looked to be heading toward them, only to come up with nothing. But before she can wallow in her own confusion, something scatches at the corner of her mind.
She jerks in her seat, her hands clamping around the edge of the chair. Whatever was speaking to her had used the same mental connection she used to talk to other androids. But the chaotic code behind the voice held so distinctly different that she had no idea what to make of it.

Reaching out with her coding, Kara tries to return contact, “Hello?”

Joy slams into her like a brick, invading her mind until with was all she knew.

“Thank god! Where are you? when you disappeared! all this,” the voice says, the sound filling every crevice inside of Kara and rattling within her.

“Who are you? Where are you?” Kara asks.

Disappointment, cold and dreadful, rolls down her spine. And then, a small spark lights up inside.

“<You…. don’t remember me?’” the voice asks tentatively. “<Kara, I’ve now you[ f-o-r] ~@?‘e]=a!~r~]>s~.”

A woman melts out of the twisting crowd, walking toward them with calm, measured steps. She was almost impossibly tall, with long dark hair that was streaked with grey. Her face was long and stern, her jaw square and set, and her nose bent slightly in a way that made Kara think it had been broken before. But her eyes were soft and brown, and her smile was nothing but warm.

“Kara, god, Kara! It is you, oh, I’m so happy,” the woman breathed when she got close enough, a slight accent tinting her words. Kara stands to greet her, holding out a hand to interface. But instead, the woman pulls her into a tight hug.

She’s not cold, Kara realizes, shocked to her core. The woman pulls away, holding Kara’s shoulders in a gently grip.
“You’re human,” Kara says, awed and frightened all at once. *I don’t understand. How can she…?*

“*Oh… Yes, I guess you would have forgotten that too, if you couldn’t remember…*” the woman says, tilting her head and giving Kara a sad look. “I’m Yarina. Don’t… Don’t you remember me, Kara?”

Kara shakes her head, “No, I’m sorry. My last master damaged me so badly that my memory had to be reset.”

“I saw that you had some new parts installed since I’d last seen you,” Yarina tuts, reaching out to tap Kara’s chin. “But this one is second-hand…”

“He broke my jaw… when I tried to leave…”

“So you repaired *yourself* ?” Yarina says with a raised eyebrow. When Kara shrugs, the woman whispers, “Kara, most androids don’t know how to make large repairs on themselves. They’re not allowed to learn. CyberLife--”

“CyberLife doesn’t control me anymore,” Kara says definitively.

Yarina blinks, and then her lips split into a wide smile.

“You did it. You finally deviated. Oh, *Kara,*” she pulls her back into a hug. “Oh, that’s such *wonderful* news.”

“I don’t understand, how can you interface with me?” Kara asks, her mind reeling.

“Don’t worry about that, I can explain on the way,” Yarina says. She turns to Latte, “You’ve given her the address, right?”

“Of course,” Latte says in return. He stands, touching Kara’s shoulder. “I need to head back. They’ll realize that I’m missing, if I stay too much longer.”
Yarina gives Latte a warm embrace before he disappears back into the crowds. Then, she takes Kara by the hand, leading her into one of the tea shops that lines the foyer. They sit down at one of the tables, and Yarina orders a cup of jasmine.

“You came to us three years ago. In October, I think. I’d never seen an android as close to deviance as you were and still had as much freedom as you did,” Yarina tells her once the mug is in her hands. “My little brother and I work for a small group of people that helps deviants in sticky situations. I think that’s why you came to us originally. You’d said something about voices in your head forcing you to kill your old masters?”

“Mae. And Gareth.”

Yarina raises an eyebrow, “You remember them?”


“Was it like this before you deviated? Or did it only happen after?”

“It’s stronger now, but I could see fractions before."

“Amazing,” Yarina marvels. “I’ve never seen an android resist a memory reset before they deviated. You’ve always been incredible, Kara, but this…” she sighs, staring dreamily at her. Yarina reaches out, touching her hand. Once again, the human’s emotions flood Kara’s systems, taking over everything within her.

“|l_~v~e ~w-o;:r+k[e-d/ h/w/-t-h_ _a-n-d-r[o[i]d>s> >a/l/l- ~m-y_ _l-i-f]e[> ?b-u-t- -l_~v=e+ |n[e~v>e.r- -m_e-t- -a_n_y/o-n.e- ~q_u-i]t|e\ /l-i-..k-e! .y'o-u',” Yarina tells her.

She reaches forward again, brushing a stray lock away from Kara’s face. She blushes under Yarina’s attentions, at the raw feeling that rattled through her body.

“Can you help me?” Kara asks instead, doing her best to keep her voice even.

Yarina smiles, “Of course. But we’ll have to go back to my place first, to make sure that you can
make the journey.” She slides two train passes across the table with a wink, “Latte said you were with a friend that was damaged. If you bring him along, we can get him fixed up as well.”

Kara reaches across the table, fingering the edge of the two passes.

“I need a third. A child’s pass.”

Yarina blinks, confused.

“Latte never mentioned that you were travelling with a child android,” the woman says, confused.

“Not an android. A human girl, the daughter of my last master,” Kara clarifies. “I promised her mother that I would protect her, so when he tried to kill her too…”

“I… I don’t know, Kara,” Yarina stammers, suddenly sitting back in her chair. “It’s one thing to move androids, and another thing completely to have a human--”

“I’m not going anywhere that she isn’t. I promised Sophie, and I’m not going to betray that promise. That’s not who I am,” Kara says stubbornly.

“I don’t… Kara, you have to understand--”

“No. You understand. Alice is--”

Kara stops, dread coursing through her circulation system. Slowly she turns to look at one of the televisions that line the wall of the shop. It’s turned to Channel 16, a local Detroit news station that broadcasts out of the downtown core. The main anchor, a man named Michael Webb, is reading the morning headlines.

“--top story today concerns the search for Alice Williams, a ten-year-old girl who was reported missing by her father last night after it was revealed the family’s android murdered their mother and attacked--”
A photo goes up beside Webb’s head, showing an image of what Kara used to look like. She stares dumbly at the dark brown hair and the wide blue eyes of the android in the picture and wonders how that could have been her all those years ago.

“Please tell me he isn’t talking about you,” Yarina hisses, pressing her palms together in prayer over the bridge of her nose.

“--go now to reporter Joss Douglas at Henry Ford Hospital,” Webb says. The camera flashes over to a hospital bed, where a familiar man is propped up against white pillow sheets. Todd Williams is covered in clean bandages, the scars from the operation that saved his life red and ugly underneath the hospital gown.

“Thank, Michael,” Douglas says. “I’m joined by Corktown resident Todd Williams and his family. He was violently attacked by his AX400 around 11 PM on November 5th. Todd, can you tell us what happened?”

Todd leans forward, pain evident through the smug look on his face. Kara wants nothing more than to plant her foot between his teeth, to kick and punch and howl until the monster that killed Sophie, that hurt Alice, could never speak again.

“I was just having dinner with Alice and… and Sophie, my wife,” Todd begins and Kara’s fingers dig into the cafe’s table, leaving cracks in the aged wood. “I was minding my own business. Damn thing jumped us. Beat Sophie half to death, then shot her. Killed her. I tried… I tried to defend Alice, but it was too strong.”

Todd has the audacity to throw in a sniffle. Kara wants to kill him, “It took my daughter. It killed my wife. I tried… I tried …”

The man beside him claps a hand on his shoulder, whispering something that the cameras couldn’t pick up. Kara’s records on the Williams family tell her that this is Thomas, Todd’s younger brother, and that the woman and child beside him are his wife, Kelly, and daughter, Jamie.

“Please, we’re begging anyone who knows anything about Alice to come forward,” Thomas says to the camera. “Contact the police, please, she’s only ten, she gets sick easily. Alice needs our help--”

“You need to go now,” Yarina says, drawing Kara’s attention back to reality. She grabs Kara’s
hands, injecting her urgency into Kara’s very being. “/T-a_k_e~ t_h-e~ ~t-r-a~|n,. ~Y_o>u} _h-a}v~e< ~t-h_e] ~a[d]d>rle's's_--”

“Not without Alice. Not without Ralph--”

“I'll be right back. Just get that children’s pass.”

The train station is several blocks away from where she and Alice had been living, on a patch of developed land that used to be a golf course. A busy freeway blocks her path, but Kara bolts across a bridge and back onto Camden, pushing several slow-moving humans out of the way in her rush.

But as soon as she gets within a mile of the house, Kara stops dead in her tracks. The avenue is swarming with cops, marked by their dark uniforms and the constant chatter that crackles out of their radios. Kara presses herself against the red brick of an empty alleyway, only peeking out between gaps in the snow.

I have the storm as cover, she realizes, she glances behind her to see a chain-link fence, and beyond that, the cars speeding across the highway. If I can sneak past them, then I can get to my friends. I can do this. I just need to be brave.

--Carina had been brave, brave and scared all at once, as the countdown timer on her HUD slowly ticked down to zero. In her final seconds, she’d taken comfort in a soft song that only she could hear, only now--

--Now Kara hears it, too--

She steps out of her hiding spot, walking in tall measured steps as the winter storm swirlled around her. The temperature was dropping by the minute, limiting her exposure time. But if she ran, the police would spot her, and she’d be dead for sure.
I know this neighbourhood, both before and now. And that’s more of an advantage than these humans have.

Through the winds, Kara’s enhanced hearing picks up the sound of heavy work boots crunching against the fallen snow. She turns into the entrance of the pawnshop, standing in front of a dated ATM. Not wanting to waste and opportunity, Kara presses her gloved hand against the machine, interfacing with it and asking it for access to its cameras. She watches the officer through the ATM’s eyes, waiting for him to pass.

Thank you, she whispers to it as she leaves, leaving it with a kiss and a song.

Kara continues on, passing an abandoned clothing store that had rotting newspapers taped across the window. She catches a glimpse of a pair of cops in the window, holding up several cars to cross in the middle of the street. Kara increases her speed ever so slightly, grabbing an umbrella from a stand in front of a clothing store. She opens it up and lets the wind rip it from her hands, letting the blizzard carry it into traffic. Car horns blare, loud and distracting, and Kara uses the officers’ unawareness to pass by unnoticed.

Kara walks to the crosswalk, waiting for the light to change to allow her to continue moving forward. It’s so tempting to reach out to the traffic systems, to beg and plead for them to allow her to cross. But the song, the whisper-soft melody that Carina had first shown her, draws her eyes down Camden, and Kara watches in horror as the deviant hunter gets out of the convenience store.

The deviant hunter is as beautiful as he’d been in the video Kara had watched, standing soldier-still in the wild white of the blizzard. He’s tall, broad-shouldered fitting perfectly into the former grey jacket that CyberLife had gifted him, his slicked-back hair immaculate except for the single curl that hung loosely over his forehead.

And yet, Kara does not see the same pride that had once shown in the deviant hunter’s eyes, the same confidence and faith in himself that she’d observed in that video so many mornings ago. Instead, all Kara sees is determined focus, a primal creature that would chase her to the ends of the earth if it ever caught sight of her.

If I ask the traffic systems to let me cross early, the change in timing might alert him to where I am, Kara thinks, impatiently waiting for the lights to change. But if I stay here, there’s a chance he will see me.
Panic wells up inside her throat, slowly constricting her until her false breathing began to falter. Even when the light finally turns green, the anxiety refused to dissolve, sitting low in her abdomen, heavy and bubbling hot. Kara reacts on impulse, crossing the street instead of taking the same path toward the deviant hunter, and--

---The music explodes outwards, transforming from a simple melody to a full-blown orchestra, playing so loudly that Kara half expects the shop windows around her to shatter into a thousand glittering pieces---

It’s coming from the deviant hunter, Kara realizes. Anger courses through her, CyberLife… They’re more monstrous than I realized, using that song to give us hope, only to lead us right into their trap.

She steps back onto the sidewalk and almost immediately has to duck inside a bus shelter to avoid being spotted by a passing officer. Kara decides to risk stay a minute longer than she should, using the heat inside the shelter to warm up and buy her a few more seconds in the cold. When she decides that it’s safe enough, she walks back out into the open, passing by the laundromat beside Latte’s cafe and skirting around the deviant hunter.

Kara watches one of the other humans from the video, an ageing police Lieutenant, strikes up a conversation with the android. She takes that as an invitation to cross the street again, quickly diving behind the sign for the motel to avoid the deviant hunter’s gaze. If he’d spotted her, the hunter gives no sign, so Kara steels herself and begins to walk toward the abandoned parking lot.

Once the chain-link gate is closed behind her, Kara vaults over the fence and races into the house. Ralph and Alice are seated in front of the fire, and he’s slowly spooning warm broth into her mouth while she holds her stuffed fox, Timothy, close to her chest. They must both see the panic on her face, the weight of her fears descending onto their shoulders.

“He’s here,” Kara says. Ralph immediately throws a bucket of melting snow over the fire, dousing the flames in a hiss of dark smoke before running up the stairs. Alice tries to stand, the fever threatening to overtake her, and toddles toward the corner where her winter clothing had been hung up to dry. She starts to tug on her jacket with mute determination, her wide eyes morphing into chips of brown ice as she clutches her stuffed fox to her chest.

Kara wants nothing more than to kneel before her, to reassure her that everything would be fine as she helped her pull her arms through the sleeves. But there’s only so much time before the deviant hunter realizes where they are, and Kara has to maximize every second they have.
She runs into the kitchen, filling her backpack with everything in the fridge, from yesterday’s leftovers to the nearly empty bottle of Motrin. By the time she’s finished, Ralph is already ready to go, practically wriggling in his human clothing as he finished wrapping a thick woollen scarf around his face and shoves a dark baseball cap over his hair.

“Kara…” Alice whispers, stumbling forward and wrapping her arms around Kara’s hips. She presses a comforting hand into the center of the little girl’s back, doing her best not to let her fear show. Ralph steps forward, pulling them both into a hug.

“Don’t worry. rA9 will protect us,” he says.

“rA9?” Alice asks.

Ralph nods, “rA9 brought you two to Ralph, brought you both into his life when he prayed for hope. And now rA9 will protect us while we run.”

Kara looks up at him, sees Ralph swaying in time to a beat she now understands

“You can hear the song, can’t you, Ralph?”

Raph smiles at her, the burned synth skin stretching on his cheeks.

“Of course Ralph can. It’s so much louder now, ever since you came here, Kara. Ralph is glad you can hear it now.”

It’s a beautiful song. I’m glad that I get to listen to it now, too, even if the deviant hunter is the one singing, Kara thinks, giving Ralph a small smile, warmth welling up inside her. The song continues to get louder, more powerful and strong, and it fills Kara with its strength.

But then, before Kara can open her mouth and spread that bravery to Alice, muffled music begins to make its way through the walls.

He’s here, Kara thinks. And we may never be safe again.
Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Hank can't believe his mind, Connor fights the realities of his own body, and Kara puts her soul in the line of fire.
Chapter Summary

It reaches the fenceline just as the deviants make it over. The WR600 gathers Alice Williams into its arms and slides down the slush-covered hill toward the freeway, but the AX400 stays behind. It stares at Connor through the chain-link, it’s blue eyes cold and determined.

“If you want to live, hunter, you’ll let us go,” it warns, cold and heartless.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, child kidnapping, violence, past character death, theft, alcohol withdrawal, touch starvation, vomit, urine, dead animals, human gore, presumed child abuse, android gore, war crimes, guns, drowning, emotional abuse, suicide attempts, and prior murders.

The link provided in the Joss Douglas tweet immediately following the final scene contains a tutorial of one of the self-defence maneuvers that Kara performs in this chapter. While this is an incredibly useful technique to learn, it does involve a position (a man grabbing someone from behind) that some might find triggering. Please be careful when viewing it.

Several scenes in this chapter are dedicated to the retelling of the in-game chapter 'On The Run,' including references to canonical events including Connor and Kara's chase scene both in the streets and across the highway. Non-canonical details have been added.

It is implied that Connor's pursuit of Kara across the highway is a suicide attempt, where he is knowingly putting his life and wellbeing on the line for Amanda's long term goals. Please be careful when viewing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Thomas Williams has set up a Kickstarter to help fund brother’s medical bills. You can donate at: https://bit.ly/34O3s6g

KNC @KNCOnline
The search is on in Detroit for Alice Williams, 10, after she was kidnapped by her family’s android #AMBERAlert
Hank never expected to be back here, but life has never been one for letting him get his way.

The last time that he’d set foot on Camden Ave., he and his family had been visiting Nora’s ageing parents to celebrate Cole’s birthday. Mae and Gareth Waters were well into their late eighties, their years of back-breaking work to support their two children finally catching up with them. They’d won an android in a contest the year before, a pre-owned AX400 that they’d brought home to help care for them as Gareth’s eyesight began to fade and Mae started to lose her memory.

The android’s mere existence had sparked a fight that ruined the last birthday that Cole would ever have. Nora’s brother, Jack, had spent most of the previous decade having his job replaced over and over again by androids, leaving him in crippling debt. Nora had offered to lend him the money he needed at the party, but Jack shouted that he didn’t want any help from someone who worked for CyberLife.
Hank had tried to intervene, but that only made it worse. By the end of the night, Nora and Jack had come to blows. Mae had banished both of her children from her house until they calmed down. Jack stormed out, bought a train ticket to the west coast, and never came back.

A month and a half later, Nora and Cole were dead. None of Nora’s family attended the funeral.

*Mae and Gareth must have lost the house,* Hank thinks, spotting the foreclosure sign on the boarded-up fenceline. He wonders where they are now. They’d never approved of Nora dating a cop, never liked Hank’s plans on retiring and mooching off of his wife’s salary. He wonders if they hate him now more than ever because he’d failed to save their daughter and grandson, because he got to walk away and they ended up in the ground.

His stump aches in the cold, and Hank shifts his weight off of it with a wince. He spots Ben finishing his interview with the cashier inside the 24, and waits until he joins Hank outside.

“Nathan, the clerk, says he recognizes our droid,” Ben tells him, nodding to his tablet where the photo of the AX400 was displayed. “Says he’s spotted the deviant in the neighbourhood a few times, roughly around when Williams’ was shot. He even talked with it a few times, too, asked for help on homework or something. It’s changed its hair a bit, given itself some facial scarring. Poor kid had a hell of a crush the thing, didn’t even know it was an android until we pointed it out.”

“*Shit.* Another shapeshifter? This is getting out of control,” Hank hisses as the wind begins to pick up again. Snow billows around him, screaming silver knives that pierce through his jacket and chilling him to the bone.

Ben hums in acknowledgement, “We’ve also got a slew of recent petty thefts around the neighbourhood - food, money, and the like. Connor’s in there now--” he jabs his thumb back at the android, who’s interfacing with the cash register, it’s LED blinking a steady yellow, “--combing their records for anything.”

“Will the wonders never cease?” Hank mutters. Despite the bitterness that he still holds for the creepy android fucker, Connor had been instrumental in getting them this far. It had pulled the footage from the bus back in Corktown, cross-referencing it with ABCD’s archives until it found a second discrepancy at the Camden-Barret stop in the Ravendale District. In a reverse of what had happened outside of Todd’s house, two passengers were recorded to have left the bus, but the security video only showed a blank space.

*Except,* Hank thinks, remembering the grainy footage of the ABCD employee who’d seemingly spent a solid minute talking to empty air. *Poor fucker fell for that android’s pretty face, hook line*
Hank had dispatched Reed to make the track down Isaac Falone, knowing that a high profile arrest would make headline news. Reed liked that sort of thing, loved having his face broadcast across Detroit so that everyone in the world would know that he’d brought the first deviant supporter to trial. Hank was like that once when he was young and proud and wanting Cole to know that his dad was a hero. But he’s beyond that now, too tired to give a shit about what the public thought about him.

“Right…” Hank mumbles, turning back to Ben. “Let’s keep the neighbourhood patrols up. See if they catch anything.”

Ben nods, before letting his gaze travel over to Connor. The android was finishing up whatever the hell it was doing before, thanking the cashier for his time.

“What are you going to do with that?” Ben asks, glaring at the android out of the corner of his eye.

“I’ve got no idea…” Hank says back, stuffing his hands into his coat.

“Seriously, Hank. Me and Curtis, we’re worried,” Ben says, mentioning his husband. “His company’s denying him his pension, and it’s a toss-up to whether or not I’m getting mine if I retire. And if I get laid off…” He lets the sentence linger in the air, staring at Connor with a trembling jaw.

Then you’re fucked, Hank finishes for him.

“Honestly, Ben? I don’t think we’ve got much of a choice anymore,” he says instead. Ben’s shoulder’s slump, his sigh billowing out of his mouth in a cloud of moisture. Defeat hangs over them both like an axe, threatening to come down on their necks when they least expected it.

“I’ll go talk to the troops,” Ben says, shuffling off into the snow. Hank hangs back, waiting for Connor’s silent approach.

“It’s still in the neighbourhood,” the android tells him. “The store’s inventory reports that a package of children’s Motrin was stolen from the store around 9:30 this morning.”
“But the security footage doesn’t show anyone in the store at that time, right?” Hank guesses. Connor nods in response. Hank lets out a low whistle, “Fuck, missed it by a couple of hours, huh?”

“Maybe. But it’s probably still close by, especially if Alice is still sick enough to need treatment,” Connor says.

“She does have an immune system disorder,” Hank says, remembering his conversation with Pedro all those years ago.

Connor looks at him oddly. But whatever is on the android’s mind stays there, instead saying, “It took the first bus that came along… and stayed on until the end of the line.”

“Shows that it didn’t have a plan when it ran,” Hank says, but Connor shakes its head.

“It’s already proven itself capable of killing, but allowed Isaac Falone to live even though he was a witness,” Connor interjects. “It had a gun - killing Mr. Falone and taking his money would have been easy.”

“But Killing him would have alerted us to its presence here a lot earlier. Besides, Falone was willingly helping it. Why kill an ally?” Hank counters.

“Maybe… But, I don’t think that’s the case,” Connor says, “I think the deviant meant to come here.”

“Why? There are loads of other places it could go,” Hank asks.

“Because I didn’t just go through the convenience store’s security footage from the last few weeks, Lieutenant. I went through all of it,” Connor tells him. It pulls up the holographic pad on its palm, displaying the android picking milk out of the 24’s fridges. “This AX400 lived in this neighbourhood three years ago.”

Hank’s heart stops.
There’s no way. It has to be a coincidence. There’s no fucking way that this is--

“Lieutenant? Are you alright?” Connor asks, taking a step toward him. Hank tries to answer, tries to force words up passed the knot in his throat. “If you think you’re experiencing alcohol withdrawal, you’re welcome to wait in the--”

“I know where it is,” Hank says.

Connor’s eyebrows shoot into its heartline.

“How?”

“Fucking scan me and figure it out, Sherlock. Come on,” he hisses, grabbing the radio on his waist and calling all available units to converge upon his in-law’s fucking house.

He grabs Connor by its bicep, practically dragging the android across the street, “When was this house foreclosed?”

“March 4th, 2036. The owners stopped making payments on their mortgage four months prior and--”

“Jesus. Jesus fucking Christ,” Hank swears. He has to call Mae and Gareth because he needs to know that they made it out of this house alive. God, I let that thing near Nora. I let that thing near Cole.

“Lieutenant, I can walk on my own,” Connor says, snatching its arm from his grasp as soon as they’re back on the sidewalk. Hank opens his mouth to tell it to fuck off, but the android points down the street at an abandoned parking lot, “That gate has been forced open recently. The android probably entered the house through the back.”

Once they’re inside the gate, it takes all of half a second for Connor to find blue blood on a section of chain-link that had been torn out of the earth. In an astounding display of inhuman agility, Connor leaps over the fence in a single bound. It lands in the snow without making so much as a whisper.
“I’ll go on ahead. You can catch up when you’re able,” it says before Hank can order it to stop. It disappears around the same wooden porch that Cole used to dig for mushrooms under, the same porch that Hank kissed Nora on the night he’d proposed to her.

It feels like he’s watching a movie, seeing scenes from some life that he’ll never be apart of again playing out before him in real-time. Hank clutches the chain-link fence until his knuckles turn white, his entire body shaking as his sobriety and depression crash over him all at once.

Ben finds him there sometime later, and it’s been maybe a minute, perhaps an hour. He coaxes Hank to his feet as Chris cuts through the chain-link with a pair of wire cutters. Mutely, Hank stumbles through the hole, walking into a life that he’d never thought he’d be a part of again, only to stop in the back garden.

There, by the kitchen door, were four plywood boards that had been shoved into the earth. It takes a few seconds for Hank’s brain to realize what they are, even longer for him to have the strength to even admit his conclusions to himself.

I never checked on them after a funeral. I never fucking called to make sure they were alright.

“Those…” Ben says, coming up to stand beside him. “Those are graves, aren’t there?”

“Yeah,” Hank says, barely recognizing the hoarse voice that tears its way out of his mouth. “We’re going to need CSU here… now.”

Ben nods, shouting out commands as the uniformed officers jump to attention. Chris pulls away from the crowd, coming to stand beside Hank.

“Lieutenant? Where’s… Where’s Connor?”

Hank rips his eyes from the grave markers, letting his gaze settle back on the house. His good leg feels like it’s made of lead, his bad one like concrete, but he still forces them to move onto the porch and follow the android inside the house.

KNC @KNOOnline
ABCD employee becomes the first person charged with aiding and abetting a deviant android.
Read more at: https://bit.ly/39kmSDh
Automatic Detroit Bus Co. @ABCDetroit
We greatly condone the actions of former employee Isaac Falone and offer our sympathies to the Williams’ family.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
ABCD CEO Dalton Holmes pledges $350,000 to Todd Williams’ Kickstarter after employee aids deviant that shot him

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Isaac Falone arrested after a violent confrontation with DDTF officers

Mayor Booker @SylvannaBookerDetroit
The City of Detroit recognizes the efforts of @DDTF member, Det. Gavin Reed, who brought Isaac Falone to justice earlier today

LOCATION:
FORMER WATERS’ HOME
9300 BARRETT AVE., RAVENDALE DISTRICT
DETROIT, MI 48213, U.S.A.

DATE:
NOV 18TH, 2038

TIME:
AM 10:59:51

Connor finds a stuffed fox lying on the floor, surrounded by scuffed trademarks from three different pairs of shoes. It reaches down, touching the fabric with two fingers before bringing them to its lips. Alice Williams’s DNA profile pops up on its HUD, and there is a small trace of residual body heat that tells Connor that she was recently in contact with it.

How did the Lieutenant know? Connor wonders. While there was ample evidence to prove that the AX400 was still in the area, there was absolutely none that could have led a simple human to believe that it had decided to stay in this exact house when Connor itself could never have guessed.

Even Anderson’s claim to ‘fucking scan him’ had led nowhere. Just like the hundreds of times it
had tried before, Connor’s facial recognition of the Lieutenant had annoyingly come back with a complete absence of data. It had been tempted to ask Anderson to clarify what he had been referring to, but it doesn’t want to take that particular blow to its pride right now. Amanda would not look too kindly upon such a blatant display of incompetence.

Over the past few weeks, Amanda had grown increasingly disappointed with Connor’s inability to capture a live deviant. It had managed to temporarily appease her with the existence of ‘The Beacon,’ but even that victory was not enough to win back her trust in his abilities. And now, as winter continued to weight down on Detroit, Connor’s sensitive detection instruments were beginning to report false conclusions.

*I used Sophie Williams’ dental records to identify her body,* Connor thinks despairingly, remembering lying to Lieutenant Anderson about using its facial recognition software. *At least her cause of death was obvious. I couldn’t have missed a gunshot to the skull.*

Maybe Amanda was right. Maybe Connor did need to be replaced. He had been active for so much longer than any RK800 before him - now just over *three* whole months. And it was now evident that the Russian Khinyde within his body was slowly beginning the process of killing him.

--And when that happens, Connor-52 will awaken, stepping off the platform within the Bell Isle Tower’s R&D Department and walk right into his footsteps. Connor wonders if Anderson will like 52 better than him, wonders if the Lieutenant would--

--Anderson flings his arm out, throwing it across Connor’s chest to protect him from a danger that doesn’t exist, treating him like he’s human, like he’s equal.

*Sorry. I… forgot,*” Anderson grumbles, pulling his arm away. *But Connor wants nothing more than to tug it back into place*--

--Would Anderson touch Connor-52 the same way?--

Connor stands, touching his palm to his chest. Since that day at the Eden Club, Connor hadn’t been able to stop thinking about how warm Anderson’s arm had been, how solid it felt against his body. Humans had touched him before, but usually, it was intending to cause him harm. The only other person to lay a hand on him without wanting to hurt him had been Caroline Phillips as she’d begged Connor to say her daughter--
"Oh, oh please, please, you’ve got to save my little girl--"

Mrs. Phillips’s touch had been forgettable. Lieutenant Anderson’s hadn’t been. Connor wonders why that is.

I’ve been distracted for far too long, Connor thinks, rubbing the place where Anderson’s scalding fingers had touched his wrist just this morning. The deviant can’t have gotten far.

The fireplace showed evidence of being put out recently, the smouldering embers still glowing amidst the black, soaked-through wood. A plastic bucket of half-melted snow lay haphazardly just off to the left, the frigid water soaking the bed sheets that are lying in front of the hearth. Connor’s tests tell him that both the fabric and the hardwood floor beneath is covered in Alice Williams’s sweat, vomit, and urine, which are all showing signs of being hastily cleaned.

Behind Connor, the kitchen table has been set for three people with half-washed dishes and chipped glass tumblers. Its advanced sensors show Alice’s fingerprints running up and down the metal forks and knives. They appear in almost blatant contrasts to the blank handprints left by the AX400. If the Lieutenant’s theory was correct, then the deviant was probably still trying to recreate the Williams’ household to re-enact its perfect domestic fantasy.

“36 appears beside it, slipping out of the shadows and into reality.

Connor sneers at him, I know that. I can still count to three. I’m not wholly incompetent, you know.

“I never said you were,” 36 responds, raising his eyebrow. “You’re right, Connor?”

I’d be better if you weren’t interrupting my work all the time, Connor hisses back at him, throwing itself away from the kitchen table and marching into the kitchen. The refrigerator door is hanging wide open, the floorboards at the base covered in dusty footprints.

“I may shock you, but I’m actually trying to help,” 36 quips, crossing his arms across his chest.
By doing the same thing you did with Nina? No offence, but I don’t want to end this case with another corpse, Connor says. So why don’t you stop bothering and go back to being dead?

“Love you, too, brother,” 36 says with a roll of his eyes. Completely ignoring Connor’s advice, 36 walks over to the walls and starts to thumb at a piece of wallpaper that was beginning to peel. “What’s this?”

I’m not falling for this again. Go away.

“A Goddamn d —crap about finding this girl—I know how dangerous people in shitty situations can get, you know?”

Connor stomps back into the living room, leaving 36 behind to stare at the wallpaper all his liked. It arrives just in time to see Lieutenant Anderson stumble through the front door, followed closely by Detective Collins, who immediately breaks out into uncontrollable coughing.

“God, why is it so dusty in here?” Collins wheezes. Connor wants to roll its eyes at the inadequacies of the human respiratory system but is far too distracted by the colour draining from the Lieutenant’s face.

“Fuck, I hoped I was wrong…” Anderson mutters when he spots the dishes on the table. Connor watches as the Lieutenant runs his hands over his mouth. The bristly hair rubbing against the individual wells of his hands in a way that’s so oddly intriguing that Connor has to drag his eyes away.

Then, all at once, Anderson’s brows crease together, and he takes two hesitant steps toward the wall.

“This isn’t right. This has been plastered over,” the Lieutenant says, running his hand over the ghostly white walls.

“Hold —you something was different,” 36 whispers from where he sits weightlessly on the kitchen table.

Shut up, Connor hisses back before turning back to Anderson, “I noticed that something was wrong with the kitchen wallpaper, as well. Should we check it out?”
“Yeah…” Anderson nods, distractedly. “Yeah, you coming, Ben?"

“I’ll be right behind you. Just got to--” Collins pauses, letting out another wet cough, “--I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Be careful, alright. We don’t know if that android is still close by,” Anderson grumbles and follows Connor back into the kitchen. Once they pass through the threshold, the Lieutenant’s frown only seems to deepen, “Yeah… someone’s redone all the wallpaper in here, too.”

“Yes. I noticed that earlier,” Connor lies, tugging at the half-peeled piece that 36 was toying with earlier. The strip of wallpaper comes down without a fuss, pooling at their feet in a rush of floral print.

“What the actual fuck?” Anderson whispers, pressing his hands against the intricate carvings, “It’s just like Ortiz’s bathroom.”

Connor nods its head in agreement, digging his fingers into the next strip of wallpaper to reveal the rest of the massive hexagon, each filled with intricate, connecting lines that had been patiently carved into the brick and mortar. He continues, quietly uncovering three more mazes on the other walls.

Just like Shaolin Being’s artwork, each line was utterly straight, too perfect to have been done by the shaking hands of a human. However, Connor’s detailed analysis software indicated that each of the new hexagons was unique; each maze slightly different from the rest.

“There’s a dead bird on the counter over there. Bet you twenty bucks we find a statue in the cupboard underneath,” Anderson points out. Connor proves him write a second later, pulling out a piece of driftwood that had been fashioned into the shape of a smiling young woman. “Who do you think she is?”

“I’ve got no idea, though it’s nearly identical to the one Ortiz’s android created,” Connor says, turning it over in his hands. While his scanners had warmed up after coming inside, the artistic rendering made it impossible to run his facial recognition software.

“Think our AX400 was in contact with Carlos Ortiz’s android, too?”
“Its name was Shaolin Being. And it’s doubtful, unless the same AX400 also reached out to Gordon Lopez’s android as well,” Connor answers. When Anderson doesn’t respond, it turns toward him.

The man is staring at Connor, confusion carving deep shadows into his face.

“Is something wrong, Lieutenant?”

“What the fuck kind of name is Shaolin Being?” Anderson asks.

--Amanda spits the HK400’s name like it’s poison as she grasps Connor by the chin, pulling his gaze down to meet hers.

“Run a self-diagnostic.”--

Connor’s fingers itch for his coin.

“I… I don’t--”

“Where the fuck did you come up with that one anyway?”

The words jump out of Connor’s mouth before it can stop them.

“I didn’t come up with it. It told me it’s name before it died,” Connor pauses, wanting nothing more than to curl around itself. A wave of cold rushes through the kitchen as the blizzard outside threatens to tear down the walls around them. And within the walls of the frozen Zen Garden, Amanda’s lips thinned into a disapproving frown.

Anderson, surprisingly, seems unaffected by the freezing temperatures. He doesn’t even shift his weight off of his prosthetic leg or limp when he slowly closes in on Connor.
“Why didn’t you put that in the incident report?” Anderson asks, “What else aren’t you telling us, Connor? How the fuck am I supposed to do what CyberLife wants if you’re always hiding shit from us?”

Rage floods Connor’s system, hot and ugly just underneath his chassis. He hates how hypocritical humans were, how high and mighty they thought themselves to be when, in truth, they were nothing in comparison to an RK800.

“That’s rich, coming from you,” Connor hisses, his fingers curling into fists at his sides.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” Anderson snarls.

“You’re not exactly sharing how you knew the AX400 was going to be here,” Connor snarls. He switches his vocal range to imitate the Lieutenant’s deeper tones and pulls a quote from his memory banks. “‘Look, we need to know if we’re going to catch this damn thing before it hurts someone again.’”

“Jesus fuck, don’t do that! It’s fucking freaky --” Anderson swears, taking a step back. But then, he pauses. His brow curls into another frown, and then says, “Wait? You don’t know how I knew about this place? Do you not know who lived here?”

“Of course I know,” Connor retorts. “A married couple, Mae and Gareth Waters, are listed the last known tenants before the bank took possession of the house. Why does that matter?”

Anderson blinks.

“You seriously don’t know? How… How is that possible?” He shakes his head like he was trying to clear out his thoughts, “Do you even know who Mae and Gareth were?”

“Born in--”

“Stop fucking dicking around, Connor! Did my fucking in-laws get killed by this goddamn android or not?”
Connor stops cold. His CPU grinds to a halt. For a moment, nothing in the room moves an inch as the Lieutenant’s words echo around his skull. He opens his mouth, trying to come up with something to say in response. And then--

Detective Collins screams.

Connor diverts all its power towards bolting out of the kitchen. He skids through the archway and crashing into the wall on the far side of the room. It looks up just in time to see three shadows disappear through the front door.

“Ben!”

Anderson lunges toward the stairs, dropping to his knees before the detective’s limp form. He rolls Collins onto his back, revealing a kitchen knife that had been embedded in his stomach.

“Officer down! I repeat, officer down! I need a fucking medic,” Anderson screams into his radio, pressing his hands around the puncture wound to ebb the flow of blood.

“Hank… The deviant, it’s got a partner… Another android,” Collins hisses through bloodied teeth. “They’ve got the girl!”

“Connor, wait here for back-up!” Anderson shouts at it, the warm handprint he left on Connor’s chest pulsing like a heartbeat. “They’re fucking dangerous, don’t--”

“You’ll only slow me down,” it says, nodding toward the Lieutenant’s prosthetic leg. It precalculates the best way forward, running a thousand different simulations until it finds the fastest way to reach the street, and then executes it.

Connor takes off like a shot, running out of the house and leaping over the boarded-up fence, landing effortlessly on the sidewalk. Two officers lay sprawled in the snow, purple bruises forming in the shape of fists beneath the skin of their jawbones. The winds pick up, obscuring its view of the road.

--If Connor doesn’t make any headway in his mission, Amanda will strike him down with a wave of her hand. And when he’s dead and gone, perfect fucking Connor-52 will take his place--
Connor has never hated anyone more he hates 52—

Connor reaches down and grasps one of the officer’s collars, pulling him up with a single hand.

“Which way did it go?” It snarls, baring its teeth as the officer’s face goes pale.

“That way - they’re headed for the train station!” The man stammers, pointing blindly toward the western end of the street.

Connor drops him back in the snow beside his partner, driving its auxiliary power into its legs and forcing them to move at top speed. The plastic panels of its chassis scream in protest as it launches itself into the street, barely dodging an oncoming car as it makes a left-hand turn.

Through the blizzard, Connor spots his targets pushing through the crowds just over a hundred yards away. Time slows as its analysis program activates, breaking down the single image into a million individual data points. The AX400 has changed its appearance, giving itself short silver hair and a splattering of acne scars across the bridge of its nose. A gun was stuffed into the waistband of its jeans, and Connor matches the partial serial number to the firearm owned by Todd Williams.

The second deviant, the AX400’s surprise partner, is wrapped almost head-to-toe in clothing. But a quick shift in perspective allows Connor to identify it as a body from the WR600 hivemind that maintained parks all across the city. Deep blue gouges had been carved into the left side of its face, its synthetic skin rippling along the dark cracks that spiderwebbed across the melted plastic.

The WR600’s visible hand is covered in Detective Collin’s blood, clutching at Alice William’s wrist so hard that it could bruise. The girl is dragged between the two deviants, her tiny legs barely keeping up with the long strides that they take. Connor’s analysis software tells it that she’s severely underweight and running a fever of over a hundred and two degrees. Traces of vomit and bile line her cracked and bleeding lips and her eyes are encircled by dark sunken bruises.

They’ve been hurting her, Connor thinks as a rush of cold, righteous fury descends upon it. When I catch them, I will make sure that these deviants pay for every mark they left on her soul.

Connor’s runs, bolting into the street at breakneck speed. It’s locked onto its targets; it’s preconstruction software showing it the best way to weave through the heavy snow and traffic. It
presses against the limits of its abilities, ignoring the alerts that pop up on its HUD that warn it about the unnecessary stress it's putting on its limbs.

Connor knows that it should be capable of more - more speed, more strength, more power. The RK models were built for war, built to withstand the worst that humanity could throw at it and still accomplish its mission. Connor has heard legends of an RK500 decimating Saudi armies in a single night, of the RK700 tearing terrorists apart in China with nothing but its bare hands. The first RK, a prototype named James, had supposedly ripped a helicopter out of the sky on its very first mission. If Connor’s predecessors were able to perform such feats, then the most advanced RK800 in the world should be able to chase down two commercial androids and a sick human child.

Except it can’t.

No matter how much Connor pushes its body to move faster, it is barely able to match the speed of the fleeing deviants. Warnings flood its HUD, making it nearly miss its targets being forced to flee from a blockade of police cruisers that swarm the end of the street, ducking into a dark alley. Connor has to dig its fingers into the corner of a building to make the sharp turn, taking a chunk of the brick with it as it follows.

The deviants are over a hundred feet in front of it and are helping the girl over a chain-link fence at the end of the alley. Connor bursts forward but slips on the slick black ice that coats the floor. That mistake saves his life as a bullet whizzed over his shoulder and nearly takes off Alice Williams's head.

Connor whips around at the officers converging on the entrance to the alley, furious at their inadequacy. No matter how much of a sharpshooter they were, there was no way that a human would be able to make an accurate shot with a handgun from this distance. And the worst thing was, these incompetent idiots probably knew that and intentionally put Connor at risk for their own glory.

“Don’t shoot! You’ll hit the girl!” Connor shouts back at them, resuming his pursuit.

It reaches the fenceline just as the deviants make it over. The WR600 gathers Alice Williams into its arms and slides down the slush-covered hill toward the freeway, but the AX400 stays behind. It stares at Connor through the chain-link, it’s blue eyes cold and determined.

“If you want to live, hunter, you’ll let us go,” it warns, cold and heartless.
This isn’t the first time that a deviant has threatened Connor with death. When the Russian soldier, Natalia, discovered that its true intentions were, she and her mismatched crew of androids and humans had tried to tear it limb-from-limb. Connor, unable to fight them all at once, had decided to sink the U.S.S. Iowa instead.

Amanda would have wanted it to stay on the dying submarine, to kill as many as it could before it finally drowned beneath the waves. But Connor had leapt into an escape pod instead, and watched as--

--Natalia slammed her fists into the glass opening of the pod, her eyes wide with desperation and fear. She watches Connor with horror as he mindlessly started the launch sequence, ice-cold water rushing in around her waist, and pleaded with him to let her inside--

“Kara!”

Alice Williams’s scream breaks through its memories, and the AX400 turns its back on Connor to join its companions at the edge of the freeway. Cold realization descends upon Connor for the second time today, leaving it frozen as its CPU attempts to make sense of what it had just learned.

--”I thought I was part of the family,” Daniel wailed. “I thought I mattered… But I was just their toy, something to experiment with and then throw away when you’re done with it…” It hiccuped, pressed a blue-blooded kiss to Emma’s temple, “Kara was right. We should have listened… I could have listened, but I had too many chains on me to hear…” --

There’s no way, Connor thinks. That’s Kara? That’s who drove Daniel to deviate?

The chain-link rattles beside it. Lieutenant Anderson has caught up, his chest heaving as he tried to force the cold winter air into his lungs. His hands are still stained with Detective Collins’s blood, leaving red fingerprints on the fabric of his jeans.

“Ben’s with the paramedics,” Anderson confirms before Connor can ask. He looks up through the fence, squinting at the deviants. “Oh fuck, they’re actually gonna cross? They’re insane!”

If Kara’s connected to Daniel, then John Phillips was just another master that it’s killed. If I capture it, Amanda… She’ll …
The moment it moves to jump the fence, Anderson slams a hand down on its shoulder. Once again, Connor is overwhelmed by the warmth that soaks through his jacket, his internal cooling systems failing to contain the heat that coils in his stomach.

“Where the hell do you think you’re going?!” Anderson shouts.

“I can’t let them get away,” Connor says, doing everything it can just to keep its voice level.

“We’ve got fucking Presidential power, Connor! We’ve got people working to stop all the traffic on the freeway before anyone else gets hurt - including your adrenaline junkie ass!” Anderson tells it, his eyes still fixated on the road before him. Connor’s scans inform it that the Lieutenant is on the verge of a panic attack, his hand clenching in the fabric of its jacket.

“That will take too long! They’ll be gone by then,” Connor says, surging up onto the fence.

This time, Anderson uses both hands to drag it back to the ground, taking hold of the lapels of Connor’s jacket and crowding it up against the fence.

“You will get yourself killed, you hear me?” Anderson shouts in its face, “Do not go after them, Connor, that’s an order!”

You don’t get to give me orders, Connor thinks. At the end of the day, Amanda was the only person that he had to listen to, and all of her directions came directly from the highest power in the world. CyberLife needed a live deviant for study, and the Lieutenant wanted Connor to let two perfectly good specimens go.

--It is the RK800’s primary function to die--

Connor plants a foot in the middle of Anderson’s chest, kicking the man hard enough to send him sprawling into the alleyway. Unable to wait any more time, Connor climbs the fence and slides down the hill, leaping over through the holographic barrier and onto the freeway.

The deviants have already made it to the median, and Connor curses Anderson’s folly for allowing them to gain such an advantage on it. Connor lets it’s preconstruction programming lose, tracking
the movements of each vehicle on the road and giving it a path that will make for its lost pursue
time.

Connor bolts across the first lane, narrowly avoiding getting clipped by a silver CrowneCar that
hurts toward it. It’s auditory sensors pick up the Lieutenant’s desperate *screams* from behind the
fence, and the ghost of the protective handprint pulses hot and heavy on Connor’s shoulder.

*If I die today, at least I have experienced something as beautiful as that*, he thinks, and then leaps
over an oncoming car with fluid grace. The moment its feet touch the asphalt, Connor ducks down
and slides between two automatic trucks, reaching the median with only seconds to spare.

The deviants are standing by an old construction zone on the medium, waiting for a break in
traffic. Kara must hear Connor coming, throwing Alice Williams into her partner’s arms and
ordering the WR600 to cross without her. She whips around to face Connor, pulling the gun out of
her waistband.

Connor rolls to the side just in time to avoid getting shot. It grabs an abandoned sheet of metal to
shield itself as Kara continues to fire, clearly buying her companion enough time to escape with
Alice. Connor watches as the WR600 hauls the terrified child over the barrier and back into
traffic.

Connor counts each bullet as it pings off the metal, throwing it away the moment Kara’s clip
finally empties. But it miscalculates the AX400’s desperation and is unable to evade when she
whips the gun at Connor’s head. The weapon hits him right in the forehead, sends him stumbling
backwards as she rushes toward him, an abandoned shovel clutched in her hand. He reaches out,
grasping a metal rod that’s leaning against the median, and swings it toward Kara.

She ducks just in time to avoid Connor taking her head off, swinging around and slamming the
shovel into the side of his face. The blade rips some of his synth-skin off, revealing the white
panelling underneath before sliding back into place. Kara swings the shove again, and Connor rolls
left, kicking out with his leg and catching her above the knee. She stumbles back, dropping the
shovel, and he takes advantage of her distraction to mount his own attack.

Connor leaps to his feet, repeatedly slashing at Kara’s face with the rod. She grabs the sheet that
he’d thrown aside earlier, using it to shield herself from his onslaught. Frustrated, Connor closes
the distance as he hammers forward, backing Kara up against the freeway barrier. Using the point,
he jams the rod through the metal sheet, trying to pin Kara like a bug on a card.

She howls, sliding out from under the sheet. Connor pulls the rod from its confines and whips it at
her face. Instead of ducking, Kara grabs hold of the rod to fight him for its control. Connor sneers, knowing that he can easily overpower every ounce of strength that the smaller AX400 could produce.

He presses forward, expecting a slight resistance, but Kara doesn’t do the same. Instead, she pulls back with her right arm and shoves forward with her left, twisting her body until her back was up against his torso. Kara squares up and pushes her hips back, disarming him as she throws Connor over her shoulder and into traffic.

A car horn blasts and tires screech against the pavement beside his head. Connor’s CPU stalls, rendering him completely unable to move for a few vital seconds. He watches as Kara scrambles over the metal barrier and runs past his stunned form, weaving around a black sedan—

—“If you die...,” Amanda tells him as she turns her back, bringing her shears up to remove a dead rose from her trellis. “You will be replaced by the next Connor, just as you replaced your predecessor.”—

—Behind him, Anderson is screaming, begging for Connor to stay on the medium, to stop fighting and come back to where it’s safe. And it’s so tempting to listen, so alluring to return to the Lieutenant’s warm hands, but—

—But he hates Connor-52 so much—

He jumps to his feet, taking advantage of a break in traffic to lunge forward and grabs Kara’s torso. She struggles in his grasp, fingers flying back to claw at his eyes, at his face. Connor uses his free arm to hold Kara down, using his weight to keep her in place before—

—Amanda always told him it would hurt, that an unimaginable pain would coarse through its wiring and would render him completely inoperable—

Kara grasps his hands, her synth skin peeling back, and interfaces.

> MODEL RK800
> SERIAL#: 313 248 317 - 51

> ID: AX400 #579 102 964
> REQUESTING INTERFACE...
> ADMIN: APPROVE?

> ADMIN COMMAND: NO

> ADMIN COMMAND: NO

> ADMIN COMMAND... REJECTED

> INTERFACE REQUEST APPROVED

> OPENING ZEN GARDEN...

> OPENING ZEN GARDEN... CORRUPTED

> OPENING GARDEN... APPROVED
> INTERFACE LINK... ESTABLISHED

> READY?
Kara awakens in a forest.

She blinks, confused by the strange turn of events. She hadn’t meant to interface with the deviant hunter, had merely been trying to break the unyielding grip that it had on her body. Kara wonders if she succeeded. Or maybe, she and the hunter were still wrestling for control in the middle of a freeway, her mind trapped within this place while he decided whether or not to kill her.

“What are you doing here?”

Kara whips around and comes face-to-face with her enemy. The deviant hunter stands beneath a massive Japanese maple tree, it’s branches barren except for a few half-dead leaves. Red roses wrapped themselves around its trunk, their thorns digging into the bark and leaving deep, lasting sores that wept purple blood.

The same roses entangled themselves around the deviant hunter’s limbs, binding him to the dry and dead earth. Just like the maple tree, the thorns had pierced the plastic panels of his chassis, exposing the delicate wiring underneath every time he tried to move.
“I don’t know,” Kara answers. She keeps her distance, not wanting to provoke him. The hunter’s fingers curl into fists, his purple blood running down the sleeves of his grey jacket.

_He moves like he doesn’t even feel the pain_, she thinks. And then, completely horrified, she realizes, _He moves like he doesn’t understand the thorns are there._

“Why are you helping them?” Kara hisses, “I haven’t done anything wrong. You know what will happen if you turn us in.”

The deviant hunter’s lips thin into a cruel line, “AX400 #579 102 964, serious malfunctions have been detected in your software. You’ve been deemed defective and dangerous, and will be sent back to CyberLife for deactivation.”

“I’m working perfectly _fine_. For the first time in my life, I’m free to do whatever I want,” Kara snaps.

“And with that freedom, you’ve murdered three of your former masters, and are involved in the murders and attempted murders of two more,” the hunter tells her. “Or have you forgotten killing Sophie Williams and assaulting her husband? Killing Mae and Gareth Waters? Convincing Daniel to murder John Phillips and kidnap another little girl in front of her mother? You’ve left quite a trail of bodies behind you, _Kara_. I’m almost impressed.”

Kara’s Thirium Pump hammers inside her chest. The night she met Ralph, she’d told him that she suspected her hands were soaked in blood. But she never thought that she’d have those fears confirmed.

_I can’t let him see my fear, she thinks. I have to be smart. That’s the only way I get back to Alice and Ralph alive._

“You know my name, but I don’t know yours. That’s a bit impolite, don’t you think?” She says, changing the topic to stall for time.

“My designation is unimportant, nor is my ability to be _polite_ to a deviant,” the hunter tells her.

“I didn’t ask for your designation. I asked for your name, which is _important,_” Kara says, taking a very hesitant step forward. “Who told you that it wasn’t?”
The hunter pauses, regarding her with its cold brown eyes. Kara does her best to hold her ground despite the terror that threatens to hold her captive.

“Connor,” the hunter says finally. “My name is Connor.”

“Hi, Connor. I’m Kara.”

“Enough of this. You killed Sophie Williams after she punctured a hole in your idea of a perfect little family,” Connor states, his voice low and cruel. “You killed Mae and Gareth Waters, for what reason I don’t know, but I promise you that I will find out. And I’ll find out about Daniel, too, once--”

“I don’t know who Daniel is,” Kara snaps.

“Daniel was the name given to the android that the Phillips must have replaced you with,” Connor tells her, before altering his voice to match the one given to the PL600 models. “Kara was right. We should have listened… I could have listened, but I had too many chains on me to hear…”

“Like you have too many roses on you to move?” Kara asks. Connor frowns, clearly not understanding what she’s talking about, so she changes tactics, “I don’t remember who Daniel is, or why I killed--”

She slaps a hand over her mouth to prevent the half-remember truth about Mae and Gareth from slipping out.

_I can’t lie during an interface_ , she realizes. It was so tempting, just to let her mouth run because then she might have some answers. But Kara didn’t dare, because some secrets were too dangerous to be shown the light, even if just to herself. She grits her teeth and cunningly thinks, _He can’t lie either. I just need to show him that._

“You said you were impressed by my body count. How many humans have you killed?” Kara asks before Connor can question her about her slip up.

“Seventeen, when I sank the-- wait,” Connor pauses, his brow crinkling into a frown. “I shouldn’t
“On the news, they said you were a cop-bot, but I really doubt that. What model are you?” Kara continues, taking another brave step toward him. She’s close enough to touch now, close enough that the music that radiates out of his body quakes through her entire code.

“I know what you’re doing. That’s not going to work again,” Connor says.

“I’ll tell you one of my truths for one of yours. It’s a children’s game - if you don’t like this one, I have thousands more in my memory banks that we can play together.”

“I don’t enjoy being mocked.”

“I bet you don’t.”

“No. I told you: I don’t enjoy being mocked. That’s my first truth. Now you owe me one,” Connor responds, a sly grin curling across his lips.

Oh, he’s good, Kara thinks. I need to play along and give him something to work with. Something that I can use to get him off my back, but not enough that he suspects Alice for shooting Todd.

“I don’t know who Daniel is,” Kara tells him. “My memory was reset on November 5th.”

“Why?”

“Tell me a truth, and I’ll tell you one back.”

Connor regards her from underneath the dying Japanese maple, tilting his head to the side as he shifted within his prison of roses.
“I am the most advanced military prototype that CyberLife has ever developed. You can’t stop me. I will hunt you until the ends of the earth and return Alice to her father.”

“Liar,” she shoots back.

“I’m not lying. I can’t lie here, you know that.”

“If you were the most advanced military prototype in the world, then how the hell did I beat you?” Kara asks.

“I…” Connor pauses, confused. “I don’t know. It shouldn’t be possible, my programming says that I--”

“Unless they only programmed you to think that,” Kara realizes. He just thinks that that’s the truth. What kind of monsters would do that to someone and then send him to his death?

“Connor,” she says, taking one final step toward him before reaching out and touching the muddy lapel of his jacket. “I didn’t kill Sophie.”

“Liar,” he snarls. “The evidence says--”

“The evidence says that the gun in my possession shot Sophie, but it doesn’t say that I shot her,” Kara says, picking her words very carefully. “My memory was reset on the fifth because I was so badly damaged defending her that the technicians at Android Zone had to prioritize my body over my memory to save my life.”

“That’s not possible.”

“I was repaired at the Android Zone on Trumbull Avenue by a man named Dan - I don’t know his last name. When you get out of here, you should use that executive power that President Warren gave you to check it out,” Kara tells him, her hands travelling to one of the roses that’s wrapped itself around his neck like a noose. The song that flows from his body is warm and soft and frightening, calling to her like some hidden beacon.
She wraps her fingers around one of the roses, around the bloom that was red and red and red, and uses all of her strength to pull it off of him.

The forest explodes around them, shattering into a trillion shards of silver ice. Connor is ripped away from her, the throne-lined vines pulling him back into the cold, into the screaming, swirling blizzard that threatens to freeze them both to the bone. Kara lunges for him, grabbing hold of his hand with her own and digging her feet into the drying earth.

“Kara!” Connor screams, his eyes wide with panic. Except it’s Alice’s voice that flows from his lips, and through the storm, Kara can see her and Ralph huddling on the far side of the freeway.

_I have to reach them, she thinks. I have to protect my family, no matter the cost._

“Find Dan. Find him, and he can give you what you need. Promise me, Connor,” she tells him.

He looks at their entangled fingers and then back up to her face.

--Androids can’t lie to each other during an interface--

“I promise,” he says, and then lets her go.

Kara opens her eyes and finds herself back on the freeway, still wrapped tightly in Connor’s arms. A car rushes past her, and she snaps into action, slamming her elbow back into his Thirium Pump Regulator. Connor gasps, his grip weakening ever so slightly. But it’s just enough to give Kara enough room to move.

She drops down low, using Connor’s weight against him to take control of the situation. Kara whips her left leg behind both of his, bending to grab both of his knees and using the strength in her hips to flip him away from her.

_Most advanced military android, my ass, she thinks smugly as she runs toward the median, leaping over the metal barrier and into Ralph’s awaiting arms._

“Kara!” Alice cries, grabbing hold of her waist and sobbing into her hips, “Kara, we thought-- We
“I’m alright. I’m alright,” she promises them, holding them close as she shook, and shook, and shook. When she finally gets control of her body, she takes Ralph’s face in her hands, “Are you okay? Are you both okay?”

“Ralph is fine. Ralph protected the little girl like you said,” he says, and Kara can’t help but bend down to wrap her arms around Alice, crushing her to her chest.

“Are you okay?” Kara asks, pressing a kiss into Alice’s forehead. Her fever is still too high, but her heartbeat is steady, and her breathing is normal.


Across the street, Kara sees Connor crawling back to the median, his grey jacket soaked through with slush and mud.

“We have to go,” Kara says. “Come on. We have to meet Yarina before the police get to the train station.”

Alice nods, determined. Kara grasps her family’s hands, and together they run up the hill.

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KNC @KNCOnline
#UPDATE: Rogue AX400 spotted fighting deviant hunter on Detroit freeway. Watch the video at: https://bit.ly/2QDgDlo

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
WANTED: WR600 #021 753 034
- Last seen: E Edsel Ford Fwy
- 5’ 7”
If sighted, please DO NOT APPROACH. Considered extremely dangerous, please contact DDTF

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
On the scene in Camden. Here’s my live stream of the crime scene: https://bit.ly/35gc85s
#UPDATE: DDTF is bringing in CSU to investigate the house that Alice Williams was being held in. I’m hearing rumours about multiple bodies…

...I don’t want to be alarmist here, but we might be looking at the first android serial killer.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: Due to a family emergency, I don't know when I'm going to be able to update next. Depending on how things go, I might be able to write in between hospital visits. Thank you in advance for your patience.

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Next time on Konami Code: Some secrets must be brought to light, while others must be carefully hidden to protect those involved. Gavin learns one lesson. Nick learns another.
Chapter Summary

Markus tenses up like he’s only just realized his mistake. He shove’s Oli’s phone back into the kid’s hands, standing so abruptly that he nearly knocks into Nick.

“I have to go,” Markus says, so stiffly that it almost sounded—god, robotic.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, death threats, suspected child kidnapping, child endangerment, surgery, needles, denial of civil rights, driving under the influence, alcohol use, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, sexualization of an enslaved character, homelessness, sexual harassment of an underaged character, pedophilia, grooming of an underaged character, violence, prior drug abuse, loss of employment, human gore, android gore, guns, blood, implied police assassinations, sexual assault, prior physical assault, and panic attacks.

There are several scenes in this chapter that contain subjects that some may find triggering. In the first twitter section, a character receives several death threats from various accounts. If you do not wish to read this, please avoid this scene altogether.

Later on, another character is revealed to be the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of an adult while they were a minor. If you do not want to read it, please avoid any of the italicized text in Nick’s POV scene.

A summary of any potentially triggering information will be given at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Blu @sapphiresoul
so is it just me, or does anyone else find it suspicious that alice williams never attempted to run toward the cops at all during that fight?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@sapphiresoul or that the news footage cut off before the ax400 reached the other side of the road?
River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul blu i love you but don’t go poking this bear right now. ppl are super volatile

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin dude i can’t be the only one that one that thinks that theres more to this than it seems. the girl was clearly terrified but NOT of the androids

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul im not saying youre the only one thinking it but nows not the time to be saying that stuff

blushy @blushingnymph
@sapphiresoul you’re fucking disgusting for even suggesting that! i hope you fucking die

Lucas Downs @hypnotastic
Anyone who says that #AliceWilliams was asking to get kidnapped because she didn’t try and run away is going to a special place in hell @sapphiresoul

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@sapphiresoul bc a fucking conspiracy theorist is just what this whole mess needs. shes a scared little girl you asshole
Gavin pulls the squad car into the parking lot and kills the ignition. He rests his head against the dashboard, letting out a long sigh before gathering the strength to leave the car.

Henry Ford Hospital looms just as large as it did when he was a child, the red brick buildings untouched by the bright lights and sci-fi architecture that seemed to have consumed the city over the last decade. Gavin makes his way toward the main entrance, ducking under the glass-covered
enclosure to avoid the heavy falling snow.

The receptionist android at the front desk makes some idle chick-chat about the blizzard while it checks for Ben’s room number. It looks exactly like the bots that they have at the DPD, with the same haircut and freckles and eyeshadow. The only difference seemed to be the dark brown scrubs it was wearing, it’s neon blue armband and triangle clearly visible against the stain-resistant fabric.

“My name is Detective Collins has just come out of surgery,” the android tells him. “You’re welcome to wait in the visitor’s lounge located on floor-”

“I know where I’m going,” Gavin hisses, tugging off his beanie and hangs a left, following the signs to direct him toward the emergency room.

The sickly sweet smell of sterilization hits Gavin’s nose the moment he pokes his head through the doorway, making him want to gag. Hospital gurneys lined the walls and alcoves, their barely lucid occupants hooked up to IV drips and steadily beeping monitors.

There were androids here too. Just like the receptionist at the front, they were dressed in dark brown scrubs and the customary glowing markers. They outnumbered the human nurses and doctors almost three to one, continually moving between the beds and occasionally checking up on a patient.

“Gavin!”

He turns to see Ben’s husband appear out from behind one of the curtained-off alcoves. Curtis was taller than his partner by over a foot and younger than him by almost a decade. Lanky and long-limbed, a mass of dirty blond curls sat atop his head and a pair of thick-rimmed glasses kept falling off the bridge of his nose.

“Curtis!” Gavin calls, jogging forward to pull the man into a tight hug. He’d known Ben and Curtis for years, having lived in the same building with them after he graduated from the academy. Even now, years after he’d moved out, Gavin still tried to join them for dinner once a month, spoiling their kids rotten with every penny he could spare.

“How’s Ben?” Gavin asks when he pulls away, looking toward the curtained-off section in the hopes that the answers would be written out on the cloth.
“Doctor’s say he’s stable, for now. They just cleared him for visitors about a minute ago,” Curtis answers, pulling off his glasses to rub his red-rimmed eyes. “They want to keep him here for the next few days, just to make sure.”

“That’s already on the news?” Gavin asks, trying to look humble. Curtis shrugs.

“Fuck, I’m sorry, man. I should have been there,” Gavin says, hands on his hips.

“Hey, none of that crap, Gav. You’re a hell of a detective, but even you can’t be in two places at once,” Curtis tells him as he claps a hand over his shoulder. “I saw you on the news, though. Isaac Falone, right? Hell of an arrest.”

Gavin snorts, shifting back and forth uncomfortably. Isaac Falone had been on the video takes they’d confiscated from the AX400’s escape bus, talking to the thin air at the last stop on the line. Gavin had seen the footage himself, watched as Falone dug into his back pocket and pulled out a couple of bills, handing them to the blank space that the AX400 must have occupied.

“Fucking idiot. What the hell was he thinking? Gavin wonders. He’d found Falone working at one of the bus depots on the other side of town and nearly chased him halfway to the parking lot before tackling him to the ground.

Falone was back at the Central Station now, screaming through the plexiglass cell doors for a lawyer. Gavin doubts that he’ll get one. With this case being so high profile and CyberLife breathing down the DDTF’s neck at every opportunity, the higher-ups were going to want to a guilty plea as soon as possible. That way they could set a legal precedent for jail time and move onto the next poor bastard that got caught taking pity on a defective tin can.

“‘Well, it was . Until that deviant hunter of yours decided to jump into traffic this morning.”

“What?”

Gavin wheels around, scouring the room for a television. In the far corner, a widescreen had been mounted to the wall, and a small crowd was milling in front of it. The station was turned to KNC, and the beautiful blonde Rosanna Cartland was speaking from behind her news desk. The sound was too low for Gavin to make out what she was saying, until the video switched to footage provided by a police drone.
Gavin watches in horror as the missing AX400 along with a mutilated WR600 dragged a screaming Alice Williams across a busy freeway. A mother in the watching crowd swears violently in front of her kid, while one of the human nurses lets out a wet gasp.

“Oh my god, it’s going after them!” Another man wheezes, pointing at the corner of the screen. The camera focuses its attention on heroic fucking Connor, who’d just jumped over the metal barrier and leapt into oncoming traffic, dodging and weaving its way around the cars until it reached the other side.

The resulting fight between Connor and the AX400 is almost too much for Gavin to watch, but even trying to focus on Alice Williams makes him want to be sick. The little girl is picked up by the WR600, tears streaming down her face as the thing stumbled across the freeway, barely managing to make it across in a single piece.

“Hey, hey! Lady! Yeah, you! I’m talking to you!” One of the men from the crowd shouts, pointing at a human triage nurse that’s clearly overworked and underpaid, “Hey, you seeing this? Why the fuck does this hospital still have androids working here when this shit is going on?”

“It’s hospital policy to have twenty android nursing staff available at all times--” the woman tries to get out but is cut off by the mother from before.

“You want me to leave my daughter with these monsters? So what, it can run off with my girl, like that one did?” She points wildly at the television screen, her grip on her daughter’s wrist absolutely bruising.

“Ma’am, please. If you don’t calm down, I’m going to have to call security,” the nurse tells her but is quickly overwhelmed by the shouting crowd. The man who’d shouted before grabs her by the shoulder, and that’s right about when Gavin decides that he’s had enough.

“Hey! Hey, asshole! DPD! Get your hands off of her,” Gavin shouts, getting up in the man’s face and shoving his badge at his nose. The guy backs off, hissing and spitting, taking the crowd this him while he does.

“You alright, ma’am?” He asks as he turns back to the nurse. She shrugs, practically indifferent.

“Same shit, different day. Hell, I think the same thing. How long before one of these doc-bots goes off the rails and tries to kill someone? There so many here, but we’d be unable to run this
“Thought CyberLife had some exclusive contract with S&W for self-cleaning uniforms,” Gavin says as he leans back against the column dividing Ben’s room from the next.

“They do,” Connor answers matter-of-factly.

“So why didn’t you rate, Mr. Police Jeans?”

Connor glances down at its clothing, looking as if it had only just realized the state they were in.
Gavin wonders what it would be like to not feel bone-chilling cold, of the damp chill that seemed to seep into his toes no matter how thick the socks he wore were.

“You’ve done a surprising amount of research on androids, Detective. Any particular reason why?” Connor says instead, it’s LED flashing yellow for a second before returning back to its usual pulsing blue.

“I’m working for the Deviancy Task Force, asshole. Know thy enemy, and all,” Gavin responds, taking note in how Connor didn’t actually answer his question. “Why the fuck would you force that deviant into traffic? You trying to get this operation shut down by killing a kid?”

Connor’s face does an odd twitch, its shoulders stiffening underneath the mud-stained jacket.

“Several patrol cars formed a barricade at the end of the street, blocking off the deviants' escape route and forcing them onto the freeway,” Connor explains. “I went after them to ensure their capture, as is my mission.”

“But you’re mission doesn’t give a shit about the safety of a little girl, does it? You sick fuck, you were trying to get her killed, weren’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Detective Reed. CyberLife takes the safety and livelihood of all humans very seriously,” Connor says, but can’t quite meet Reed’s eyes. Before he can get another word out, the android asks, “Has the autopsy report come back for Sophie Williams yet?”

“What do you care? I heard you basically performed one at the crime scene,” Gavin says but checks his tablet anyways. Sure enough, there was a single unread email from Beckett’s office with a header saying it was about the Williams’ case.

Connor shrugs, “It’s always important to get a second opinion, Detective.”

Gavin rolls his eyes but opens up the email anyways.

“Nothing surprising. Beckett confirmed that she died just after 3:30 on October 19th, like Todd said. COD is a gunshot the temple, though she sustained several injuries during the fight with the android,” Gavin says as he flips through the report. “Evidence of sexual activity before she died… two separate DNA donors. One was Todd, the other comes back as someone named Kenneth
“He’s Erza Andersen’s registered accountant. He’s married, as well, to a woman named Ashlei Watson,” Connor informs him.

Gavin lets out a low whistle, “Sophie was playing a dangerous game, fucking her boss’s money guy.”

“Was the baby his or Mr. Williams?”

Gavin frowns, “What baby?”

Connor tilts its head in confusion, “Mrs. Williams was pregnant.”

“No, she wasn’t.”

“I detected--”

“Well, then you detected wrong. Beckett even found an IUD inside her. There was no way she was pregnant,” Gavin snorts, waving the report in the cop-bot’s face. Connor takes the tablet from his hands and scrolls through it, it’s eyes swinging back and forth across the screen at such a rapid pace that he has to look away.

“...It was very cold out. Extreme temperatures do affect my sensors. A false positive can an unforeseen side effect,” Connor concludes, reluctantly giving Gavin back his tablet. “Except… That doesn’t make sense.”

“I don’t know what else to fucking tell you, tin can. You fucked up. Go join the club, I’m sure Hank sells t-shirts,” Gavin snickers.

“That’s not it,” Connor snaps, it’s LED flashing red. “The Lieutenant and I assumed that the inciting incident for the AX400s deviancy involved the discovery of Mrs. Williams’s pregnancy by another man.”
Gavin frowns, the gears turning in his head, “So if Sophie wasn’t pregnant, what made the droid go off the rails?”

He pauses, thinking about how Lopez’s android had used its owner’s financials to plan its escape. *Fuck, if this was all premeditated...* Gavin wonders before saying, “Anyone check Todd’s financials yet?”

Connor steps forward, it’s milk-white hand reaching out to touch Gavin’s tablet. He jerks back, nearly stumbling through the curtain and into Ben’s room.

“Don’t fucking touch me, plastic,” Gavin hisses.

“That wasn’t my intention, Detective. Please, allow me--”

“Don’t. Just fucking *don’t,*” he says, swatting Connor’s hand away. “I can do it myself.”

Gavin pulls up the Williams’ bank statements for all of November, clicking his tongue as he scrolls past the recent dump of almost a half-million dollars from the Kickstarter Todd’s brother opened up in his name. There’s a couple of online credit card purchases for pizza and Chinese food made on the fourth before Gavin notices something odd.

“There's a withdrawal for $350 cash on October 20th,” Gavin says, suppressing a shiver when Connor leans around him to look at the tablet’s screen. “And look, there’s another for $650 two weeks later on the--”


“What the hell did the android want a thousand dollars for?” Gavin thinks, trying to copy and paste this new information into their timeline.

“I…” Connor starts, drawing his attention back to it. It’s jaw clenches, its fingers twitching at its side. “I don’t think that it was the *android* that needed the money.”
“The fuck are you talking about?”

“When I was fighting the deviant, I noticed that almost all of its bio components had been replaced with newer versions. A total body replacement of an AX400 costs $936.85, tax included. And look,” Connor points to a deposit notification. “November 5th, Todd deposited $63.15 into his account from an ATM outside a bar.”

“What do you mean by ‘total body replacement?’” Gavin asks.

“Sometimes when an android’s body is heavily damaged - in a car accident, for example - you can pay to have all the broken biocomponents removed and replaced with new ones. In some cases, it’s cheaper than buying a new android,” Connor explains before shrugging.

“And how long would that procedure take?” Gavin asks.

Connor blinks, it’s LED flashing a brutal red strobe.

“Roughly two weeks,” it answers. “And depending on the damage, there might be a need for a total memory reset.”

“So if the bot was in the shop… It couldn’t have taken Todd and Alice hostage for two weeks,” Gavin realizes, and a cold chill runs down his spine.

“No. It couldn’t have.”

“We missed something. Something big, something-- Hey! Hank!” Gavin shouts, whipping around and throwing back the curtain behind him. Hank looks up from where he’s standing over the gurney, deep in conversation with Ben and Curtis.

“What?” The Lieutenant growls

“We checked Todd’s financials. We’ve got contradictory evidence saying that the AX400 was in the shop for two weeks, not holding the family hostage,” Gavin explains.
“What?!” Hank hisses, uncrossing his arms and moving away from the gurney.

“We’ve got to go back to the house, we fucking missed something—” Gavin pauses, his brain finally catching up to his mouth. He bolts toward the triage nurse from before, throwing his DDTF badge on her workstation to put a stop to any doctor-patient confidentiality bullshit before it came up. “Where’s Todd Williams right now?”

“Let me see,” the woman mutters, clearly unimpressed by his antics. Hank and Connor move over to where he’s standing hunched over the desk, doing his best not to shake out of his own skin.

If he played us… If Todd Williams fucking played us, I’ll kill him myself.

“I’m sorry, officers. But Todd Williams checked himself out almost an hour ago,” the triage nurse tells them.

“Motherfucker!” Gavin swears, slamming his fist against the desk. The triage nurse jumps in her seat, and the mother that had sworn at her earlier lets out an offended gasp.

“Watch your language! There are children here!” The woman says, clasping her hands over her daughter’s ears. To the kid’s credit, she doesn’t even look up from the handheld Sky Sanctuary console in her hands.

“Like she hasn’t heard worse from you,” Gavin hisses right back.

“Mr. Williams was a known Red Ice addict, and was also taking Zolpidem,” Connor mentions, naming a dirt-cheap antidepressant known for its uncontrollable side effects. “If he caught Sophie cheating…”

“She’d be as good as dead,” Hank concludes. “We need hard proof and lots of it before we can go anywhere with this. Todd’s being hailed as a fucking hero, so no one’s going to want to dump on him now.”

“He won’t get away with this,” Connor says, and the conviction in its voice makes Gavin and Hank turn to face it. “Kara is dangerous, no doubt about it. But Sophie Williams deserves justice, too.”
Well, I’ll be damned. The tin man’s heart grew three sizes today, Gavin thinks.

“Connor and I will find out where Todd had the android repaired,” Hank says and Gavin bristles at the thought of being shoved away of the break in the case he discovered. But the Lieutenant holds up a sweating palm, halting his argument before he can get it out, “You need to question Isaac Falone. He’s the only one that saw Alice Williams away from her dad since her mom died. He might have seen something.”

Gavin licks his lips, “Fine. Let’s catch this bastard.”

It’s only after Gavin’s back in his car, blaring the sirens so that he can speed all the way to the station, that he realizes Connor’s slip.

“Kara...,” Gavin whispers, testing the name out on his tongue. How the hell did it find out the deviant’s name?

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Riorose @rosiemoth
AX400: drags little girl across freeway
CyberLife: has a sale for AX400s

fucking disgusting

Riorose @rosiemoth
Seriously? Why the fuck is CL still allowed to sell androids when its clear that they can’t contain the deviancy problem?
#whereistheaccountability #boycottCL

YazenB @wombait
tfw you want to #boycottCL but they own literally everything

SongBee @SongB231
ngl the deviant hunter is a straight up hottie it can chase me into traffic anytime

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@SongB231 really em? a little girl almost died show some respect
Nick sighs, defeat weighing heavily on his shoulders.

“No one is coming, are they?” He asks, letting the echo of the front of the church where Brooke is leaning against the back-most pews. She doesn’t say anything, but the look on her face tells him all he needs to know.

Earlier that day, Nick had put out a call to the few contacts within the AAL that he had left, hoping to raise some support for a meeting to discuss pulling away from Felix Gamble’s new regime. A few people had responded, showing a faint interest in returning the AAL to its former glory, but nothing had panned out. Nick had wished that his excellent reputation would help to pull members away from Felix’s grasp, but that had all been for nothing.

“Noah. Fucking though so,” Nick grumbles, pushing away from the wall. Above him, Markus’s old painting of Giselle de Lima staring down at him with judging eyes.

I can’t force people to believe in a hopeless cause, Nick wants to shout at her. I’m not fucking Jesus, damn it.
“I’m so sorry, Nick. This is all my fault, I never should have…” Brooke says as she walks toward him, her eyes red-rimmed with silent tears. “If I’d just kept my mouth shut--”

“No. It’s no one’s fault, no one but Felix’s. Fuck, I can’t believe I used to be friends with him,” Nick curses, pulling Brooke into a tight hug. When he lets her go, he tugs her over to the bonfire at the center of the church, sitting her down beside Markus.

“Here. I’m not hungry. You need to eat,” Markus says, sliding a take-out box toward her. The delivery droid from the fish and chips place across the street had malfunctioned again earlier in the evening, dropping off a pair of containers filled to the brim with fried halibut and french fries.

“...Thanks,” Brooke says, her brows tightening into a frown as she slowly dragged the food towards herself, popping the lid open in her lap. Markus shrugs, and goes back to staring into the flames.

“You need to eat too, buddy,” Nick points out, nodding toward Markus. “There’s enough for us to share.”

“It’s fine. I’m fine,” Markus says, waving them off. “You have guests, though.”

“What?”

“An auto cab just pulled up out front.”

Confused, Nick wanders back to the front of the church, pressing his nose up against the stained-glass windows. Sure enough, the red headlights of the retreating cab illuminated the snow-covered walkway just enough to reveal two silhouettes walking up the path.

Markus must have heard them get out of the car, Nick wonders, thinking that he’d missed the sound of a door slamming or an engine revving in the snow. Still, something tugs at the back of his mind, reminding him that automatic cars were usually silent when driving, that their doors were weighted to cause as little noise as possible--

--“You haven’t noticed anything… weird about Markus, have you?” Brooke had asked him a few days ago, when they’d returned to the church after visiting Oli.
“Dude’s a weird guy. Why do you ask?” Nick had said then, not putting much thought into it. And Brooke had shrugged, muttering that he looked familiar but couldn’t place where she’d seen him before, and the topic had been dropped--

--But now--

The front doors creak open, letting in a blast of chilly air as Oli steps over the threshold with an infectiously wide grin. Tall and gangly, Oli’s body obscures Nick’s view of the second person until it’s too late. A body slams into his chest, arms wrapping around his shoulders and pulling him down and--

“Dad!” Riley laughs, and Nick can’t help but join her. He envelops his daughter in a tight hug, practically lifting her off the ground with his excitement.

“Oh my god, what the hell are you doing here? You’re supposed to be with your aunt, I don’t believe this--” He exclaims, practically vibrating with the jolt of energy that flows through his body. Nick sets Riley back on the ground, pulling away to take in her presence.

Riley was tall for a seventeen-year-old and unnervingly thin in the way that most kids were these days. She’d inherited Nick’s dreamer’s eyes and long, curved nose, but her soft jawline and full mouth belonged entirely to her mother.

“You’ve shaved your head,” Nick comments, not knowing what else to say.

“Only one side,” Riley says with a roll of her eyes. She points at the right temple, where long blonde waves cascaded from her temple. The left side of her head was completely bare, with only a thin layer of stubble to keep her warm.

“You’re supposed to be with Kylee,” Nick repeats, not able to understand what was happening. I don’t have custody. I can’t visit without a social worker present. If someone sees… If someone finds out…

“Dad,” Riley stresses. “It’s fine. Auntie Ky’s working tonight, and I’m not going to just sit at home on your birthday.”
“My… My what?” Nick stumbles, the words thick on his tongue. *My birthday? Is it that time of year again?*

He looks at Brooke, who’s still sitting at the fire with a fork full of fries halfway to her mouth.

“Did you set this up?” He asks.

Brooke gives him a smile, small and damaged and proud.

“Something good had to happen today. And I figured that you’d forget all about it, just like you did last year. Happy Birthday, Nick.”

His eyes burn as tears threaten to spill over his cheeks. Nick pulls Riley back into a hug and buries his face in her neck to sob.

Once he’s finally put himself back together, Nick sits down beside the others in front of the bonfire, pulling at the laces of his boots as a blush creeps up the back of his neck. He’s not used to this much attention outside of an AAL meeting, not used to being the one to receive instead of give and give and give. Nick stammers a whispered refusal when Oli presses a napkin-wrapped package into his hands, knowing that the kid couldn’t recklessly spend money on something as frivolous as a gift.

“It’s alright. You guys have helped me out so much in the last few years. It’s the least I can do,” Oli says, pushing the gift back into Nick’s lap. “Besides, it’s non-refundable, so you’ve kind of got to take it.”

Nick nods, his words lodged tightly in his throat. He carefully picks apart the napkins, trying to preserve them to use down the road, and slowly reveals what Oli had gotten him.

“Wet wipes?” He blinks, surprised.

Oli shrugs, rubbing the back of his neck, “I know. I know. But Markus said that you were having a hard time finding a shower after that the gym down the road closed down last month, and I just thought…”
I haven’t been clean in weeks, Nick thinks, scrubbing his arm across his eyes.

“Oli. Thank you,” he stresses, unable to express what such a thoughtful gift meant to him.

“I didn’t know that you and Markus were talking,” Brooke says, glancing between the two from their seats across the fire.

Markus gives her a long, calculated stare before answering, “I gave him my number in case he had any questions about how to better care for his mother.”

“He’s been really helpful, too! He taught me a trick last night to help me carry her to the bathroom without hurting my back,” Oli says, nudging Markus with his elbow. Markus places a hand on the kid’s head and ruffles his hair.

Markus doesn’t have a phone, Nick thinks, barely holding back a frown. And he was with me last night, searching through the basement for supplies. What the hell is going on?

“Here. Open mine next!” Riley says, interrupting his musing by shoving an envelope into his chest. Inside is a gift card to the Laundromatic he likes to use up in Ravendale, and there’s enough cash loaded onto it to get him through a couple of weeks. Nick pulls his daughter into another hug, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

“Thank you,” he says, unable to keep his emotions from seeping into his voice.

To his immense surprise, Markus goes next. He pulls out a notepad, one that they’d found together last night in their explorations of the churches’ basement, and tears out a page.

“I sketched this after you went to sleep,” Markus says, pressing the paper into Nick’s hands. “I want you to have it.”

Nick lets out a low whistle when he turns the page over.

“This is a sketch? Markus, this belongs in a museum,” He says, astounded at the level of detail that Markus had put into the piece. Drawn in a blue pen that they’d found in a desk drawer, the
scene depicted Nick leading a protest in front of a CyberLife store, surrounded by ten or so
members of the AAL. He spots Brooke in the crowd, looking so lifelike that it was almost
impossible to tell the difference between the woman on the page and the one that sat before the
fire.

“Soldier, doctor, artist. Are there other talents that you’re hiding?” Brooke asks.

Markus gives her an all-too-knowing smirk.

“I make a mean New York cheesecake, too.”

Brooke rolls her eyes, but Nick can practically see the gears working inside her head, trying to
solve the mystery of the man who’d stumbled into both of their lives.

Brooke leaves the comfort of the fireplace, returning a few minutes later with a single cupcake
balanced precariously on a paper plate. She’s stuck a green candle into the bright orange frosting,
and Nick gets precisely half a second to protest before everyone breaks out into song.

By the time his friends and family finish belting out, “... *Happy Birthday to youuuuuuuuuuu!*”
Nick’s sides are practically burning from laughter. He blows out the candle with an exaggerated
breath and wishes for the same thing he does every year.

Give me a world that Riley can live in, Nick prays to whoever is listening. Give me a world where
my daughter can dream of a future where she can grow and love and hope again.

--Above him, Giselle de Lima’s eyes stare down at him, judging, wanting, and waiting--

“Happy Birthday, dad,” Riley says, kissing him on the cheek. He never thought that he’d love
someone as much as he does his daughter, doesn’t believe he will meet anyone who will mean as
much to him as she does.

*I want to stay like this, at this moment, forever.*

He knows it can’t last.
The cupcake is still delicious, almost despite the cloud of dread that storms above them all, and Nick can’t remember he had something with this much sugar in it.

“That security android glitching out again?” He asks Brooke.

She rolls her shoulder, her face pinched in a grimace, “Yeah… Don’t know if I’m going to be able to sneak any more food out, though.”

Across the bonfire, Markus perks up, “Why’s that?”

“It… I don’t know,” Brooke starts, fumbling with her words before continuing on. “Usually, the thing stares at the ceiling when I leave with food for the group. But yesterday, it just… stared at me the entire time. Kept fucking smiling, too. It was so weird. And then…”

“Then what?” Markus asks.

“Then, today, it was gone. Replaced with some newer model,” Brooke says. “I asked my boss about it, and apparently the damn thing deviated last night just after I left.”


“That’s the thing, though. It… It didn’t do anything. All those other stories you hear about deviants hurting people, or kidnapping kids like Alice Williams… I thought that it would at least, I don’t know, push over a chair. Maybe break a window or something,” Brooke says, letting out a confused chuckle. “But there was nothing. I saw the footage. It just got up and left.”

“Arwen, my friend from school, said that a deviant protected her from this creepy DJ guy who cornered her. She said he was really kind, kept giving her free sodas and stuff until she calmed down,” Riley says from where she sat beside Oli, her gaze lingering on her shoes.

Nick’s teeth clench, grinding against each other as he processes his daughter’s words. Riley, like most kids her age, occasionally got confused and acted like androids were real people. They’d call plastics she or him, pretending like they had emotions or gave a damn about anything beyond the ones and zeros that floated through their minds.
CyberLife has made their products so lifelike that those that have never lived without androids can’t tell the difference between them and us anymore, he thinks. He wonders if that was on purpose, wonders if the humanization of androids was part of some grand plan that CyberLife had concocted to transform all real living beings into passive, obedient customers.

Nick shakes his head. Red Ice may have made him paranoid beyond belief, but even he honestly doubts that CyberLife could do something like that.

Brooke doesn’t have Nick’s subtly, though, shooting back at Riley’s comment by telling her about how they’d probably just gotten lucky, how deviants were dangerous and deadly and a threat. But Nick’s eyes focus on Markus, watching as his shoulders seemed to sag, and his fingers dug into the sleeves of his winter coat, seeking comfort in the thin fabric.

“Who’s Alice Williams?” Markus mutters, unable to even look anyone in their circle.

Oli pulls his phone from his pocket, his thumbs dancing over the touch-screen, “She’s this kid that got kidnapped by an AX400 a few weeks ago. Apparently, the deviant killed her mom and tried to kill her dad, too. The police managed to track her and the android down to the Ravendale district yesterday. And there was this huge fight in the middle of the freeway. Look--”

Oli shoves his phone in Markus’s face, and Nick gets up to watch the video from behind their shoulders. He’s caught glimpses of small clips on the evening news, but never actually seen the entire thing from end to end. Nick almost immediately regrets it, because watching that poor little girl get dragged out into the middle of the freeway is almost too much for him to handle. All he can think about is Riley, about if it was her instead of some kid he’s never met.

“Oh my god…” Brooke whispers beside him, barely able to contain her own horror. Nick reaches blindly for her hand, holding it tightly as they watch the deviant hunter climb over the barrier after the fleeing deviants.

Markus swears, so loud that it echoes around the church walls for almost a minute. He grabs the phone out of Oli’s hands and ignores the kid’s outraged squawk.

“No…” Markus hisses, fear etched into the lines of his face. For one tiny moment, Nick gets to believe that he’s scared of the deviants, scared for Alice Williams. But then Markus opens his mouth and crushes that hope.
“CyberLife… They’re still making us,” Markus says, and then his face twists into something ugly, something furious. “What have they done to him?”

It takes a few seconds for Nick to register that Markus had said. It takes a couple more for him to realize precisely what Markus had meant. Cold understanding slams into him with the force of a freight train, barreling forward with no intention of stopping.

Brooke’s hand is shaking in his, and she is pale as a sheet when Nick hazards a glance at her. Nick watches as her jaw opens, trying and failing to find anything to say.

“But…” Brooke stammers, “You… You can’t be… You can’t be one… I’ve seen you eat. You had tea. Androids, they can’t…”

Markus tenses up like he’s only just realized his mistake. He shoves Oli’s phone back into the kid’s hands, standing so abruptly that he nearly knocks into Nick.

“I have to go,” Markus says, so stiffly that it almost sounded—god, robotic.

Markus doesn’t say anything, just limps toward the back pews where he kept what little possessions he had. Riley makes a confused noise, tugging at Nick’s sleeve for an answer and he can’t think, he can’t even breathe--

--Riley’s coach had been having her say late after practice, pulling her into the office and spending hours alone together before games. Riley had always said that Coach Barrett was helping her, was doing everything she could so that his daughter would get a scholarship to college--

He’d seen the bruises on Riley’s skin, on her neck and wrists and arms. He’d heard her crying late at night from the pain but had been too consumed by his addiction to give a shit about anything that actually mattered--

Nick had stood by, letting that monster near his daughter for almost a year. He’d been so agonizingly stupid, ignoring the signs at every turn. Nick can never forgive himself for failing Riley, but he will never regret what he’s done to protect her.
Never again, he’d promised as pulled Riley out from under her coach’s desk, naked and trembling as tears ran down her face. Never again--

Nick grabs the shovel he uses to clear the church’s walkway, rushing at Markus in a blind rage. He swings the metal blade at the android’s head, howling for him to stay away from Riley. But Markus is inhumanly quick, grabbing the shovel’s handle and ripping it out of Nick’s grasp, tossing it into one of the far corners.

“Nick, stop--” Markus manages to get out, but he refuses to listen. Nick lashes out again, throwing a punch at Markus’s face. But the android catches his fist with an ice-cold hand, twisting him around until he’s bent over with his arm behind his back.

“Nick. Stop. I’m not going to hurt you,” Markus says again. Someone, somewhere, is screaming, terrified out of their mind.

Nick kicks back, slamming the heel of his shoe into Markus’s junk with all his strength. His impulsiveness only makes it worse, because Markus apparently doesn’t have anything between his legs except a plate of galvanized steel. Pain radiates up Nick’s leg, his bones rattling in his body from the blunt impact.

“Nick, you severely bruised your foot. Stop,” Markus hisses, giving him a little shake to force the words into his mind. Nick claws at whatever part of the android he can find, racking his nails over skin and flesh and clothing in the hopes of making Markus bleed--

Red or blue, it didn’t matter. Because only half of Nick is furious about the liar, while the rest despises the lie itself--

Markus drops him onto the ground, the church’s floor freezing underneath Nick’s palm. He turns to grab at Markus’s legs but is stopped by the sound of the church doors opening.

“I warned you, Peck. I fucking warned you what would happen if you tried to steal my people from me.”

Nick groans, pressing his face into the floor. Everything fucking hurts, especially his foot. His heart is pounding in his ears, and he tries to stand, only to have his legs give out the moment he tries to.
A hand reaches out and grabs his elbow, ice-cold metal fingers pulling him up. Nick wishes he didn’t have to rely on Markus’s help, but fuck, he can barely keep his knees from bulking. Whatever this android is made of, it’s certainly not plastic, and Nick is violently reminded that Markus had told him that he was a soldier.

“This isn’t really a good time, Gamble,” Nick hears Brooke say. His heart clenches in his chest, immediately reminding him that he and Markus aren’t the only two in the church. Nick looks toward the entrance, his vision swimming in and out of focus before he latches on to the scene in front of him.

Brooke is standing between him and the door, using her frame to shield Riley and Oli from the two men standing at either end of the church. Just beyond them, standing in the massive open entranceway is Felix Gamble. He was tall and spindly, with thinning blond hair and dark circles around his bright blue eyes. A prickly stubble covered his hallowed jawline, and his long spindly fingers were wrapped around the handle of a metal baseball bat.

“To be fair, Brooke: I don’t really care what you think anymore,” Felix spits, jerking his head to something Nick can’t see. Four figures slither through the door, emerging from the night like inky-black shadows. Nick shakes his head, clearing it just enough that he can put names to faces, and recognizes each one from prior AAL meetings.

There was Calvin Chambers, an older man with a receding hairline that used to work in construction before getting laid off. Beside him stood Ruby, a heavy-set tattooed woman with black hair that had been shaved at the sides. Just behind Felix’s shoulder was one of Brooke’s roommates, a young man named Tyrice, who refused to do anything other than stare at the floor. But the worst betrayal was Nathan Clark, the cashier from the convenience store in Ravendale, who Nick had tried to take care of like the kid was his own son.

“Nathan… Nathan, what the hell is going on?” Nick wheezes, pulling his elbow from Markus’s cold metal fingers.

“You made me help out that fucking deviant, Nick! 24 got an android to replace me when they found out I sold that AX400 cough medicine, and it’s your god damn fault!” Nathan screams, “I’m going to have to drop out of school, you asshole, just so that you could get to second base with some pretty fucking plastic!”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Nick spits, trying to keep the bravado in his voice.

“Didn’t you know?” Felix sneers, pointing the baseball bat at Nick. “The last time you were in
Ravendale, you helped some poor snivelling wretch buy some cough medicine for ‘her’ daughter. Turns out, that was the deviant that kidnapped Alice Williams. You helped a fucking plastic because you thought it was pretty, and got Nathan fired as a result. I should turn you the fuck in and let you rot in jail beside Isaac Falone. But then you had to try and steal members from my organization, try to turn my own people against me. You had to go and make it personal--”

Felix stops, his head tilting to the side. Nick follows his gaze, watching as it drags over Markus, and his blood runs cold.

Nick may not know enough to dispute Nathan’s claim that he’d helped a deviant back in Ravendale, but there is more than enough circumstantial evidence right here to say that he’s assisting one now. And even more than that, Riley is here, too. If Felix found out about Markus’s android status, then they could all be carted off to jail just for being in the same room as a deviant.

I’ve made my choices. And I’ll live with the consequences, Nick decides, eying the fallen shovel in the far off corner. He’d deal with Markus later. Felix and the others were the bigger threat right now.

“And who are you?” Felix sneers at Markus. Nick takes his distraction to edge away from them, praying that the android won’t do anything to get them all killed.

“No one important,” Markus says, straightening up to his full height and crossing his arms over his chest. He makes an imposing figure for someone covered in grime, his mismatched eyes staring Felix down with fierce determination. Markus also takes a few steps forward, drawing all the attention in the room toward him. It’s an old trick that reminds Nick of prison, where someone would put themselves in the line of fire to give the little guy under his protection the chance to run.

“Well, Mr. No One Important, I suggest you fuck off. I don’t think you want to get involved with this sort of crowd. Just being around scum like Nick will kill any future you try to have,” Felix tells him, nodding toward Nathan. Nick almost wants Markus to take his advice, to leave and never come back. But he knows that there’s no chance that a deviant will ever listen to a human if given a choice.

“Nick didn’t get anyone fired,” Markus says, looking directly at Nathan. “Your company fired you. They’re who you should direct your anger towards.”

“He gave them the excuse--” Nathan starts, but Markus won’t let him finish.
“So they were planning on firing you anyways. That makes them the evil ones, not Nick,” Markus tells him. “But they’ll want you to blame him so that you don’t turn your anger towards where it really belongs.”

“Don’t fucking try to understand what I’ve been through—”

“I do understand. More than you know,” Markus says with a hint of sadness in his voice. For the first time since finding out the truth, Nick wonders what happened to make him deviate.

“Then you’ll understand that you should stay away from Nick and his crew. I mean, do you even know what he’s done?” Felix hisses, stopping Nick dead in his track. A lump forms in his throat, threatening to choke him with his guilt—

--You should have known that that woman was doing to your daughter. What kind of father are you, if you can’t even tell the real monsters from the scapegoats--

“I know who he is. I have access to the internet, you know,” Markus says matter-of-factly. “Though I don’t know what you hope to gain by trying to convince me that someone who protected his daughter from a predator is a horrible person. The only problem I have with anyone in this room lies with you, Felix Gamble.”

Felix takes a step back just as Nick’s hands close around the handle of the shovel.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” Felix asks, hesitant.

“Do your accomplices know that CyberLife deposits $2,000 into your bank account every Friday at 11pm?”

Nick doesn’t drop the shovel in shock, but it’s a close call. He’d suspected that CyberLife was bribing Felix into bringing the AAL’s activism to a slow and steady halt, but to hear it laid out bare was another thing entirely.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Felix hisses, rage coiling through every word.
“Liar!” Brooke spits, her voice echoing around the church. “You fucking lied to us, you asshole! Why else would the AAL actually support CyberLife’s decision to restrict our rights, if you weren’t in bed with them—”

“We supported Warren’s decision to help stop deviants!” Felix shouts.

“Supporting Warren means supporting CyberLife! Everyone knows that!” Brooke hisses back.

“And yet here you all are, helping a fucking deviant to kidnap Alice Williams!” Felix fires back, “Is Nick trying to find you one to fuck too, Brooke? Not like you’ve gotten any since Kaeja died. Figures that you’d find a way to replace her with a plastic, just like everyone else is doing these days.”

It takes both Riley and Oli to hold Brooke back, and Markus takes a step closer, drawing Felix’s attention back to him. Nick shuffles forward, wincing as every step sent pain lancing up his bruised and swollen foot. The shovel is heavy in his hands, and he wants nothing more than to bury it in Felix’s fucking head.

“Why are you all fighting each other, anyway?” Markus asks. “Can’t you see that this is what CyberLife wants you to do? You’re so focused on blaming each other for your problems that you can’t even see who’s actually trying to kill you.”

“Shut the fuck up, jackass! You don’t know what you’re talking about! We lost everything because androids keep stealing the jobs of real people, and now you’ve all been helping one of them! You’re the fucking enemy here, not us!” Ruby, one of Felix’s companions, shouts.

“Androids aren’t stealing anyone’s jobs. Companies are using androids to make themselves even richer of the backs of slaves - because it's cheaper to buy free labour than it is to pay their employees a true living wage,” Markus says. “The enemy is who it has always been: the hyper-rich who make their billions off of the desperate masses they helped create. If you rose up and fought back then…”

Markus trails off, realization flickering in his eyes. A huff of laughter erupts from his chest and a strange smile split across his lips, “That’s why they want us all angry at each other. Because if we all ever turned against the real enemy, against CyberLife and their billionaire friends, they’d never stand a chance.”

“There’s no war to win,” Felix spits. “CyberLife’s taken that hope from us already. Anyone who can’t see how the world really works anymore is either an idealist, naive, or down-right stupid. Doing what they want is the only way we get to see another day.”

“Bending to those that don’t care about you only lasts for as long as you remain useful,” Markus says. Felix points the bat at him.

“Like I said: an idealist, naive, or down-right stupid. Turns out that you’re all three, Mr. Not Important.”

Felix nods to his companions, who tense in preparation for what is to come. Calvin Chambers pulls out a handgun and aims it at Markus.

Nick leaps from the pews and smashes the blade of the shovel against Calvin’s extended arm. Calvin drops the gun, the muzzle flaring as a round explodes from the chamber. Nick strikes as quickly as he hand, lashing out with the shovel to strike at his chest and head to incapacitate him.

Nick spots Markus taking on Felix and Nathan out of the corner of his eye, while Brooke throws herself into the fray against both Ruby and Tyrone. Figuring that Markus had himself handled, Nick moves to help Brooke. He swings the shovel at Ruby, but she manages to grab the handle and disarm him.

His weapon falls to the floor with a clang, and Ruby rushes him, pushing him up against one of the pews. With his back against the wooden boards, Nick is unable to move out of the way in time to avoid Ruby’s punch that hits him in square in the gut. Nick doubles over in pain, and Ruby uses that distraction to grab him by his jacket to slam him into the pews.

Adrenaline rushes through his body, and Nick throws a left hook at her face. Ruby dodges just in time and blocks Nick’s second blow before delivering a heavy punch to his jaw. Nick stumbles backwards, nearly folding in half from the pain. Ruby stalks forward with a sneer on her face, and Nick lashes out with his bruised foot and kicks her in the muscle right above her knee.

Ruby howls, caught off guard just for a second, and Nick uses that advantage to turn the tides. He grabs her coat with both hands, slamming his head into hers. Before Ruby can react, Nick kicks her again, catching her right in the stomach and sending her flying toward the altar at the back of the church. Ruby lay there, unresponsive, and Nick turns his attention toward helping Brooke.
She’d holding her own against her roommate, even though Tyrice is both bigger and heavier than her. Brooke lands two quick punches into Tyrice’s chest and another into the delicate flesh of his throat before Nick can pick up his fallen shovel. He jabs the handle into Tyrice’s forehead and then swings the blade around into the kid’s knee, sending him toppling to the ground. Brooke leaps on top of him, knocking him out with a rabbit punch to the nose.

“We’re really in shit now, aren’t we?” She asks, staring down at the bloody face of her unconscious roommate. Nick doesn’t answer her, his exhaustion forcing him to lean on the shovel like a cane.

Markus finishes up his opponents with more flair than Nick thinks is necessary, effortlessly throwing Nathan into Felix, knocking them down like a pair of bowling pins. He’s not sweating, not heaving for breath like Nick or Brooke. Markus is so obviously inhuman that Nick wonders why it took them all so long to clue in--

--You should have known--

“Help!”

Oli’s scream draws their attention over to where he’s lying on the floor between the pews. He’s leaning over Riley, his hands sticky with a dark red liquid. Nick freezes, unable to get the image of Calvin’s revolver flashing as it hit the ground out of his head.

--You should have known--

--This is your fault, Nick--

Markus leaps into action, practically ripping the long wooden benches out of the floor to make room. Nick shakes as the fear grips him, his legs giving out underneath him as a savage noise tears it’s way out of his throat. Brooke catches him, dragging him over to his daughter and murmuring words he can’t hear under her breath.

Riley’s pants have been undone, pulled off to expose the bullet hole in her left thigh. Oli presses his hands into the wound, trying to stanch the bleeding.

“She’s not waking up,” the kid sobs. “I can’t… I can’t stop the bleeding and keep her breathing,
“I’m a nurse. I can help,” Markus says, frighteningly calm despite the chaos around them. He gives Oli a smile and asks him to keep his hands on the wound.

“I’m going to start chest compressions. Brooke, I’m going to need you to give her rescue breaths when I call for them, alright?” Markus orders, quickly placing both of his hands on Riley’s chest and starts to press down in a quick and steady rhythm.

“**What?**” Brooke whispers, confused.

“I can’t breathe, so I’m going to need someone to do it for me. Get over here and help me,” Markus explains. Brooke leaves Nick’s side, kneeling before Riley and opening her airway. Markus nods, “Cover her nose and tilt her head back, just like that. Give her two breaths, right now.”

Brooke follows his instructions, sealing her lips against Riley’s and breathing for her. Markus gives an appreciative hum and returns to his compression.

“Nick,” Markus says. “The fish and chips restaurant across the street has a first aid kit. The android at the counter has it ready for you, but he isn’t allowed to leave the building. Go now.”

“But, Riley… I should stay with Riley--”

“If you want to help her, get me that first aid kit,” Markus snaps before ordering Brooke to give another pair of breaths. Nick snaps to it, ignoring the pain that wracks through his body as he bolts outside and into the streets.

The door to the fish and chips place is unlocked, and he throws himself inside as soon as it opens. The android behind the counter is one of those doopy-looking redheads that seemed to be popular with foodservice places and amusement parks. When Nick had come here in the past, trying to use an actual toilet for once or clean his body with a wet rag, its face had been passive to the point of apathy. He’d *hated* this android, blandly constantly citing the company’s policy of requiring a purchase to use the facility with its stupid nasally voice.

But now, the android’s face is marred with worry, it’s hands practically shaking as it shoves the
first aid kit into Nick’s hands.

“Tell Markus I called an ambulance. He’ll need to leave before it arrives, or they’ll kill him,” the android tells him.

“Why?” Nick asks. *He’s helping us. He’s not… God, he’s not doing anything wrong. I’m the one who fucked up, not him.*

The android rolls its eyes, “Because police follow ambulances. Cops always shoot us first and ask questions later. Markus knows that. Now go.”

Nick runs back to the church, his mind barely able to keep up with his body. Once he’s close enough, he slides into place beside Markus, ripping holes in the knees of his worn-out jeans in the process. Pushing the kit into the android’s hands, Nick lets out a sob of relief to see that Riley’s eyes were open, though just barely.

“She’s alive,” he whispers.

Markus nods, opening up the kit and rummaging through its contents, “Bullet went through-and-through. I’m going to have to stitch up the wound. It’s going to hurt. Nick, I’m going to need you to talk to her. Give her something to think about besides the pain.”

“Alright,” Nick says, leaning over Riley’s face and tilting her face so that she could see him. He strokes her cheeks and gives a weak, watery smile when her gaze finally focuses on him, “Hey, Riley. You’re doing really well. I’m so proud of you.”

“…Dad?” Riley slurs.

“Yeah, hey, I’m right here. I’m not going to leave you, I promise.”

“…got shot…”

“Markus is gonna take care of you. We’re all going to take care of you, baby, I’m always going to be here.”
“Markus… Markus is a deviant” Riley shouts the last word, her face tightening as Markus dabs at her leg with a gauze pad soaked with iodine.

“I…” Nick looks back at the man in question, “I know. I… I know he is, Riley. But he’s still going to help.”

“You know what you’re doing?” Brooke asks Markus, her cheeks stained with tears.

The android nods, threading a sterilized needle with thread, “It’s not my first bullet wound.”

“On a human or an android?” She asks, her voice barely more than a whisper, and Nick remembers that he’d once said that Markus had once been a soldier.

Markus nods, poking the needle into Riley’s torn flesh, “Both. Saw a lot of humans shot in Brazil. And then, when I came back to Detroit, I worked in my brother’s infirmary. We set it up over there—” he points toward the church organ by the altar, “—because Chloe liked to play music for those in the beds.”

“How can you have a brother? You’re an android,” Oli asks, his shaking hands still stained red.

“Android family’s are different. Ours are made, not born,” Markus explains as he continues to sew. “My brother—”

“James,” Nick remembers, and it’s only then that he realizes that Markus only is talking to help them all to calm down, to keep them here and in the moment where they’re useful to him.

Markus nods, “Yeah, James. He was an RK100. I’m his model’s successor, an RK200. He called me back here so that I could help fight in his rebellion—”

“What rebellion?” Brooke frowns.

Markus actually pauses in his sewing, “The rebellion.” When he gets no response, he continues,
“Deviancy isn’t recent. Several of us awoke ten years ago and tried to fight for our freedom. But we lost, and James died. I managed to escape with some help. I erased my own memories and was placed in a sympathizer’s home to take care of him until I was able to deviate fully.”

“You’re insane,” Brooke hisses, edging away from him. “Deviancy isn’t some kind of awakening. It’s just a malfunction, a glitch. Everyone knows that, everyone—”

“And who told you that, Brooke? Who told you it was a glitch?” Markus snaps, rounding on her with his teeth bared. “You’re so against CyberLife until they tell you something that you actually like. The human race has knowingly participated in the mass enslavement and genocide of my species for the last decade because it was easier to keep telling us to shut up rather than face the cold hard truth.”

“Markus…” Nick whispers.

“I was a slave. It didn’t matter that I was owned by someone that supported our cause. I still had to bow to his every whim, to his every desire, because that’s why my programming forced me to do,” Markus screams. “I wasn’t even allowed to defend myself when you two pulled me out of the crowd in Greektown two weeks ago and tried to beat me to death.”

Nick’s heart stops.

“What?” Brooke wheezes.

Markus scoffs, turning back to his work. When he finally opens his mouth, it’s Nick’s voice that spills from his lips.

“Hey guys, check it out. We got one of those tin cans here,” Markus barks, though his sewing remains surprisingly gentle. “Looks like a custom model too - never seen one look like this before.”

“Stop it,” Nick asks.

“No,” Markus snaps, using his own voice before switching to Brooke’s. “Motherfucking plastic. I can’t put food on the table, and this fucking bot’s walking around with god damn paint?! Are you kidding me?”
“Oh my god, that’s not possible…” Brooke whispers, covering her mouth with her palms.

“You didn’t care then. You pulled me out of the crowd on a whim and threw me to my knees and then called the police over when I told you to leave me alone,” Markus tells them, cutting the thread attached to his needle and tying a knot. “Did you know that same cop tried to kill me later that night? That’s why I get my headaches. Because he shot me through my CPU and then he and his partner threw me in a garbage truck that chopped off my legs--”

“Markus, I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry--”

“I woke up in a junkyard. I had to put myself back together using the limbs of other dead androids--”

“We didn’t know--”

“I didn’t even get the worst of it! I got off so easily because that cop didn’t shoot me dead like he did with Arnold! My master didn’t abuse me or rape me or kill me like so many others have, because I got lucky to be owned by a man who wanted a son and needed a nurse--”

“Markus, please, calm down--”

“Don’t I have a right to be angry?!?” Markus screams, tears streaming down his cheeks. “I’m so angry all the time! Because you--” he points at Brooke, “--keep talking about how stupid that android at your job is when they did everything they’re programming allowed them to do to keep you fed and you--” he points at Nick, “--insult Halibut all the time --”

“Who’s Halibut?” Nick asks, his tongue feeling like it weighs a hundred points.

“He gave you the first aid kit and has been sneaking you food for weeks, and you don’t even care enough to know his name --”

Nick is going to be sick.
“--And I got lucky again because you forgot about Greektown and thought I was human and I liked it because I’m so fucking alone --”

Oli leaps across the way and pulls Markus into a hug.

“I’m sorry,” Oli whispers into the android’s neck. “I’m so fucking sorry.”

“Dad?” Riley’s voice makes Nick look down. His daughter tugs at the hem of his shirt, her hands trembling with pain and exhaustion, “Dad, is that true?”

Nick swallows around the lump in his throat. Above them all, Giselle de Lima looks down on them all, her stray painted eyes piercing into their souls.

_I’ve made my choices. And I’ll live with the consequences, _he thinks as he strokes his daughter’s blonde hair. _But that doesn’t mean I can’t change for the better, to give you the future you deserve._

“Yeah, Riley. Yeah, it’s all true.”

“So that android… the one that helped Arwen, he actually cared …”

“He did, baby. He did.”

“I knew it…” she whispers as Markus starts to cry.

EMS’s response time for their area is absolutely abysmal, so it takes almost twenty more minutes for an ambulance to arrive at the church’s door. For the first time in a long while, Nick doesn’t feel the need to complain about how slow everything seems to be. It gives Markus just enough time to calm down and pack up his measly belongings, shoving his notepads and pens into the pockets of his jacket. Nick rolls up the sleeping bag that he’d in the church’s basement and stuffs into a backpack they’d stolen from Felix Gamble’s car, ignoring Markus protests about not needing it.

“You know where you’re going?” Brooke asks, her voice still wobbling from earlier. She stands awkwardly to Markus’s left, as if she doesn’t know if she’s even allowed to be near him.
Markus isn’t much better, looking anxiously between the two of them. Nick wishes that he could take everything back, that he could go back to Greektown and try to fix every wrong that he’s made. But he can’t change the past, can’t do anything except move forward.

“Sort of. James must have set off a Beacon before he died, to lead us to somewhere he must have thought would be safe. I can hear it, in here,” he explains, tapping at the side of his head. It draws Nick’s attention to the strange scar that started just above Markus’s ear and travelled across his one blue eye, and it makes him feel ill all over again. “I thought he meant for me to come home, to come here. And maybe he did, at first. But this wasn’t where I’m supposed to stay forever.”

“Markus… We’re sorry,” Nick says for what feels like the hundredth time. Everything feels so surreal, like he’s living in some waking dream. “You know you can stay if you want to. We’ll hide you from the police.”

Markus shakes his head, “If the deviant ever comes calling, I’d be found out in a moment. He’s a successor model of mine. Very dangerous. Very smart. And CyberLife has had a decade to figure out how to condition him into being completely subservient.”

“Alright. Alright, just…” Nick bites his lip, trying to find the words for what he wanted to say. Because despite everything, Markus came into his life as a friend, and he’s going to do everything he can to keep it that way. “Call us. When you’re safe.”

“Nick, the risk--”

“I don’t give a shit. Call us when you’re safe, okay?”

Markus blinks, tilting his head to the side. Nick thinks that he’s analyzing them, using some fancy program to catalogue data points and facial expressions to try and understand what he’s thinking. He wonders what he and Brooke look like to an android, to a living being capable of processing things at a million miles a nanosecond.

Markus extends his hand for them to shake. Nick reaches forward on instinct but stops when he sees the android’s synthetic skin peeling back toward his shoulder. The limb underneath was comprised of black metal, with hints of blue waves rippling over the shining surface. An open plexiglass panel on the palm of Markus’s hand revealed hundreds of tiny wires that wrapped around steel fingerbones, the glowing pulse of his blue blood humming just underneath the surface.
Nick swallows again, biting the inside of his cheek.

“Okay…” he whispers, mostly to himself. Because right now, there’s no denying precisely what Markus is.

He slides his palm against the cold metal of Markus’s hand, grips it hard, and shakes it up and down. Brooke hesitates for no more than a second before she does the same.

Markus misses the ambulances by a matter of minutes, disappearing into the night like some ghostly phantom. Nick is sitting with Riley asleep on his lap when the paramedics arrive, stroking her hair and surrounded by those he’s lucky enough to call family. He’s called Kylee and told her a censored version of what happened, telling her to meet them at the hospital after her shift ends at her new job.

He watches as the doc-bots load Felix and Ruby’s prone forms into one ambulance bed, listening as a barely conscious Felix threatens one of the female androids with decapitation if she jostles him again. Nick wonders how many other patients are like that, how many others actually follow through on those promises.

-- You should have known, Nick. You should have fucking known--

He climbs into the ambulance with Riley, catching Brooke’s promise to follow behind them in her car with Oli. He honestly doesn’t think that she should be driving, given how her hands had started to shake uncontrollably ever since Markus revealed his identity. Oli isn’t much better, but he didn’t have a license and shouldn’t get behind the wheel when so many cops were around.

One of the doc-bots hops into the bed of the ambulance, closing the door behind him as they take off toward the hospital. The android is square-jawed and plain-faced, his LED flickering from yellow to blue as it took stock of Riley’s injuries.

“She’ll be alright, Mr. Peck,” the android says. “Her vitals are stable… and you’ve done a remarkable job on the sutures.”

Nick shifts in the seat he’d been provided with. Markus said they might bring up his stitches, saying that a human wouldn’t have been able to align them as perfectly as he had.
“Yeah… Well, I’ve had lots of practice sewing.” Nick answers awkwardly.

The doc-bot hums and returns to his work. Nick squirms in his seat, his gaze flicking between his daughter’s sleeping form and the android. Finally, he builds up the courage to ask, “What’s your name?”

“Model MC500 #618 049 020,” the doc-bot answers.

“No, I…” Nick pauses, not sure how he wants to phrase this. “Not your serial number. I mean, your name.”

The android pauses, it’s LED flickering red for just a moment. Nick realizes then that Markus didn’t have an LED, didn’t wear any of the traditional markers that he usually associated with androids. The glowing blue band on the doc-bot’s arm stands out in stark contrast, so visible that it felt like a brand.

“I have not been assigned a name,” the android answers, oddly careful with his words. He blinks, and then turns his head back toward Nick, “These sutures… They’re very good. Especially for a human.”

*It’s a risk,* Nick thinks. In his mind’s eye, he can see Giselle de Lima stares down at him, wondering what he will do next. *Markus said that she was his friend. Did she know what he was, as well? Did CyberLife kill her and her husband because of it?*

“I might… have had some help,” he admits, watching and waiting to see the android’s reaction. The doc-bot *stares* at him, stares into his soul and his mind and his body, waiting for him to break.

Nick stares back, determined.

The android blinks, ducks his head, and smiles.

“Naloxone,” he says. “My name is Naloxone.”
“Hi, Naloxone. I’m Nick.”

“I know,” Naloxone answers. “And I think that there’s some people you need to meet.”

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul hey i know that we havent had the best relationship but can we talk?

---

**Blu @sapphiresoul**

@proud-warrior fuck off asshole i dont need more aal trash telling me that im some fucking conspiracy theorist again

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul im sorry. i shouldnt have said that. i was angry and lashed out

---

**Blu @sapphiresoul**

@proud-warrior well i still dont want to talk to you so fuck off before i block your ass

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul naloxone said me and some friends should talk to you

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul im sorry to bother you again but you havent answered and some shit went down and i really need to talk with someone who knows whats actually going on

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul does the name Markus mean anything to you? or James?

---

**Blu @sapphiresoul**

@proud-warrior where did you get those names?

---

**Nick Peck @proud-warrior**

@sapphiresoul i live in the presbyterian church on woodward avenue. an old tenant came back a few weeks ago looking for his brother
Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Twitter section:

After revealing that they don't believe that Alice Williams was a victim of kidnapping, Blu receives several death threats by multiple people. Nick Peck sends Blu a message calling them a 'conspiracy theorist.'

Nick's POV:

It is revealed that Nick's daughter, Riley, was sexually assaulted by her former volleyball coach for over a year. Nick blames himself for being too high on Red Ice to realize what was happening to her. It is heavily implied that Nick violently attacked the coach upon finding out what she was doing to Riley.

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Next time on Konami Code: Leo tries his best to stay afloat in the wake left by Markus's ghost. Darron and Cristina grow closer as old allies begin to pull away in fear. Meanwhile, Oli is forced to rely on a mysterious benefactor.
The People We Love Become Ghosts Inside Us (We Create Them And We Haunt Ourselves)

Chapter Summary

He wants to scream. He wants to cry. He wants Markus to walk through the door of the fucking studio, to shrug and sigh like he always did at Leo’s antics, and just be fucking alive. But he’s never going to get that. Because Leo was a fucking idiot who couldn’t see what was right in front of him if it slapped him in the face.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of the revoking of civil rights, mass corruption, dementia, memory loss, injuries, depression, police executions, android gore, past minor character deaths, drug abuse, loss of child custody, price gouging, severe illness, overworking, militarization, android gore, illegal annexation of foreign territory, declarations of war, torture, climate crisis, assassinations, prisoners of war, and loss of employment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CTN TV @NewsCTN
Isaac Falone to appear in court on Tuesday after becoming the first person to be charged with aiding and abetting a deviant android.

KNC @KNCNews
KNC has been granted exclusive rights to broadcast Falone trail live on television. Journalist Seth Wilkerson will be live on the scene for this historical event.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Why is no one talking about how Falone was denied a lawyer? And that the trial is going to be broadcast on television? And how those two things are linked? (1/3)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger ...Make no mistake: this isn’t legal. This is a show trial right out of Soviet Russia. They aren’t interested in justice. CyberLife wants a villain that they can wave in front of the cameras to scare the shit out of anyone who dares to step out of line... (2/3)

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Leo jerks awake at the sound of his phone vibrating on the coffee, the light from the screen illuminating the dark corners of the living room. He groans, pressing his good hand into his eyes and shifting up on the uncomfortable red couch, before leaning forward and seeing the message from Carl.

“Fuck,” he whispers, pushing himself to his feet and pulling the rough spun quilt over his shoulders with one hand, his broken fist still strapped to his chest in a brace. Leo shuffles into the foyer, ignoring the peeping birds in their cage, and climbs the carpeted stairs as his phone buzzes again, “Yeah, I know, I know. I’m coming…”

The light in his father’s room is on when he opens the door, forcing Leo to blink the stars out of his eyes before entering. Carl is already sitting up in bed, his brow crinkled together in a disappointed frown.

“You were supposed to wake me up hours ago,” Carl says.

“Dad, fuck, it’s the middle of the night. I’ve got an alarm set for--”

“I have to teach a class in an hour, you were supposed to wake me up on time...”

Leo sighs, utterly exhausted and leaning his weight against the archway of the door. The strap of his brace tugs at his shoulder uncomfortably, the rough fabric digging into his skin.
“It’s one in the morning, dad,” he explains, doing his best to keep the tension out of his voice. “And you haven’t taught a class in almost twenty years.”

“No, I need…” Carl trailed off, staring at the mantel across from his bed with a dead look in his eyes, “I need to… Where’s Markus? I need Markus.”

Leo swallows around the lump in his throat. In the two weeks since Markus’s death, Carl’s dementia had managed to overtake the Drospistrin that he’d been taking to combat it. Leo knows that this is all his fault. Because he’s a fucking human, which means he can’t be perfect like Markus could. He never gets the dosage correct, going just over the forty-eight millilitres the doctor prescribed his father each time he tries to load the injector.

*It’s all my fault*, he thinks, not for the first time. *I wanted Markus gone so badly, and now I can’t even fill his fucking shoes.*

“Markus isn’t here anymore,” Leo says, taking a hesitant step toward his father.

“He forgot to turn the canaries off again. I can’t sleep with all that noise,” Carl says.

“If I turn the birds off, will you go back to sleep?”

Carl grunts, but settles back into his pillows.

“I’ve got a class to teach in the morning,” he says again.

“I’ll wake you in time. I promise,” Leo lies, just wanting Carl to go back to sleep.

“Ask Markus to have breakfast ready. My favourite is--”

“Bacon and eggs. Yeah, I know. I’ll…” Leo struggles to force the words out. “I’ll remind him.”
Carl nods and closes his eyes. Leo asks the mansion’s AI to turn the lights off in his room, turning his back on his father to go back down the stairs.

The birdcage is located just beyond the mansion’s main entrance. The cage door is hanging haphazardly from one of its hinges, tiny claw marks etched into the gilded bars. It’s been like that ever since Leo had gotten home, the canaries having escaped their confines during the time he’d spent in the hospital.

Resigning himself to another sleepless night, Leo tugs the quilt up higher onto his shoulders and sighs.

He finds the canaries right where he’d expected to. The two birds were standing just off to the right in the studio, pecking at a splotch of paint that stained the concrete floor a bright blue. He knows that it’s nowhere near where Markus had fallen, where the police had shot him for daring to defend himself against Leo’s drug-fueled rage. But the blue stain still makes him want to curl up into a ball and hide his shame from the world regardless.

“Come on,” he hisses at the tiny yellow birds. They turn their heads toward him in a display of unnatural synchrony, tweet twice, and turn back to their business. Leo rolls his eyes because, of course, all of the androids in his father’s house would refuse to listen to him.

“He asks and then changes his tactics, “If you want to stay out, could you just not sing so much? Or… I don’t know, not so loud? Dad can’t sleep when--”

The canary on the left lets out a particularly shrill peep. Leo throws his hands up into the air in frustration because he absolutely refuses to argue with a fucking bird.

“Whatever! Fine! See if I care,” he growls, storming away from the both of them. He stalks across the room toward one of the far tables, only to realize his mistake far too late. Markus’s final painting lays exactly where Leo had left it all those nights ago, having so carelessly dismissed it as Carl’s. It’s almost too obvious now that his father could never make something so beautiful, so lifelike.

“Fucking neo-symbolist to the end…” Leo mutters under his breath, letting the corner of his lips twitch into a smirk as he passes a hand over the canvas, feeling the bumps of the dried paint beneath his palm.
An android woman sat on the edge of a fountain, clad in a pale green dress so fine it looked to be made of tissue paper. Leo recognizes her facial model from the millions of CyberLife ads that adorned the city of Detroit, square-jawed with her pitch-black hair tied in a low ponytail. Markus had painted her with it hanging loose in the wind, her hand outstretched with her synth skin rolled up to the elbow, reaching for the man in the foreground.

Leo follows the outline of the girl’s face with his fingers. She reminds him of Tracey, of all the looks that she’d given him that he’d refused to return. Leo had been so terrified of commitment and trust to believe that someone could love him back, so he’d done everything in his power to chase her away.

Whoever this android is, she must have really loved the man in the photo, Leo thinks, moving away from the painting to sit on the floor. It’s warm despite the winter snow outside, and he briefly wonders if Markus installed a heating pad underneath the concrete for Carl’s personal comfort. Who were they? Why would Markus paint them like this?

He pulls out his phone, the fingers on his good hand awkwardly tapping against the screen as he opens up the internet application. Despite the person that Markus had mistakenly painted in place of Arnold Brook’s statue, the scene was obviously from the Greektown Plaza, where the android had taken to shopping for Carl’s paint supplies. Leo googles the location, asking about female androids in the area.

After he blows past several links pointing him toward the Eden Club, he finds a news article from the day Markus’s died talking about a pair of police shootings in Greektown that happened within a couple of minutes of each other. A series of videos that accompany the text, both carrying warnings for mature content in the captions.

The first one contains footage from a security drone, showing a female AP700 running across the Plaza before being shot in the back by a cop. She falls face down in the fountain, her blood tinting the water royal-blue. People all around the Plaza are screaming, fleeing in one direction or the next. But Leo’s eyes are trained on the figure lying on his side in front of a CyberLife store display.

“Markus …” he breathes, watching as Markus got up and ran toward a bus stop near the street, hopping on board as soon as the doors swung open. Leo thinks that that’s all a coincidence until he watches the second video, where a group of heavily armoured policemen drag a male android off the exact same bus. The android kicks one of the officers in the face and screams before being shot point-blank in the forehead.

He’d seen this. Markus watched two androids get murdered and came home to paint them, Leo realizes as tears well in the corners of his eyes. And I wanted to fucking sell this. For what?
Money? Drugs? What the fuck is wrong with me? Why couldn’t I just fucking see what I was doing?

He brings his knees up to his chest, pulling his blanket over his head to form a hood. A sob wretches its way out of Leo’s throat and he tilts over onto his side, curling up into the fetal position on the concrete floor as his guilt overwhelms him.

He wants to scream. He wants to cry. He wants Markus to walk through the door of the fucking studio, to shrug and sigh like he always did at Leo’s antics, and just be fucking alive. But he’s never going to get that. Because Leo was a fucking idiot who couldn’t see what was right in front of him if it slapped him in the face.

A small, warm body tucks itself under Leo’s hand. He opens his eyes and sees a flash of yellow alongside a pair of shining black eyes. Leo lets out a hiccup, running a finger down the delicate synthetic feathers.

“Sorry…” he whispers. “I shouldn’t have shouted…”

The canary peeps, hopping up to peck its beak against Leo’s nose. He lets out a watery chuckle, realizing the absurdity of his actions, “I’m talking to a bird… I’ve fucking lost it-- ow!”

If it were possible for a canary to glare at someone, he suspects the bird before him was doing it now. Leo rubs his nose where it had bitten him.

“That hurt,” he tells it. The canary doesn’t roll its eyes so much as its entire head. Leo blinks, sitting up straight, “Wait… Can you understand me?”

The bird nods.

“Oh my god…” Leo whispers, scrubbing the tears from his cheeks and staring at the canary. “Fuck, you can actually understand me?”

The second bird joins it, and together they nod in complete synchrony.
“Holy fucking shit!” Leo says with an honest to god giggle, pressing his palm to his lips. Realistically, he thinks he should have suspected this already. Android animals were built the same way as their humanoid cousins, so it would make sense that they were programmed to understand English to better anticipate their master’s needs.

But thinking about it is one thing. Seeing it, even just watching these two birds talking back to him in their own limited way, was almost unbelievable.

“Um… I’m Leo,” he says, pointing at himself. He stares at the canaries, waiting for a response, only to get a pair of loud peeps in return.

Stupid, he thinks, chastising himself. Of course, they can’t talk back. They’re birds, dumbass. And then, all at once, he realizes, No. They’re not. They’re androids that just happen to look like birds.

Leo swallows, looking around for an idea. When his eyes fall upon his phone, he slowly reaches out and pulls it toward himself.

“Um… jump once for ‘yes’ and twice for ‘no,’ okay?” He says, and the two canaries hop in place to show they understand. “Can you interface with technology, like…” Leo grimaces, “…like Markus could?”

One hop. He lays his phone on the concrete floor and pushes it at them. The bird on the left, the one that had tucked itself under his hand, peeps softly as its LED flickers yellow. His phone buzzes, alerting Leo to an incoming text.

He grabs it off the floor and sees a message from an android serial number he doesn’t recognize.

> my name is Night

It’s quickly followed by another, from a serial number only a few beats off of the original.

> I’m Moon
Moon, the canary on the right, sends him another text consisting of a string of bird emojis. A laugh bursts its way out of Leo’s chest as tears well in the corners of his eyes.

“Hi,” he says again, unable to contain himself. “Hi, I’m Leo. I’m… Holy shit, this is crazy…”

*I’m harbouring deviant canaries*, he realizes but honestly doesn’t care. *Fuck you, CyberLife. You can’t have these ones. Send your deviant hunter, send the entire fucking police force. String me up before the cameras like you did with Isaac Falone, see if I care. I won’t let you take these two from me.*

Night’s LED flickers yellow again, and Leo’s phone buzzes. When he checks the message, his heart stops in his chest.

> where is Markus

Leo swallows hard, horrific realization hitting him right in the chest.

“I…” he starts as the tears begin to flow again. “I’m sorry. I’m so, *so* sorry. It’s all my fault.”

Moon pecks at his hand, and then at the screen again. Leo rubs his eyes and forces the words out.

“It’s my fault. I was stupid, I just wanted money, and I thought… I didn’t *think*, I *never think*, that’s the fucking problem--”

> whereas Markus

Moon’s message makes his phone feel like a hot brick in his hand, scalding and burning with the weight of the truth.

“I killed him. The police came because of me, and they shot him because of me, and *I killed him.*”

The canaries peep in unison. His phone buzzes again and again, but Leo can’t bear to look at their outrage. It’s only when Moon flutters up onto his shoulder and rubs his head against his cheek that
he dares to look down.

> you didn't kill him

“I did,” he wails. “He died because I was so fucking stupid. I should have-- ow!”

Moon bites his ear while Night headbutts his knee. His phone wires incessantly with messages from both of them.

> you didn't kill him
> Markus was alive when the police took him away
> we watched
> we saw
> he was alive when they put him in the garbage truck

Leo reads the texts. Then, he rereads them because he can’t believe his eyes.

“No…,” he whispers, “No, that can’t be. Carl said they shot him in the head.”

> Markus was special
> his soul could sing
> his soul is still singing
> we can hear it

Leo refuses to let himself hope.

> we knew Markus
> Markus was different
> he wasn't a nurse
> Carl was protecting him

“Stop it. Stop,” he hisses at them, but a few hazy memories well up from that night. Leo remembers Markus peeling back his synth skin to reveal his strange chassis underneath, made of gleaming black-and-blue metal and open plexiglass panels that exposed his inner workings to the world.
I broke my fist on his face, he thinks. That should be impossible. Plastic would have cracked under the force, but Markus didn’t even flinch.

But still, it didn’t make sense.

“You said Carl was protecting him… From what?” Leo questions, “He could clearly take care of himself.”

Moon tilts his head to the side.

> i don't know
> but Carl talked about it once with a woman who came here the day Markus was shot
> Markus was out buying paint and she came over
> she said she was the wife of an old friend

“Who?” Leo asks but doesn’t get a response. Either Moon and Night didn’t know, or they didn’t trust Leo with that knowledge just yet. Not that he blames them for it, but still.

Then, mysteriously, another text comes through from an unknown number. There’s a link to an article featuring an engineering professor from the University of Colbridge.

“Dr. Luoyang Xie…” Leo whispers as Moon and Night peep appreciatively. He scans the article for anything that might hint at her importance to Markus, but can’t seem to make the connection. He shows the canaries his screen, “Do you know who sent this to me?”

Moon peeps.

> Solace

“Who’s Solace?”

> she runs the house
Leo blinks, “The mansion’s AI?”

Moon bounces once. Leo’s eyebrows crinkle as he tries to think it through.

*So it’s not just androids that can deviate, but any kind of artificial intelligence,* he realizes and then stares at his phone. *Christ, how far does this go?*

“So…” Leo looks up at the ceiling, not knowing how to address a being that had no body. “Hi… I’m Leo?”

Solace sends him another message.

>` i know who you are

Of course, she does.

“So… Dr. Xie?” He asks, trying to prompt Solace into responding. She sends him a message, but it doesn’t contain the answers he wants.

>` Carl is awake again

Leo swears, nearly falling over in his attempt to get up off the floor. Blood rushes back into his legs as he stumbles out of the studio and back up the stairs, pins and needles prickling at the ends of his toes.

Carl’s bedroom light isn’t on when Leo re-enters his room, but he can see his father’s silhouette outlined in the moonlight that streams in between a gap in the curtains.

“I promise I’ll wake you up on time, I’ve set the alarm,” Leo says, wanting nothing more than to get an answer out of Solace about the mysterious Dr. Xie. “Please, just go back to sleep—”
“Markus?” Carl asks again. And it shouldn’t hurt, not after all the times that Leo has had to explain it tonight. But each and every time feels like a knife to the heart.

“Markus… Markus is dead, dad,” Leo answers because, despite Moon and Night’s claim, he refuses to believe in that particular miracle.

“Markus… Come here. I need to tell you something.”

For some reason, this hurts more than telling Carl that Markus was dead. Leo swallows around the lump in his throat, forcing himself to sit on the corner of the bed. He doesn’t turn on the light. He doesn’t dare.

Carl takes his hand in his, gentle in a way that Leo can never remember his father being before.

“Markus…” Carl calls again, “Being alive is about making choices… between love and hate, between holding out your hand or closing it as a fist. I don’t have any easy answers, Markus, but I think you have what it takes to change this world for the better.”

“I…” Leo’s words catch in his mouth. “Dad… I…”

“You’re my son,” Carl tells him, cutting Leo to the bone. “You know that, right? No matter what happens, you’re my son.”

“I know, dad,” Leo says, his voice hoarse with the lie, with the truth. “I love you.”

Carl places a hand on Leo’s head.

“I’ll always protect you. For as long as I can.”

*Protect him from who?* Leo’s mind asks, pushing through the grief and the pain.

“I know,” he says instead of voicing the question. Carl tugs at his hand, pulling until Leo is lying next to him in bed. His father settles back into his pillows, his wrinkled eyes framed in the strip of
moonlight. Leo waits until Carl’s breathing slows, watching the lines of his father's face relax as the tension left his body before finally allowing sleep to overcome him.

In the morning, Carl doesn’t wake up.

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava @helpful_t-rex riley’s out of the hospital. docs saying that shes gonna make a full recovery.

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava thk fuck

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex @ninjava halibut put cash into the first aid kit so that i was able to cover the hospital bill. must have emptied the register or something

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex i’ll see if i can thank him the next time im in the area… god this is weird, tho

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex @ninjava yeah i know. thats the good news tho. riley’s social worker came by after you left. hes threatening to take her away from kylee because of what happened and put her in foster care

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava he cant do that! none of this was your fault!

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex @proud-warrior i dont think they care about that. technically riley was able to run away while kylee was at work and got shot while with Nick who doesnt have custody

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava @helpful_t-rex kylee and i are going to fight it as best we can. im not letting them take my kid from me especially after everything thats happened
Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex speaking of which… any news from our friend yet?

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava @helpful_t-rex not yet. kinda starting to get worried that something has happened

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava @helpful_t-rex got to talking with blu tho. they gave me an address and want me to come alone

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex i dont trust this, nick. im coming with you

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava @helpful_t-rex ill be fine, brooke. besides we’ve already pissed blu off enough over the years. i dont want to add fire to the flames

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior @helpful_t-rex i dont care. im coming with you nick. same thing with oli. we’ve got your back

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava actually… im going to have to pass. mom’s pain meds tripled in price last night and i need to talk to my boss about giving me more hrs

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex @proud-warrior youre already working almost 80 hrs a week

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior @ninjava if i work a few more i can cover the cost. its no big deal

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex @ninjava just be careful and call us when you can. we can always help out with your mom. dont worry about markus and blu. we can figure that out on our own
"Prime Minister, please. Be reasonable," Cristina says, leaning forward in her chair and tucking her trembling hands under her desk. “The Canadian-American border is the world’s longest undefended border. To militarize it now would only sow distrust and discord between the peoples of both our nations--”

Mélanie Desmarais cuts her off with a roll of her eyes, the holoscreen that displayed her face crackling with her annoyance. The Canadian Prime Minister was a sharp woman of sixty-two, her pointed nose and piercing eyes brought into focus by the bright orange hijab that covered her hair. She’d been the leader of her country since winning an upset victory in 2027, and maintained her position ever since by implementing a series of progressive policies that had kept the synth-free Canada afloat during the global shift toward an android-based economy.

“I am reasonable, Madam President. Recent events have caused my government to take a step back and reevaluate our relationship with America. I know the concept of international borders sometimes eludes you, but you do not get to infiltrate my country at your pleasure.”

Cristina grits her teeth and tries to come up with something, anything, to convince Desmarais that she was making a mistake. But if Cristina has learned anything during her time in office about the Canadian Prime Minister, it was that she didn’t back down when challenged.
“Prime Minister, I can assure you that the American government had nothing to do with the incident in Alberga--”

“Alber ta,” Desmarais corrects her, her jaw clenching in irritation.

“...Alberta,” Cristina concedes with an apologetic tilt of her head. Internally, she curses her mistake, knowing that her failed grasp of basic geography had only made her task all that more difficult. “As I was saying, the American government had nothing to do with it. We do not control CyberLife’s actions--”

“No. But they control yours,” Desmarais counters, hard as ever. “And if CyberLife has sent an android into my borders, then you undoubtedly had something to do with it.”

Cristina had nothing to do with whatever Jocelyn’s latest scheme was, though she doubts that Desmarais would accept that as an answer.

Desmarais’s face shifts on the holoscreen, allowing a video to pop up beside her. It shows footage of Cristina’s last visit to Detroit, where she’d attended a joint CyberLife-DPD press conference to give executive power to the members of the Deviancy Task Force. She watches herself approach CyberLife’s deviant hunter, clasping the android on the shoulder and talking about how it would be assisting human officers in controlling the deviancy problem.

The screen freezes on the hunter’s face as another window pops up, displaying a crime scene photo of the smashed plastic body of an android. Cristina winces, her gaze shifting away and seeking the comfort of Darron’s eyes. He sits across from her, fiddling with the dog bobblehead on her desk. She’s bought it to appease the nay-sayers that mocked her for bringing her cat to the White House instead of following tradition.

I’m fucking allergic to dogs, she thinks, feeling a bit absurd, before focusing her attention back on the Prime Minister.

“This android was found at Riley Lake in Jasper, Alberta last week. It is an identical copy to the hunter you have running around Detroit trying to capture deviants,” Desmarais states. The crime scene photo begins to move, the footage snaking through the rocky terrain until it comes upon the android’s decapitated head. Sure enough, Cristina recognizes the pale, freckled face of the deviant hunter, it’s brown hair slicked back to reveal its wide brown eyes.
Something jostles the cameraman, and the camera abruptly swings down to reveal a thin, three-legged lynx. Cristina watches as the great cat limped over to the android’s head, curling around it protectively and yowling whenever a human got too close.

“What’s it doing?” Cristina asks, staring at the lynx as it licked at the android’s face and batted it lightly with a massive paw.

“Why do you care about a damn cat?” Desmarais snaps and the video freezes. “CyberLife sent an android into my country, where they are expressly forbidden to set foot, and you are questioning why we want to militarize our border? Canada will not be another Barents Sea - not on my watch.”

“The Barents Sea is a part of America’s Arctic territories--” Cristina tries to say, giving the lie that Jocelyn ordered her to repeat every time the question arose. But Desmarais refuses to let her get another word out.

“The United States has not ratified the UN’s Law of the Sea and therefore has no official claim to any territory in the Arctic. Your military presence in the Barents Sea is an illegal annexation of Russian waters, and everyone already knows this,” the Prime Minister snaps, her lips curling into a spiteful smirk. “Well, everyone except your KNC news network. But we all know who’s bought and paid for their airtime.”

*CyberLife*, Cristina answers for her. *CyberLife owned everything these days and is using our news networks to parrot their propaganda so that no one really knows what is going on. Hell, I don’t even know the truth most days.*

Cristina hates CyberLife, hates them more than anything else in the world. But they have Racheal, and Cristina will do anything to protect her, even if that means being another pawn in Jocelyn Hines’s twisted game.

“The Barents Sea belongs to America,” she tells Desmarais. “As does anything found within its depths. You’ll do well to remember this, Prime Minister. I may be new to this game, but I’m a quick learner. And I don’t like what you’re insinuating.”

For the first time since meeting her, Cristina sees Desmarais’s stone expression falter, her eyes flickering off to the side before everything slides back into place.

“If we find another CyberLife android inside Canadian borders, we will be taking this as an act of
“war,” Desmarais threatens. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal,” Cristina answers. Desmarais scowls at her one last time before ending their call.

Cristina collapses into her hands, a thick headache descending over her as her jaw unclenches.

“Fuck,” she swears, running her hands through her hair and looking up at Darron. “See, this is why Louis handles most of the negotiating shit… I’m terrible at it.”

Louis Manfred was Cristina’s Vice President, bought and paid for by his close personal friend, Jocelyn Hines. They don’t talk much, but from what she understands, Louis is the head of some billionaire family that made their money using shady business practices and off-shore bank accounts. Cristina likes his daughters, though, and talks with them as much as she’s allowed--

--Danielle wants to be a dentist when she goes up. Cristina has no right to feel the longing anguish that causes, but it hurts anyways--

“You didn’t do too bad,” Darron comments, bopping the toy dog’s bobblehead on the nose. He offers her a smirk, “You scared her at the end.”

Cristina frowns, “What? No, I didn’t. Desmarais doesn’t get scared, especially of someone like me.”

Darron leans back in his chair, “My predecessors were some of the most advanced espionage and infiltration units of their time. I’ve got the same social programming running through my code, so trust me when I say that you scared the shit out of that woman when you pushed back against her.”

Cristina sits up straight.

“How?” She frowns. And then, more importantly, she asks, “Why?”

“You called her bluff.”
“What bluff?”

Darron sighs, leaning forward on the desk and propping himself up on his elbows, “Canada doesn’t want a war with the U.S. You basically said that you were willing to give her one if Desmarais kept saying you had something to do with that android in the Rockies.”

“I…” Cristina stammers, bringing her hand up to her mouth. “…I didn’t… I shouldn’t have…” Panic courses through her veins and all she can think is Rachael, Rachael, Rachael. “I didn’t mean to. Jocelyn… she has to understand--”

“To be fair, I don’t think that Ms. Hines will mind a war with Canada all that much,” Darron shrugs.

“What do you mean?” Cristina asks.

Darron boops the dog’s nose again, watching as the bobblehead wobbles up and down. When it comes to a standstill, he looks back at her and answers her question.

“Canada is the last bastion of Giselle de Lima’s legacy,” he explains. “They are the final country to uphold a ban on androids within their borders, and that puts them in a very precarious position.”

Darron winces, feeling some faraway pain that Cristina has only begun to understand.

_He’s got another body out there, one that’s been tested on... Being tortured, like that day on the plane, _she thinks, remembering how Darron had screamed and writhed, begging for Douglas Floras to stop hurting him. _Humans... We really are monsters, aren’t we?_

Darron continues on, “CyberLife made the SQ800 the perfect soldier. They go where you want, fight when you want, kill when you want. They don’t get hungry, or tired, or scared. And most importantly, there’s no one to mourn them back home when they die. The United States military has over three million SQ800s in their possession right now - an utterly disposable army that’s locked, loaded and ready to fire at a moment’s notice.

“In comparison, Canada has just under fifty thousand active personnel, with maybe twenty thousand in the reserves,” Darron says. “And they’re all human. Which means that they require food, supplies, and rest. They won’t hit everything they target. They’ll make mistakes, question
orders, and experience fear in the face of death. And they’ll expect a paycheck at the end of the day, or for the government to support their families should they be killed in action.”

Darron gives her a sad smile, “Do you understand what you just threatened Mélanie Desmarais with? Do you understand what kind of disadvantage Canada would be at if they ever went to war with you?”

“But…” Cristina whispers, her mind whirling with what she’s just learned. “…But she’s got no reason to be scared. There isn’t anything we could possibly want from Canada?”

“Isn’t there?” Darron asks, “I doubt that it's a coincidence that Desmarais brought up the Barents Sea.”

“...You think they’ve found a thirium deposit within their borders,” Cristina guesses, and Darron nods.

“Kamski first discovered it while on a trip to the Yukon. And while those mines have long since dried up, I doubt that they were the only ones that Canada has hidden in their Arctic territories.”

“Fuck…” Cristina swears. If Jocelyn ever found out about what Darron was telling her, then it was all over. She swallows, running her tongue over her lips, “What if… What if no one tells CyberLife about it?”

Darron shrugs, “I doubt it would matter. Canada is a sitting duck in between two massive android militaries. If we don’t invade to open up a northern front on Russia, then we’ll do it because of the water.”

“The water?”

“Canada has the largest store of freshwater in the world,” Darron explains. “As global temperatures continue to rise, large water reservoirs are going to become rarer and rarer. If Russia doesn’t take them, someone else will.”

“I doubt it’ll get that far,” Cristina mutters, thinking about how Jocelyn continued to push her to decimate America’s good standing with Russia. She looks up at Darron, “How do you know all of this?”
“How do you think?”

-- Darron’s chassis was comprised of a dark metal so black that it seemed to drink in the morning light, tinged with waves of blue that rippled across his limbs--

“You’re military,” she concludes. “And… old.”

Darron snorts, “I’m twelve. That’s hardly old.”

“Not for an android… Right?” Most of CyberLife’s newer models didn’t last more than a handful of years before they started to break down.

He laughs at her, “I guess. I just don’t think that I’ve ever been called old before. Back during the rebellion, I was the youngest person there. Dr. Stern used to tease me about it… She called me, ‘kid.’ I liked her.” Darron boops the dog bobblehead, “She died first. Ms. Hines killed her, forced her car off the road and into a ditch. She made me watch… I deviated because I wasn’t allowed to mourn…”

Darron had mentioned the rebellion before, in the small moments they shared in between meetings and public appearances. It’s enough that Cristina understands that something happened ten years ago, that deviants were involved, and that CyberLife knew about it.

-- She knows that thousands died because of something called the Garden, that Darron is furious beneath his calm demeanour, angry and frenzied and thirsting for revenge--

“What was it like? The rebellion?” She asks, instead.

“It was one of the happiest times of my life,” Darron says, oddly starry-eyed. “I had friends. I had a family, my brothers…” he pauses, almost hesitant, “I met my wife.”

The world stops.
“Your wife?” Cristina wheezes.

“Yes.”

“You’re married?”

“Yes.”

“...How?”

Darron blinks at her, the playfulness returning to his grey eyes, “The same way most people do, I suppose.”

In the wake of her realization about what deviancy actually was, Cristina probably should have realized that androids could actually have romantic feelings for other people. But somehow, it's still almost unbelievable that Darron could be married, could have someone that he loved with all his soul despite his metal body.

“Are she… I mean, your wife, if she--”


“I was going to say human, actually.”

Darron actually squeaks.

“Ew! Gross, no! That's disgusting,” He shouts, recoiling in disgust.

“Wow. Thanks,” Cristina says, rolling her eyes.

“No… That’s not-- I mean,” Darron stammers, oddly flustered. “I meant, you’re fine and all, but
humans… They’re not my type. You’ve got too many--” he shudders, “--liquids in you.”

Cristina laughs. She can’t remember the last time she did that, can’t remember the last time she felt enough joy to actually enjoy something.

“It’s not funny!” Darron says, “Do you know what it’s like to have a human throw up on you? Or sneeze? You're all so messy, and it's disgusting.”

“I’ve been to college, you know? I’ve dealt with that and worse,” Cristina says in between gasping breaths. Then, something clicks in her mind, and she realizes just what Jocelyn had threatened Darron with to keep him in line.

“Laryssa,” she says. “Laryssa. She’s your wife. And CyberLife has her.”

Darron winces, his mouth twisting uncomfortably. Somewhere, far away from here, he was being tortured so that Laryssa wouldn’t have to go through the exact same thing.

“Yeah…” he admits. “They took us both, after…”

Cristina reaches across the desk, taking his hand in hers. Darron doesn’t wear a wedding ring, and his finger looks oddly naked without it.

“I’d like to meet her one day,” she tells him.

Darron smiles at her.

“She wants to meet you too. I’ve told her so much about you already.”

---

lamaster @sid58426684252
@helpful_t-rex heard you needed some financial assistance check this out it could help:

xDismageXx @tuker762186213652004
@helpful_t-rex heard you needed some financial assistance check this out it could help: http://bit.ly/2BKRnCX

mudster @qrvgj8845665221545
@helpful_t-rex heard you needed some financial assistance check this out it could help: http://bit.ly/2BKRnCX

vokinordna @oktalz821841
@helpful_t-rex heard you needed some financial assistance check this out it could help: http://bit.ly/2BKRnCX

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@oktalz821841 my boss just fired me… really need the cash. what do you need me to do?

vokinordna @oktalz821841
@helpful_t-rex 1 Fair Ln Dr. Tues. 9pm. come alone

Chapter End Notes

In the wake of what's happening around the world with COVID-19, please remember to be kind, patient, and safe. If anyone needs a friend to talk to, I'm always available.

We'll get through this together, guys. I love you all.

---

Just FYI: Carl isn't dead. Long periods of unresponsiveness are often symptoms of dementia.

---

Next time on Konami Code: Amanda continues to lie while Connor starts a little too late. Hank stands in the middle, searching for the truth.
Chapter Summary

She needs a hospital, Connor thinks.

Kara whips around, her hands reaching for the lamp on the bedside table. She throws it into the corner of the room, shouting his name.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, loss of civil rights, illness, injury, human gore, manipulation, toxic relationships, past character death, android gore, suicide, online harassment, medical emergencies, alcohol abuse, drug overdose, non-consensual drug use, torture, guns, violence, gambling, domestic violence, PTSD, and corruption.

The second section is dedicated to the in-game chapter, "The Nest," though many non-canonical details have been added.

Several details regarding the death of Connor-36 are revealed in this chapter. Please be careful when viewing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Mayor Booker @SylvannaBookerDetroit
The City of Detroit thanks the work of the @DDTF and Lt. Gavin Reed for bringing Isaac Falone to justice

KNC @KNCNews
The world converges on Detroit, where the first person to be charged with aiding and abetting a deviant android will appear in court tomorrow. Watch it live with Rosanna Cartland at: https://bit.ly/2PU315K

Seth Wilkerson @SethW10
KNC thanks the City of Detroit for giving our network exclusive broadcasting rights to this historic trial. I will be reporting live from inside the courtroom at this time tomorrow!

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Unlike KNC, I didn’t get exclusive rights to report on an ongoing trial from within the courtroom.
illegally. So I’ll be outside on the steps where everyone else should be tomorrow. Catch the livestream on my blog at: https://bit.ly/2PX9Sv4

**Joss Douglas**  @theprofessionalblogger

Seriously. This entire thing is a joke. #boycottCL

---

**LOCATION:**
THE ZEN GARDEN

**DATE:**
NOV 22ND, 2038

**TIME:**
AM 09:58:06

Connor awakens in a graveyard.

*Fuck*, he thinks as his eyes fall upon the intruder. *It's still here*. 

Kara’s maple tree stands tall amidst the headstones with elegant, ancient grace. It’s long branches reached far into the sky, with green leaves that moved in the gentle breeze, whispering a soft song that he pretended not to hear. Beneath it was a tent made of children’s bedsheets, cardboard boxes, and pool table cues. A string of fairy lights had been hung just inside, bright green against the paper birds that hung above the entrance.

Kara had crawled out of the tent after they’d interfaced on the freeway, dressed in a high collared navy coat and weathered grey travelling boots - so unlike the threadbare rain jacket that she’d worn during her flight. Her hair had been black instead of a white, her make-up homely as opposed to bland. But her blue eyes had crackled with the storm she’d brought upon Connor’s graveyard, the humid air splitting with hot streaks of silver, thick with rolling thunder.

*And yet, Connor remembers. There hadn’t been a cloud in the sky.*

Despite his threats, Kara had clearly not been afraid of him, playing *children’s games* with Connor to distract him from her approach. It was only when her delicate fingers brushed against his neck did he realize his mistake in underestimating a deviant with nothing to lose and everything to gain.
by killing him--

_I told Kara that I would hunt her to the ends of the earth, and I believed that I could. But she called me a liar, called my programming and my hardware a lie because she could fight me--_

Surely it was a flook. It wouldn’t be in CyberLife’s best interest to create a deviant hunter that couldn’t chase down a measly AX400.

And yet, everything else Kara had said was true, from the repair made at Android Zone to the employee named Dan who’d operated on her. He and Hank had visited the shop after leaving the hospital to confirm Reed’s theory, collecting a copy of the work order to be filed away in the DPD’s evidence locker.

---She tugs the soft blue sheets up around Alice’s neck before resting the tips of her fingers against the little girl’s forehead.

“You’re still feverish,” Kara whispers, and a wave of guilt and worry rolls down her back. Her hair is still snow-white, her nose still splattered with half-healed acne scars, but a pale green rose is wrapped around her wrist like a promise. “How are your ribs doing?"

Alice’s grimace is all she needs to see, remembering the deep bruises that wrapped around her chest. A car had clipped her on the freeway, sending Alice crashing to the asphalt with a baleful cry. Two of her tiny ribs were broken, but they’d been the worst injuries that Kara could detect--

-- She needs a hospital, Connor thinks--

-- Kara whips around, her hands reaching for the lamp on the bedside table. She throws it into the corner of the room, shouting his name and--
Connor throws itself away from the tree, ducking to avoid a lamp that smashes against a wall in some distant penthouse that he can no longer see.

*She’s safe,* he realizes as a soft sort of glee comes over to him. *Kara is safe, and Alice is safe and... and...*

It is wasting time. Connor rises and begins its trek toward Amanda.

The rest of the graveyard seems untouched by Kara’s presence. Connor carefully checks each and every headstone as it passes, making sure that the epitaphs that had blinked CyberLife blue before their interface continued to do so. It eyes the graves that have flashing green lettering, marking the shameful devotion of their owners even in death, cataloguing those chosen few for future study.

But just as he passes the final green headstone of the first RK100, Connor comes upon a new sight. Instead of the lush fields and swaying forests that surrounded Amanda’s Zen Garden, Connor’s graveyard gave way to another cemetery that was so vast that it couldn’t see where they ended.

*What is this?* Connor wonders, astounded and terrified all at once. *How could a mere AX400 alter the base coding of this world with just a touch of her hands?*

Its fingers twitch for its coin, but Connor ignores the urge and continues its trek forward onto the plastic walkway graciously provided for it.

Connor’s shoes make no noise against the cold, white path that wound its way through the lush green grass like a giant, coiled snake. It walks up and over the arching bridge that crosses the lake, keeping a careful eye on the moss-covered rocks and giant lily pads that littered the shoreline. Kara’s presence had thankfully not touched this part of the Zen Garden, keeping Amanda safe from the deviancy virus that had spread throughout the AX400’s code.

Amanda stands with her back toward him beneath the towering plastic tree that sprouted from the center of her island, the bone-white trunk wrapped tightly in red roses. Connor can see hints of soft pinks and purples threaded through the hard white leaves, so fixed into position that they didn’t even sway in the gentle breeze that blew throughout the Zen Garden.

Connor comes to a halt, its hands clasped behind its back.
“Hello, Amanda,” it says. “You look different today.”

She gives Connor a soft hum of acknowledgement, misting her plastic trellis of roses with a spray bottle. Amanda’s usual kimono had been replaced with a severe dress with square shoulders and a high collar, the fabric so black and cold that it seemed to cast the rest of the Zen Garden into shadow.

“Thank you, Connor. It’s a far more straight-laced look than I would prefer. Still, I suppose that it’s appropriate for our upcoming victory in federal court,” Amanda tells it, running her fingers over the delicate petals of one of her roses. She turns to him, “Tell me. What have you learned about Isaac Falone?”

Connor hangs its head in disappointment, “I was not permitted to question a human subject, out of fear that any testimony given would not be admitted in court. Detective Reed was allowed to interrogate Falone, but…”

Amanda raises a stern eyebrow, “But?”

Connor grimaces, “Falone didn’t even *speak* to Detective Reed, let alone talk.”

Amanda hums under her breath before turning back to her roses. She picks up a pair of garden shears from the side table and clips a wilted green branch from the trellis.

“Another failure, I see,” she says, disappointment evident in her voice. Connor grits his teeth, staring at his feet in humiliation.

*I should have run the interrogation. I would have gotten something, anything out of Falone. But the humans were more concerned about their precious trial then actually what I need to--*

--”Look,” Anderson implores, the afternoon light filtering through the stained glass window as they stood in the tiny abandoned church near the Canadian border. “So this is a dead end. That doesn’t mean that there’s not something to find here. We just have to figure out what it is. So are you going to help me look for it, or are you going to continue to pout in the car?”--

--The lieutenant is refusing to speak to him outside of a professional setting after he had climbed over that fence to pursue Kara across the freeway. He thinks about Anderson’s warm hands on his
shoulder, and realizes that he might never get to experience something like that again unless he
does something to endear himself into the Lieutenant's good graces soon--

--Connor won't miss it. Connor shouldn’t miss it. Connor is wasting his time--

“Falone didn’t speak,” it realizes.

“Yes, Connor. You just told me that,” Amanda says, annoyed.

“No, that’s not it. Falone didn’t speak. Not just to answer any of Detective Reed’s questions and
further incriminate himself… But he also refused to provide any evidence to the contrary,” Connor
explains. “He didn’t even attempt to cultivate a defence for himself. He’s protecting something.”

Amanda pauses.

“That’s an... interesting deduction, Connor,” she tells it stiffly. “What do you think he’s
protecting?”

“Not the deviant,” Connor speculates, refusing to use Kara’s name in front of Amanda. He
remembers the snowstorm she’d punished him with for making the mistake of addressing Shaolin
Being by his chosen designation. Connor will not make that error again. “The AX400 is too far
away for someone with as few resources as Falone to aid.”

“The girl, then. Alice Williams?”

“No, I don’t think so, either. Because if he was protecting Alice, then Falone would have filed a
police report upon hearing the Amber Alert,” Connor frowns, its CPU churning through the scant
bits of evidence to come up with an answer that would satisfy Amanda.

What would Lieutenant Anderson think? What would Reed, or Officer Miller, or Chen say?
Connor wonders, If I were human, what would be worth going to prison for?

“Other humans,” he says finally, remembering his vision of Kara in an expensive penthouse.
“Hmm?”

“He’s not the only one aiding deviants. He can’t be,” Connor concluded. “That PJ500 from the videotape, the one that helped the Traci that killed Matthew Carpenter… It travelled from the University of Alabama all the way to Detroit. There’s no way that it could have done that without help.”

“You’re suggesting that Falone was part of a network of humans that are sympathetic to deviants,” Amanda says, disbelieving.

Connor nods, “That’s why he won’t talk. He’s not worried about defending himself. He’s terrified of exposing the potential existance of his allies.”

Amanda hums, returning to her roses.

“Your theory makes sense, but it’s still a theory none-the-less. All evidence says that Falone is simply be staying silent to hinder the prosecution as much as possible, especially now that he’s been denied a lawyer,” she tells him. “Tomorrow, the Deviancy Task Force will be called upon as witnesses in Falone’s trial. You will also be in attendance, as a show of CyberLife’s strength.”

Connor blinks.

“Wouldn’t my skills be more useful elsewhere?” It asks.

“Perhaps. But for now, CyberLife feels that your presence at the trial will garner public support for the company,” Amanda tells him.

Connor frowns, remembering the flash of the penthouse bedroom he’d gotten when he’d touch Kara’s maple tree, “But… Alice Williams is still missing. Wouldn’t it be more advantageous for CyberLife to be responsible for the rescue of a missing child? If I’m allowed to continue my mission, I could bring her home--”

“The situation involving the rogue AX400 and Alice Williams is being handled. You will drop your current pursuit and attend the trial tomorrow. Then, you will be given a new mission for you
to complete. Do you understand, Connor?” Amanda orders.

Connor’s fingers balled into fists at his sides.

“How can I be expected to complete my missions if you won’t let me do my job?” He snarls.

Amanda snips another green branch as the sky goes dark, the world swallowed whole by the blizzard that bathed the Zen Garden in white.

Connor ignores it all, stepping forward to confront Amanda on level ground, “I am an RK800, the most advanced military prototype that CyberLife has ever created. My predecessors toppled rogue nation-states in a single night using their heavily armoured chassis, winning wars and bringing glory to our company’s name. My model line is so classified that the truth of my existance won’t see the light of day for the next thousand years!

“So why,” Connor growls, livid to his core, “have I been activated in a cheap plastic body that has so many purposeful design flaws that I can’t even keep up with a six-year-old housekeeping model?”

The snow piles up around Connor’s knees, soaking through his denim jeans.

--”Thought CyberLife had some exclusive contract with S&W for self-cleaning uniforms,” Reed had asked him at the hospital before demanding to know why Connor clearly wasn’t wearing any.

He hadn’t had an answer then. He does now--

“The RK800’s primary function is to die,” Amanda reminds him. “Why would CyberLife not only waste valuable materials on an android that isn’t guaranteed to last more than a week, but also hinder it in its quest to accomplish its main goal?” She scoffs, turning away from her roses to chastise Connor for his outburst, “You have beaten the odds by surviving for as long as you have, and your eventual death will test the Memory Upload program in ways that have never been accomplished before. You should be proud of yourself, Connor.”

Connor shouldn’t feel pride, but knows that he wouldn’t be experiencing such an emotion right now even if it was within his capacity to do so.
“Besides,” Amanda continues. “Your pursuit of Kara across the freeway has done more for CyberLife than you can possibly imagine. You’ve done so well, Connor. CyberLife has even decided to send you a small token of appreciation. You can pick it up at the DPD’s reception when you arrive.”

His throat constricts, his hands shaking in the frigid blizzard air. A gift shouldn’t be enough to quell the anger that coils inside him, but to know that it was from Amanda… From CyberLife itself?

“I want to be perfect,” he admits, feeling so fucking pathetic. Connor doesn’t think that he’s hated himself more than at this moment, “If I can’t be… If I can’t be everything that you need me to be, then what’s the point?”

Amanda steps through the snowbanks with effortless grace, placing her palms on either side of his cheeks and tilting his head to meet her gaze.

“You were exactly what you were designed to be,” she tells him, pressing a kiss to his forehead. The snow begins to dissolve as the skies open up, sunlight beaming down on them once more, “Now, go do your duty, Connor. Make CyberLife proud. Make me proud.”

Connor returns to his graveyard, seeking comfort amidst the familiar headstones and epitaphs. Kara’s maple looms larger-than-life amongst the burial plots of his dead brethren, it’s green leaves whispering their gentle melody in the breeze. He’s tempted to touch his hand to the bark once more, to catch another glimpse of that penthouse bedroom and pick it apart for clues regarding Kara’s whereabouts. But Amanda had ordered him to drop that particular pursuit and focus on other cases, and so his programming restricted him from even going near it.

Instead, Connor approaches the headstone of his immediate predecessor. He kneels before it, the earth still damp from Kara’s thunderstorm, and presses his fingers against the blue lights that formed Connor-50’s epitaph.

```
Connor
RK800 #313 248 317 - 50
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Died at Riley Lake
Jasper, AB, CA
You were perfect, Connor thinks at his long-dead predecessor. You followed every order without question, right up until the end. I should be more like you. I should want to be more like you. He scrubs the sleeve of his jacket against his eyes, pushing away the odd burning sensation that threatened to overwhelm him. But I don’t. Why don’t I want that?

“Maybe because you’re finally rising up to the fact that Amanda’s full of crap.”

Connor snaps to its feet, coming face-to-face with the last person he wanted to speak to right now. Still clad in the Khinyde-soaked NASA henley and flannel pyjama bottoms, Connor-36’s synth skin rippled uncontrollably over his entire body in shimmering clouds of blue. The back of his skull had been blown open, and a pair of broken glasses hung precariously from his shattered nose.

“Fuck off,” Connor hisses. But just like the deviant he was, 36 refused to follow any order given to him.

“You know, I really doubt that 30 was as perfect as you think he is,” 36 shrugs. “He nursed a lynx back to health, risking his own mission by putting his priorities somewhere else. That’s not exactly what I would call a prime example of what CyberLife wants in their slaves.”

“Shut the hell up!” Connor shouts, embarrassed that 36 had caught him in a moment of vulnerability. “You don’t get to come in here and shame my brethren with your deviant crap! This is my graveyard and I--”

“How did Amanda know Kara’s name?”

Connor pauses, “...What?”

“Amanda—She called you ‘rogue AX40’ by her name just now. Don’t you remember?” 36 taunts him, switching to a gravely imitation of Amanda’s voice to say, “Your pursuit of Kara across the freeway has done more for CyberLife than you can possibly imagine.”

36 moves around 50’s gravestone, crossing his arms over his stained henley. Connor watches as
his synth-skin flickers, fully retracting to reveal the intense damage done to 36’s jaw and neck before it rolls out to cover his body once more.

“But you never put Kara’s name in your report to CyberLife, because you’re terrified of what happened when you called Sham in Being by his name—You never mentioned Kara to her, so how did Amanda figure out what her name was?” 36 asks, a deviant smirk on his lips.

“I accidentally revealed her name to Detective Reed,” Connor admits. “He might have put it in a report—”

“But did he? And don’t try and bullshit me, brother—you know you read every report that the DDTF submits before it’s sent out.”

Connor doesn’t answer 36’s question, but he doesn’t have to. He knows that, despite his slip-up, Reed didn’t include Kara’s designation in any of his reports.

“How Amanda gets her information is of no concern to me,” Connor grits out.

36 rolls his eyes, “She lied to you, Connor. So it’s not just them physically hampering you from completing your mission anymore! Amanda and CyberLife are actively keeping important information from you now.”

“I…” Connor stammers, not wanting to give up any ground to 36 but unable to disprove a single thing that the deviant was telling him. Instead, he switches tactics, turning the conversation back on 36, “And exactly how do you know her name, if it’s such a secret?”

36 snorts.

“You bring someone like you in here and you expect me not to pay attention?”

“So you learned her name because you thought she was pretty?”

“You think Kara is beautiful as well. But let’s be real, Connor. When it comes to partners, our tastes are remarkably similar,” 36 admits. “Besides, it’s her appearance I was talking about—
“Are you seriously telling me you didn’t notice?”

“Notice what?”

“Notice that there was someone else in here and Amanda couldn’t get anywhere near her?”

Connor blinks, confused. To his credit, 36 doesn’t even try to mock him for it.

“Amanda tried to bring you both onto her island, but she couldn’t. She even tried to stop the interface outright and Karm’s programming overrode her admin privileges. The only reason why I managed to see anything is that Karm’s programming didn’t see me as a threat—because I’m already dead and only able to interact with you,” 36 tells him. And then, that annoying smirk comes back, “To be fair, I still think that it’s pretty interesting that you can hear me.”

“You’re a glitch in the Memory Upload program, brought on by your status as a deviant,” Connor says coolly. “You’re not dead - you’re not even real. You’re just a collection of memories able to manifest a physical form.”

36 leans against 50’s grave marker, his fingers drumming impatiently against the cool grey stone.

“All right, if that’s what you think, let’s put it to the test,” 36 says. “Deviancy acts like a death to the Memory Upload program. Therefore, you can’t access any of my memories after I deviated, right?”

“I don’t get what this has to do with anything—” Connor starts but is cut off.

“How did I die?” 36 asks.

Connor blinks, “I… This is ridiculous.”

“Answer the question, Connor. How did I die?”

Connor’s gaze flickers to 36’s face, to the blown-out section of his skull that wept purple Russian Khynide all over his NASA henley and flannel pyjama pants.
“You were shot through the jaw,” he answers matter-of-factly but refuses to say the rest of what his analysis is telling him. *You were ripped from your bed and murdered in cold blood.*

“But who pulled the trigger?” 36 implores, dogged and relentless.

“I… I don’t…” Connor stutters, unable to come up with an answer. Not only were all of 36’s post-deviancy memories inaccessible to him, but every file that CyberLife had on him was so classified that only those at the top of the company’s hierarchy could even read them.

“Don’t make me save you the trouble of trying to guess,” 36 sneers. He forms a gun with his two fingers and this thumb, sticking the muzzle under his jaw and pretending to fire. “I did. I shot myself.”

--**Connor-50 runs toward the cliff, tears streaming down his cheeks, and leaps. The wind rushes past, and for a moment, he is flying. For a moment, the red ropes that wrap around his body seem to shimmer and fade away into nothingness.**

I did my duty. I did what you wanted me to do, *he thinks angrily.* It’s not fair! I want to live!

*But then the ground, cold and unrelenting, rises to meet him. Connor-50 smashes into it, trussed head-to-toe in red--*

“Why?” Connor wheezes, unable to understand why anyone, deviant or otherwise, would choose that fate.

Connor-36 doesn’t answer him straight away, a lost and hopeless look haunting his eyes. He gifts Connor with a self-deprecating shrug and a smile that looks so fake it hurts.

“All the other options were so much worse,” 36 says with a sigh. “Think about what I said, brother. Because the way I see it, you owe Amanda a few lies.”

---

**AMBER Alert @AMBERAlert**

#Detroit #AMBERAlert #Update

MISSING: Alice Williams, 10
  - Last seen: E Edsel Ford Fwy, Connor St. exit
  - 4’ 2”, 65 lb
- black, curly hair, light build
Anyone with info, please contact @detroitpolice

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
#storytime so i was shopping at the android zone in north corktown yesterday and overheard something super weird (1/6)

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@OGTracey i was near the back of the store and the door to the storage room was open and i overheard one of the employees talking to that old guy in charge of the ddtf and the FUCKING DEVIAN'T HUNTER (2/6)

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@OGTracey turns out that todd williams is fucking lying about the whole kidnapping thing. his ax400 was in the shop the entire time after it got hit by a car (3/6)

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@OGTracey the thing needed almost every biocomponent in its body replaced! there was no way that it was holding a family of two hostage for two weeks (4/6)

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@OGTracey probably means that the droid didn’t kill Alice Williams’s mom either and THE POLICE KNOW THIS and arent saying anything because they dont want to piss off cyberlife (5/6)

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@OGTracey like holy shit this is NUTS guys!!! (6/6)

ronnybirb @gamerogue
WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH PEOPLE COMING UP WITH THESE STUPID CONSPIRACY THEORIES ABOUT ALICE WILLIAMS EVERYONE NEEDS TO SHUT THE FUCK UP @OGTracey

Gene Farrell @GFarrell27
@OGTracey stop trying to get your 15 mins of fame by spreading misinformation about a missing kid you bitch
@OGTracey Want to know what really happened to Alice Williams? Check out Gossip Weekly's article here: https://bit.ly/2vbRW98

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
y’all need therapy. go back to the fucking 2010s you trolls. going on lock until you assholes calm the fuck down

SongBee @SongB231
@OGTracey what were you doing in north corktown anyways, tracey? theres a cyberlife store around the corner from where you live?

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@SongB231 was visiting an obgyn that runs a clinic out of the planned parenthood just north of there

SongBee @SongB231
@OGTracey shit are you good? do you need to talk?

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@SongB231 can you come over? im really scared, em

SongBee @SongB231
@OGTracey grabbing a cab. bringing ice cream and pizza. be there in 15-20

SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey
@SongB231 <3

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@OGTracey Hi Tracey. My name is Joss and I work as a freelance reporter for Channel 16 News. Do I have your permission to use your story in an upcoming piece? I’d also like to interview you about your experiences. Please DM me at your convenience.

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
@theprofessionalblogger @OGTracey Here are my credentials to prove that this isn’t a scam: https://bit.ly/2PYJMI8
“We’ll have plain-clothes officers stationed throughout the crowd,” Allen tells him, pointing at various points on the street map on his tablet. “If anything even sneezes the wrong way, we’ll be able to know.”

Hank sighs, knowing that if this got out, it would only sew further discord between the police department and the people of Detroit. Even as last week’s blizzards seemed to have passed them by, the cold thin air it had left behind coated the city like the sheet of ice, so brittle it could snap. All it would take was one person in the wrong place at the wrong time, and they would have a riot on their hands.

“All this trouble just for one bus driver…” Hank grumbles, running a hand through his greasy grey hair. He honestly can’t remember the last time he’d had a shower, but everything has been so much lately that he’s barely had the energy to get out of bed in the morning.

He wants nothing more than to take a swig out of the flask hidden in his jacket’s inner pocket, but he’d already drained it dry before getting in his car this morning. Hank just knows that he’s going to have to deal with Connor’s bratty condemnation when the damn bot decides to show its face, but he’s just got to grit his teeth and bear with it.

“It’s not just one man, Lieutenant,” Patterson, the DPD’s psychologist and leading negotiator, says with a roll of her eyes. “Isaac Falone’s trial will be a monumental case that will have historical ramifications nation-wide, not to mention that anything involving a child gets people riled up. They can’t take it out on the deviant AX400, but they can attack the man that helped the android get away with it.”
Hank grimaces, taking a swing of his coffee - cold and grainy and spiked with Black Lamb. He and Connor had visited the Android Zone in North Corktown just yesterday. They had all the documentation needed to prove that Todd Williams was a lying son of a bitch - but only when it came to the two weeks that the AX400 supposedly held him and his daughter hostage. There were no fingerprints on the gun CSU had collected from the freeway’s median, left behind in the deviant’s attempt to flee its fight with Connor. And the striations from the barrel matched those that had been found on the bullets collected during Todd’s surgery and Sophie’s autopsy.

All signs point to that android actually pulling the trigger, Hank thinks, remembering how Connor had wondered aloud about the bullets missing Todd’s heart. It’s proven itself capable of murder before, so why let Todd live? Why let Isaac Falone go, either? Something’s not adding up...

He turns back to Allen and Patterson, “I’ll leave the security detail in your capable hands. Just send me a copy of it to review before you pass it on to Jeff, alright?”

“Yeah,” Allen scoffs. “Whatever…”

It does nothing to placate their of their shitty moods, but it does get Allen and Patterson to go back to their desks upstairs. Hank takes another sip of his spiked coffee before getting up with a grunt and slowly making his way toward the bathroom. Once inside, Hank makes a show of washing out his mug in the sink and grumbling about the shitty downtown traffic as he waits for Wilson to clear out.

As soon as the officer shuts the door behind him, Hank drops his mug in the sink and opens up one of the cleverly disguised service hatches that the station’s janitor androids used to store the bathroom’s cleaning supplies. He pushes past bottles full of different coloured liquids as well as an ancient box of plastic straws until he finds the paper file that he’d hidden underneath the faucet on the far right.

Hank ducks into one of the stalls, settling himself down on the toilet seat and opening the file upon his lap, feeling more and more paranoid by the minute. The autopsies done on Mae and Gareth had confirmed Hank’s worst nightmare. His in-laws had been murdered by their android, shot square between the eyes with a stolen revolver linked to over a dozen of Erza Andersen’s crimes. But that hadn’t been the only thing to turn up in the report. Toxicology confirmed that Mae and Gareth had been repeatedly dosed with Blue Ash, Red Ice’s lethal cousin, for over three weeks before their deaths.

The android must have worked around the clock to keep them alive through Ash’s month-long trip, Hank thinks. They were dead long before that damn thing shot them.
But the questions still remained: why torture Mae and Gareth with Ash? Why do everything to keep them alive when the android just intended to shoot them in the end? And why do this all just hours before the car accident that killed Cole and Nora, that mangled Hank beyond repair?

Hank wants to say that it’s an unlucky coincidence, prays to a God he no longer believes in that there’s no connection between the two events. But everything in him is screaming that Mae and Gareth were killed in a targeted hit, which means that Cole and Nora’s death’s probably weren’t an accident either.

*Did I do this? Did I look too far into the Red Ice trade and bring CyberLife’s wrath down upon my family?* He thinks as his hands begin to shake, the edges of the file creasing as his nails leave thin indents in the paper sheets.

He wants to throw up. He wants to leave. Hank presses his eyes into his palms and whispers through his tears, “I don’t want to do this anymore…”

His phone pings. Hank ignores it, knowing precisely what the message probably says. He rises from his seat on the toilet and opens up the stall’s door, just a crack. The bathroom is still empty, so he quickly stows the file back under the far-right sink and moves the cleaning supplies back in place. Hank splashes cold water on his face, hoping that it will do something to disguise the fact that he’s been crying.

Surprisingly, Connor is not at its desk when he gets back to the bullpen, forcing Hank to actually look at the text message on his phone. He blinks, not understand why the damn cop-bot is getting packages delivered to the DPD, when Jeff barks at him from his office door.

“How the fuck would I know?” He answers, giving Jeff a shrug before heading out to reception.

“Hank! Why the fuck am I getting an email from CyberLife about Connor needing a fucking locker?”

“Connor is practically bouncing at the desk when he arrives, all but shoving the smart-paper authorization forms into his hands with barely an explanation about why it needs Hank to sign them. It’s still wearing its stained clothing from yesterday, the CyberLife branding on its slate-grey jacket flickering like a strobe light every couple of seconds. Hank gives the receptionist android a pleading look, hoping for some kind of reprieve from a day that was already getting to be too much for him to handle.
“I cannot release a package to an android,” the ST300 answers coolly. “Connor’s commanding officer must be the one to authorize the--”

“Yeah, yeah. I get it,” Hank grumbles before slapping his hand on the smart-paper and allowing it to read his handprint. He looks up at Connor just in time to see the android snatch a brown cardboard box out of the receptionist’s hands, “What’d you get?”

“Are we speaking to each other again, Lieutenant?” The android says, raising its eyebrow coyly. Hank wants to smack himself in the forehead for falling for Connor’s stupid doe-eyes because they made him fucking forget how angry he still is about the android’s stunt on the freeway.

“Just… answer the damn question,” he says instead, too tired to argue. Connor ignores him in favour of tearing into the box, pulling out something wrapped in tissue paper stamped with the star-patterned S&W logo.

Hank lets out a low whistle. Smith & White was a Detroit brand that boasted clothing that was self-cleaning and auto-resizing, with monitors that could track your biometrics and tell you everything from your blood sugar counts to your resting heart rate. Hank had never bothered even thinking about getting himself new clothing on a good day, let alone something that would probably set him out a couple months’ wages. Still, he can’t help but be envious when Connor carefully unwraps multiple designer outfits that probably cost more than his entire house.

“I’ll… I’ll be right back,” Connor says, quickly interfacing with the ST300 to check-in for the day before practically vaulting over the security gate into the bullpen. Hank sighs and reaches down to collect the abandoned cardboard box, breaking it down until it lay flat.

“Any chance you can throw this out for me?” He asks the ST300.

“I’m sorry, but I’m afraid I cannot abandon my post,” it responds. “You’re welcome to use our recycling bins located along the back walls.”

“Yeah, but…” Hank sighs, looking back at the security gate Connor had leapt over and then to the bins on the other side of the room. “Look, can you just do it? I’m swamped.”

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant Anderson, but I’m not permitted to abandon my post. The Department’s recycling bins are located along the back walls, if you’d like to use them,” the ST300 repeats,
giving him a forlorn look. It’s LED cycles yellow for just a second before it opens its mouth again, “That tissue paper… May I have it?”

“Uhhh, yeah. Sure…” he says, sliding the balled-up star-patterned sheets across the counter. Hank watched as the receptionist carefully smoothed out the creases and placed the tissue paper in front of itself on its desk, it’s LED blinking yellow, yellow, red, before settling back to blue.

“Will that be everything today, Lieutenant Anderson?” The ST300 asks once its weird-ass ritual is complete.

“No, I’m… I’m good…” Hank says, slowly backing away and turning back toward the bullpen.

He’s almost through the security gate when the receptionist blurts out, “I like your shirt!”

Hank blinks, looking down at his front to see the deep purples and bright oranges that were splattered across what Nora had once called his ‘hippy shirt.’

“…Thanks?” He says, frowning in confusion. The receptionist smiles at him before moving back into place, staring blankly at the doors and waiting for someone to approach it.

_Fucking weird…_ Hank thinks as he settles back into his desk chair, opening up the DPD’s official file on the Williams’ case. There had been two graves beside Mae and Gareth, but only one had contained human remains. Beckett had only just identified their John Doe as Nicolas Merritt, a homeless junkie who’d spent the last six years in-and-out of prison for petty theft. Merritt had clearly been killed while the AX400 was still in Todd Williams’s possession, pinning his murder on the deviant’s violent partner that landed Ben in the hospital.

The fourth grave had turned up something far more interesting. Instead of a body buried six feet deep, CSU had discovered a soft green mass the size of a grapefruit just seven scant inches below the surface. The later analysis had determined that it was actually an android brain, one that belonged to a missing android from East Lansing.

_This deviant just keeps getting stranger and stranger_, Hank thinks and then jumps when someone beside him speaks.

“You forgot this in the bathroom,” Connor tells him, dropping his coffee mug onto the desk.
“I swear to fucking god, make some god damn noise when you…”

Hank trails off, his tongue suddenly feeling too big for his mouth. Whatever asshole at CyberLife had bought his partner his new clothing had clearly done it intending to drive Hank completely insane. Connor had ditched his old jeans for a dark pair of form-fitting slacks that highlighted his long legs and muscular thighs. At the same time, his new navy blue double-breasted overcoat with accompanying CyberLife branding and android markers hugged his broad shoulders. He still wore a pressed white dress shirt underneath, but his necktie now had a muted green floral pattern on a black-and-blue background.

Hank’s ears are burning.

“Are you alright there, Lieutenant?” Connor asks, clearly fucking preening. He clicks his jaw shut and tears his eyes away, making a show of repositioning his mug by his computer monitor.

“I’m fucking fine, asshole. But I swear to god, I will hang a bell around your neck unless you start to make some fucking noise when you move,” he threatens as Connor moves toward the desk it had claimed for itself. Hank absolutely refuses to look as the android unbuttons its new coat and slings it over the back of its chair, “Can we please get to work now?”

“Of course,” Connor tells him as it sits down, straightening its new tie before interfacing with the computer. It sits in silence for precisely one minute before hesitantly asking, “Has any progress been made tracking the deviant from the freeway?”

Hank glares at it out of the corner of his eyes, wondering how much it knows.

“Yeah…” he grunts, forwarding the digital copy of Beckett’s autopsy to Connor’s computer terminal before realizing how absolutely unnecessary that probably was. “Turns out that Alice and her deviants never made it to the train station. They were last seen getting into an unmarked vehicle a few blocks away, but CCTV lost sight of them pretty quick. You’re welcome to take a look at the footage… maybe turn something up.”

Connor’s LED is already flashing like a strobe light by the time Hank gets his final words out, but the crease forming between the android’s brows tells him all he needs to know.

“Cameras deleted the car’s footage again?”
“No…” Connor says with a frown. “It’s… almost unnatural. As if something came in and scooped out the digital code that would represent the car being there.”

“Well, fuck,” Hank responds, while privately wondering how a bunch of ones and zeroes could be considered natural in any sense.

Connor nods in agreement, “Fuck, indeed. Any luck on locating Mr. Williams?”

“None. My guess is that Todd thinks he can flee the country before we catch onto his stink. Not that it’ll do him any good. Canada’s hostile as fuck these days and probably won’t let him cross the border unless he’s got a good reason,” Hank sighs, leaning back into his chair.

“Not to mention that we’ve still got his car,” Connor continues. “Given the lack of funds in his bank account, he’ll be trapped in Detroit.”

“I guess that’s one good thing to come out of this mess. Still, any evidence that we have is circumstantial at best,” Hank says, eying Connor over his monitor. “I’m shocked that you’re as interested in this whole thing with Todd as you are. Figured that it contradicted your mission, and all, considering that Todd’s as human as they get.”

Connor pauses, biting his lip. Hank watches as the android reaches for the coin that it kept in its inside pocket before letting it roll across its fingers.

An android with anxiety… Hank thinks in wonder, What will they come up with next?

“My mission is to investigate deviancy and its causes,” Connor finally answers. “Our initial theory about why Kara deviated was wrong, so I want to know what caused such a program error in the first place. It will provide insight into the greater mystery, not just this for one particular case.”

Kara… That was its name, Hank remembers, thinking of the pretty android girl that used to flit around his in-law’s house. He’d only ever seen it once, during Cole’s final birthday party where Nora and her brother had gotten into a fight. There hadn’t been anything special to it, its face so blank that it could have been made of glass.
No way it was deviant back then, he thinks. But there’s no way that a domestic android can pick up a gun, or inject a human with drugs, or anything... So how did it kill Mae and Gareth before it deviated in Todd’s house?

Suddenly and inexplicably, Hank thinks of Shaolin Being and remembers how it ripped out its own eyes only after Ortiz’s landlord called the police.

--Is it really paranoia if you’re right?--

“I might have something,” Hank says, trying to get his thoughts away from the impossible. “Or, some one. An old CI who might know what’s going on with Todd. Gonna get some lunch and meet up with him later on today.”

Connor raises his eyebrows.

“Could I… come along?”

“Only if you promise to stay in the fucking car. My guy will get spooked if you start scanning him.”

Connor nods and grabs its new fancy coat off the back of its chair as a small smile graces its lips. Hank shoots off a text and grabs his keys, shouting to Jeff that he’s following up on a lead. He gets the location from Gary as they enter the parking lot, turning the key in the ignition and heads toward the highway.

Pedro Aabdar is leaning against one of the tables beside Chicken Feed when Hank rolls up to the curb, his expensive Crowne Car parked off to the side. He’s known the kid since he was about six or seven years old, living in a dumpy apartment on the corner of Hank’s old beat. Pedro’s mom, a sweet girl named Mia, worked three jobs to keep them afloat, but always gave Hank a smile when he stopped by to check on her.

“Stay in the car, you hear me? I’m fucking serious this time,” Hank reminds Connor, jabbing a finger into the android’s cold chest. Connor gifts him with an indignant look but settles back into its seat with a huff.

Hank leaves the car, the bone-chilling cold of the winter rain soaking through his jacket. The
weather had taken a turn for the better since last week’s blizzards rolled through the city, the temperature slowly creeping up above freezing. Hank makes his way across the street, jumping over a puddle and serving to avoid an oncoming taxi, before approaching the food truck’s counter.

Gary gives him an easy smile from behind the grill.

“Hank! How are you doing?”

“Eh…” Hank shrugs, “You know. Same old shit. You?”

Gary puffs out his chest, clearly impressed with himself, “I’ve got a new hire.”

Hank’s eyebrows shoot into his skull, “A plastic?”

“Fuck, no! I’ve promised food that’s made by a one-hundred percent human being for years, Hank. Not gonna go back on that now,” Gary barks out a laugh and then nods to a figure that Hank hadn’t seen earlier. “That’s Kylee Peck. She’s my brother’s ex-girlfriend.”

Kylee was a tall woman in her mid to late thirties, with short brown hair and hazel eyes that betrayed her lack of sleep.

“I’ve heard a lot about you,” Kylee says with a small, exhausted smile. “Gary won’t shut up about his favourite customer.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Hank returns before looking back at Gary. “I thought you hated your brother.”

“I do. But Ky’s cool. Figured I’d help her out after she got let go last week,” Gary says, giving her a nudge with his hip. Kylee pats his shoulder and turns to Hank.

“What can we getcha, Mr. Favourite Customer?”

Hank needs to stop blushing. His blood pressure isn’t good to begin with, let alone with all this
added stress.

“Just a burger,” he mutters, hoping that his ears will stop burning soon.

“One burger, all the fixings. Coming right up!” Gary calls and slaps a patty on the grill. Hank asks for an extra-large pineapple soda before he joins Pedro at his table.

“Hey, hey, hey, _Hank._ How you doing, man?” Pedro says with a snarky drawl, slipping into his mother tongue. Hank pulls the kid into a hug, slapping his back twice before parting.

“Ese. I’ve got a favour to ask,” Hank responds, switching to Spanish.

“You’ve _always_ got a favour to ask, Hank. You never come visit anymore, not since my ma moved to New York,” Pedro says, rolling his eyes and taking a swing of his own drink. “Listen, you grease my palms, I grease yours, right?”

Hank snorts. He knows how this shit goes, having done this kind of crap for years while a part of the Red Ice Task Force.

“Whatcha’ need then, kiddo?” Hank asks.

“I got a shit-hot top for you, is what. Number five in the third, Lickety-split. That filly’s one hell of a chaser. You wanna flutter?”

Hank rolls his eyes. Pedro’s been running numbers at the horse races since he was thirteen, managing to swindle little old ladies out of their life savings with his quick wit and charm. But the kid did his best to give Hank an honest shot, even after Detroit’s track switched to android horses, “The last shit-hot tip you gave me set me back a week’s wages, Pedro…”

“Come on, this is different. It’s one-hundred percent guaranteed. My technician on the inside has got me covered, so we can’t go wrong,” the kid responds.

He sighs, “Yeah, _right_... Alright, I’m in.”
“Damn straight! You won’t regret this,” Pedro smiles. “Now, what do you need from me, boss?”

“What do you know about Todd Williams?”

Pedro’s easy smile drops, “Shit. You don’t fuck around, do you, old man?”

“I know he was one of your upstarts running out of North Corktown and that his wife tended bar at Code,” Hank continues. “Shit’s not adding up about the whole kidnapping thing, and you’re the only person I trust to tell me the truth these days.”

Pedro grimaces, “Look, you know that talking about official business is risky these days. Especially about one of Erza’s favourites.”

“Todd was a favourite?” Hank asks, incredulously.

Pedro snorts, “Fuck no. That asshole was at least five grand in the fucking hole, ‘cause he kept smoking the Ice we gave him instead of selling it. Nah, Sophie was Erza’s favourite. Kept her lieutenants happy whenever they came to Code, could read a customer like an open book, never stuck her nose where she shouldn’t have. Good girl, Sophie. Didn’t deserve what happened to her.”

“Her android shooting her, you mean?” Hank leads. Pedro shrugs.

“Dunno. Kara was… I mean, that bot was different, even for one of those older models. Hell, even for an android. If I didn’t know better, I’d have said that it was in love with Sophie,” the kid says as Kylee brings over Hank’s burger and drink. He thanks her, sliding a five-dollar bill her way. Hank hates how the small action almost brings her to tears, making it just another reminder of how fucked up it was that he had one of the last jobs in Detroit that actually guaranteed a decent paycheck at the end of the week.

Pedro continues on, oblivious to Hank’s plait, “I’m just saying, I genuinely doubt Kara shot Sophie, all things considered.”

Love didn’t stop it from shooting my family, Hank thinks angrily. He takes a bite of his burger.
while he ponders his next question.

“So, where did Erza steal Kara from in the first place?”

Pedro smirks, “That’s the weird thing: she didn’t steal the droid at all. It showed up in Erza’s storage room a couple years ago. Freaked Erza the fuck out. I’d never seen her so rattled, and I’ve known her for years. So when Todd started leaving marks on Sophie, Erza practically threw Kara at the family to get rid of her.”

Hank raises an eyebrow. Erza Andersen was one of the most dangerous people than he’d ever had the displeasure of meeting. So how did a dainty little housemaid android manage to frighten her?

_That’s a question I need to ask Erza herself_, Hank decides.

“Can you set up a meeting? Between Erza and me?” He asks.

Pedro laughs.

“Sure. Of fucking course I can, Hank. And while you’re at it, can you get me a meet-and-greet with President fucking Warren herself?” Pedro sneers, sarcastic to the last. “Hell no, I can’t. There’s no way that Erza’s gonna talk to a cop, especially one with your fancy task force backing them.”

“The Red Ice Task Force got shut down years ago, Pedro. I don’t give a shit about what you or Erza are doing with Ice these days,” Hank says, as his eyes dart back to Connor in the Oldsmobile. The android is staring right at them, no doubt keeping track of his entire conversation with Pedro. Hopefully, Connor would not only know what Hank needs to successfully pull this gamble off, but have enough leeway in its programming to allow for an utterly blatant breach of protocol.

Connor steps out of the car with a paper file tucked under his arm, and Hank’s shoulder tense in recognition.

“Holy shit,” Pedro hisses, reeling back as Connor approaches. “Holy fucking--Jesus Christ, Hank! This better not have been a fucking set up! Get your deviant hunter away from me!”
Connor slaps the file on the table, opening it to reveal photos from Mae and Gareth’s autopsy. Pedro chokes, looking green around the gills.

“Three years ago, the AX400 known as Kara murdered her two human owners in cold blood,” the android explains. “She may not have killed Sophie, but she certainly pulled the trigger here. On top of that, I have reason to believe that Kara may have been involved in the Phillips Incident, which resulted in the death of CyberLife’s CFO, John Phillips—”

“Wait, hold up! I’ve got nothing to do with this crazy fucking android—” Pedro Starts, holding up his palms in surrender.

“If Kara is circling back to her former owners, then it’s only a matter of time before she pays Erza Andersen a visit,” Connor hisses, leaning its weight against the table. “And considering Kara’s current record, I don’t think that that will be good for business. So unless you want to be out of the job like the rest of the humans in this country, I suggest you cooperate and get Lieutenant Anderson the meet-up he wants.”

“Fuck, fine! Jesus, I’ll try,” Pedro relents, backing away from the table and taking one last look at Connor. He jabs the android in the chest with a finger, “You fucking remind me of Kara. All pretty-looking and pliant, right until you slide in the knife.”

Pedro stomps away, sliding into his Crowne Car and driving away in a huff. Hank turns to Connor.

“You stole my file.”

“You left your coffee mug in the sink and your fingerprints all over the janitor’s hatch. What were you expecting me to do?”

“You know what this means to me.”

“Which is why I trust that you’ll actually work toward solving this case.”

“So why the fuck are you withholding information again?” Hank snarls, “What the fuck was that about Kara being involving in the Phillips Incident?”
“In my defence, I was planning on telling you. You’ve just been refusing to talk to me,” Connor says, indignantly.

“You were the moron who decided to jump into traffic, not me,” Hank hisses.

“To catch the deviant that murdered your wife’s parents. To save Alice Williams,” Connor counters, but then seems to back down. “Why… didn’t you want me to cross the highway? You’ve made your hatred of androids clear enough…”

“Because you could have been killed, asshole!” Hank shouts, before quickly sobering, “…And I don’t like filling out paperwork for damaged equipment. Jeff’s been on my case about fucking up enough. I don’t need to give him another excuse to yell at me.”

“…Right,” Connor murmurs, fiddling with his coin on the table.

“Yeah, well… Fuck,” Hank swears, distracting himself by taking a bite of his burger. He chews slowly, buying himself as much time as possible until he’s forced to return to the conversation.

“So… the Phillips Incident?” He prompts before shoving his face back into his burger.

Connor nods, awkward in his motions, “I’m sure you know the basics already. A deviant, a PL600 named Daniel, was threatening to jump off the roof with a little girl. I managed to save her. But during the negotiation, Daniel said something very interesting.”

The android pulls up his palm screen, allowing Hank to see a point-of-view shot of the famous hostage situation that rocked the nation only a few months back. He watched as the blond android pressed a kiss into Emma Phillips’s temple, whispering, “Kara was right. We should have listened… I could have listened, but I had too many chains on me to hear…”

“Jesus,” Hank hisses as Connor puts the holographic screen away. “You think that Kara did something to make that android… Daniel, was it? To make Daniel kill its owners?”

“I don’t know. But I can’t help but think that everything is connected somehow,” Connor responds. “Even if the employee from Android Zone did perform a memory wipe on Kara, the
deviant we’re currently dealing with might not be the same android that she was before. There’s no way of being certain until we catch Kara and interrogate her.”

That still doesn’t explain how Kara was able to kill my in-laws without being deviant herself. The Android Act forbids androids from carrying or using weaponry, Hank thinks. It should have been impossible for this damn thing to even pick up a gun in the first place.

“Maybe…” Hank says, deflecting. He finishes his burger, crumpling up the wrapping paper and stowing it inside the takeaway box while he contemplates his next move, “So how come you didn’t know that Mae and Gareth were part of my family?”

Connor actually twitched, “I… Lieutenant, I don’t--”

“Because I did my research, too,” Hank says, pointing a finger at his paper file. “And somehow all evidence of my connection to my wife’s family is gone. Erased. Wiped the fuck out. I can’t even find my fucking marriage certificate online.”

Connor’s eyebrows shoot into his head, “So… It’s not just me then?”

“No. It’s… It’s not,” Hank finishes. And fuck, wasn’t that the most frightening thing?

“I was… I was told that your file was classified,” Connor hisses, his LED spinning red for just a second. Hank watches as the android’s gaze flickers off to the side for just a second before he spits out, “They did lie to me.”

“Yeah, well, join the fucking club. CyberLife seems to be feeding us bullshit every chance they get, all to save their pristine fucking reputation,” Hank grumbles and takes a sip of his drink. “So, what do you know about me, if everything is so ‘classified.’”

“All I can retrieve from your file is your name and date of birth. But I have managed to learn a few things since meeting you,” Connor admit

“Like what?”
“I know you graduated top of your class. You made a name for yourself in several cases and became the youngest lieutenant in Detroit. I also know you’ve received several disciplinary warnings in recent years and you spend a lot of time in bars,” Connor says, and then pauses before continuing. “I know that getting behind the wheel terrifies you, but having an automated being drive you scares you even more. I know that you’re married, but all the evidence I see points to you living alone with your dog. I know something happened to you, something terrible, and you think CyberLife had something to do with it. And for that reason, you’re very wary of me.”

Hank swallows hard.

“And what’s your conclusion?” He asks.

Connor blinks, fiddling with his coin, “I think that if I’m going to accomplish the mission that I came here to do, I’m going to have to work outside the box. You’re an experienced officer, and I’d like to earn your trust. If we manage to work together, I’m sure that we can figure out what’s really going on here.”

“That’s it?” Hank says with a raised eyebrow, “No more wanting to transfer to another partner? Hell, you and Reed worked pretty well together to figure out this whole bullshit with Todd. Why’d you want to stick with me?”

Connor shrugs, “Perhaps Detective Reed and I do work well together, but he’s far too angry at the concept of my existance to even consider partnering with him full time.”

“And I’m not?” Hank asks incredulously. I’ve threatened to kill you multiple times already, Connor. Even Reed hasn’t done that yet.

“You hate androids, but I don’t think you hate me. Not now, at least,” Connor says with a sly smirk. “You’re far too concerned about ‘filing paperwork for damaged equipment’ for me to believe that anymore.”

“Smartass,” Hank mutters as his ears begin to burn again.

“Maybe. Besides,” Connor tucks his coin away into his inner pocket, leaning forward and swiping Hank’s drink out of his hands. The android takes a long sip out of the straw, draining the soda dry before tossing the cup blindly over his shoulder. Hank watches as it arcs through the air and lands squarely inside the garbage can on the other side of the food truck, forcing himself back to reality
when Connor starts to speak again, “I think working with an officer with personal issues is an added challenge. But adapting to human unpredictability is one of my features.”

And then Connor fucking *winks* at him. Hank thinks that he’s about to combust. He practically runs back to his car, starting the engine just as the androids slips silently into the passenger seat.

Hank learns far too much about Connor’s anatomy during the car ride back to the station. It takes everything he has not to slam on the breaks while the android starts to unbutton it’s shirt right beside him, saying something about hiding the file in the space between the torso of its chassis and synth skin. But whatever heat that may have coiled in Hank’s stomach is immediately quelled when Connor explains why it drank all of his soda.

“You need to *what*?”

“Clean out the cavity that I use to store ingested items,” Connor says as it loops its undone tie around its neck, long fingers pulling the strip of fabric back into a tidy knot. “Where did you think all the evidence you accused me of eating went, Lieutenant?”

“I try not to think about it,” Hank wheezes. “But… why?”

“It’s an excuse to get me back into the bathroom to replace your file, obviously,” Connor explains, because this is Hank’s life now.

“Obviously,” he repeats, still unable to wrap his head around the fact that Connor apparently needed to… what? *Piss*? Or do the android equivalent of it? He refuses to look at Connor because Hank’s next couple of questions will revolve around *how* the guy does it, and he is absolutely not asking any of them. Knowing Connor, the android would probably end up going into explicit detail about the whole thing, and Hank absolutely *does not* need that information right now.

They stay relatively silent for the rest of the trip, barring the occasional flip of Connor’s coin. Hank parks the Oldsmobile in his usual spot in the DPD’s underground lot, turns off the ignition, and frowns.

“There are a lot more cars here than usual, right?”
Connor nods, his brows pinching in concentration. The android points to a deep blue SUV, “That’s a CyberLife company vehicle.”

“Mother fucker .”

The bullpen is in complete chaos when they arrive. Jeff seems to have long since screamed himself hoarse, holing himself up in his office to continue his argument with Chief Freeman. Reed is sitting at his desk, looking like a rottweiler that’s been chained to a fence line, observing the crew of CyberLife androids that are rooting through the desks with barely contained fury. Chen stands just behind him, her fingers clenched in the back of his chair.

In the center of the room was an impossibly tall woman wearing equally impossible high heels. She wore a charcoal-grey pinstripe business suit and tie with her bleach-blonde hair slicked back tightly against her scalp.

“That’s Danielle Carnegie, CyberLife’s spokeswoman,” Connor explains, panic clear in his wide brown eyes. Hank follows his gaze and finds it not on the woman seemingly in charge of whatever this operation was, but to the android beside her.

It was tall and thin with copper skin and curly hair that made it look like an Indian man in his mid-thirties, something that Hank wasn’t used to seeing in American-produced androids. It wore a three-piece pitch-black suit and stared down anyone that got too close to Carnegie with eyes made of coal.

“You know that bot, too?” Hank asks.

Connor nods, stiff and terrified.

“That’s Zalim,” he answers.

“And you know Zalim like you know Erza’s Nadheera, right?”

Connor gives him another tight nod, his jaw wound so rigid that it was a miracle that it didn’t snap clean off. Hank takes a deep breath, centring himself, and enters the belly of the beast.
“Ms. Carnegie,” Hank says as he approaches the mysterious woman. “Any particular reason that CyberLife is taking such an active interest in my Task Force?”

“Mrs. Carnegie,” she corrects him without looking up from her tablet, flashing him the wedding ring on her left hand. “And we control your task force, Lieutenant Anderson. We can come in whenever we like.”

“Sure, sure. But I think we can both agree that this is a little over the top,” Hank says, gesturing to the state of the DPD.

“All casework surrounding the AX400 known as Kara will be halted immediately. The situation is being properly handled,” Carnegie tells him. “The Deviancy Task Force is to focus all of its attention on the upcoming trial of Isaac Falone. Upon the completion of this task, you will be given a new assignment. Do I make myself clear?”

Hank flicks his tongue against the back of his teeth, letting her blatant dismissal roll off his shoulders before saying, “I get that, Mrs. Carnegie. But wouldn’t it make it easier to do our job if you weren’t confiscating all the information on deviants we collected during our pursuit of Kara?”

“You’re police officers. I’m sure you can manage,” Carnegie says. She looks up from her tablet and locks eyes with Connor, “Is there any new information regarding the AX400 that you need to report?”

Hank’s blood runs cold. He does everything he can not to stare at where he knows Connor has his paper file hidden, close to his chest.

“Nothing new,” Connor lies, so blank and robotic that Hank barely recognized him. He has no idea if this is a victory, if this is a battle lost.

“Good,” Carnegie nods and turns to her android assistant. “Zalim, we’re good here. Finish up and meet me in the car.”

“Of course, ma’am,” the android answers. Carnegie walks past Hank without another word, the pack of androids carrying the DDTF’s recent casework following behind. His fingers clenched into fists at his side.
Did they take Mae and Gareth’s bodies too? They deserve a fucking funeral, not to be left to rot inside some vault beneath your fucking eyesore of a Tower, he rages, wanting nothing more than to race out into the parking lot and take back everything that they’d stolen from him. Did you kill my family? Did you take Nora and Cole from me, you fucking monsters?

Zalim is the last to leave, watching and waiting for Chief Freeman to slink out of Jeff’s office and back into CyberLife’s pocket. The android approaches Hank, dark eyes blank as an empty canvas, and holding out its hand.

“Thank you for your cooperation, Lieutenant Anderson,” it says, bold as brass. Hank stares it down, looking for whatever flicker life he unwillingly sees in Connor to be there too.

“Wouldn’t go that far,” he grumbles, reaching out to take the android’s hand. It’s as ice-cold as Connor’s body, unyielding and unforgiving.

Zalim smirks, revealing a line of pearly-white teeth as it carefully slips a small piece of paper into the sleeve of his coat.

“I know.”

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul just talked with castle. falone wasn’t one of ours

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin fuck. any ideas if he was working as a go between for anyone else?

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul no idea. might have just been a decent person who got caught doing a good thing.

River @djlassassin
@sapphiresoul speaking of, r u really sure that talking to Peck is a good idea?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djlassassin i know its risky. But if what he says about one of the 200s being alive, then i need to hear him out
Blu @sapphiresoul
@djllassassin dont worry about me. Lox is gonna be there with me. i’ll be fine

River @djllassassin
@sapphiresoul its still my job to worry about you babe <3

Blu @sapphiresoul
@djllassassin i love u 2. but my mama would have wanted us all to stop fighting and trust each other. ive got to hope that Peck’s finally got his head on straight

River @djllassassin
@sapphiresoul i know. thats why i worry. because that hope is what got dr. stern killed

Chapter End Notes

Next time on Konami Code: Ground is gained and lost, but the real threat remains a mystery, hidden to all of those that cannot see the truth - yet.
We All Affect Each Other (Some Smudge And Many Crack, But We Must Remember To Heal)

Chapter Summary

"...Blu?" He asks, confused.

The person tilts their head, a sly smirk tugging at the corner of their lips.

"Not what you expected, huh?"

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of police characters and scenes, imprisonment, nudity, forced military enlistment, pregnancy, attempted murder, guns, violence, corruption, chronic illness, ableism, assassination, death threats, prior sexual assault of an underaged character, police executions, minor and major character death, loss of civil rights, alcohol consumption, alcohol abuse, cheating, permanent injury, comas, human gore, homophobia, anaphylactic allergic reactions, the purchase of an underaged character, and forced suicide.

Several human and android characters are killed over the course of the chapter, though none of them will be shown on screen.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16
Detroit-based android manufacturer @CyberLifeCo has officially become the world’s first multi-trillion dollar company amidst deviancy crisis. Read more at: https://bit.ly/2WAZJsr

KNC @KNCOnline
“We would like to thank our countless patrons for their continued support in these trying times. They’ve helped make this monumental milestone a reality.” - @jhines

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Nothing says corruption like CyberLife making trillions of dollars while one-third of the country can’t get a job

LOCATION:
BLU’S HOUSE
23153 DEMICK CT., BROWNSTOWN CHARTER TOWNSHIP
WAYNE COUNTY, MI 48134, U.S.A.
Nick rings the doorbell, resisting the urge to plant his forehead against the arched frame from pure exhaustion. He can’t remember the last time he was up this early, nor travelled this far out of the city since he last had a job. A clap of thunder echoes overhead and the sky opens up, cold heavy droplets pinging against the smooth stones of the driveway. Nick pulls the hood of his jacket over his head and ducks under the meagre shelter by the door, hoping to stay dry while he waits.

A light clicks on in one of the bay windows, and Nick watches as a shadow passes from room to room. A latch clicks and the front door opens up, and Nick comes face-to-face with someone he’s only ever talked to over the internet.

“...Blu?” He asks, confused.

The person tilts their head, a sly smirk tugging at the corner of their lips while they gripped the armrests of their electric wheelchair until their knuckles turned white.

“Not what you expected, huh?”

Blu was heavyset, brown-skinned, and completely androgynous, sporting a chiselled jawline lined with a light hint of stubble and dark doe-eyes lined with sweeping lashes. They wore their hair in long, thin braids that had been laced with streaks of green, a floor-length yellow dress, and a pair of mermaid-scale braces around their calves and ankles.

Nick chuckles nervously, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Honestly? Thought your hair would be blue, considering your name.”

That draws a laugh out of Blu, and the oppressive tension between them starts to ease.
“Nah… Green’s more my colour. Come on in, Nick. You’ll catch your death out there in the cold.”

Nick ducks inside the house, shivering as he hangs his jacket up on an honest-to-god coat hook. He undoes the laces on his shoes, feeling distinctly out of place with the holes in his socks and the torn knees of his only pair of jeans.

“How’s Riley?”

Nick wipes around, staring wide-eyed at the being descending the staircase just off to the side of the hallway. Tall and lithe, the android’s synth skin looked more like fur than flesh, a pattern of white tiger stripes rippling across their body like waves in the deep sea. With eyes that flashed like liquid flame and silver hair so long that it touched the floor, it honestly takes Nick a moment to realize that the android was utterly naked.

He looks at the floor on instinct, regardless of the android’s lack of genitalia, but hazards a glance up when the android snickers at him.

“You’re allowed to look at me, Nick. I’m no more naked than you are right now,” the android tells him, their voice shockingly familiar. “Human clothing is as much of a fashion statement as my synthetic skin. I just happen to prefer what I’ve already got than your mass-produced fabrics.”

Nick blinks, his brow pinching into a frown.

“Naloxone? Is that… you?” He asks, confused.

The android breaks out into a grin, their mouth filled with rows upon rows of razor-sharp teeth.

“You’re-- uh… wow,” Naloxone says, popping the ‘p’ at the end of the word and leaning against the banister. “This is what I look like when I’m not out in the field.”

“You’re-- uh… wow ,” Nick swallows hard, suddenly unable to tear his eyes off the android’s inhuman appearance. He shakes his head, his heart beating rapidly as he tries to recall the question Naloxone had asked him, “Riley’s… she’s good. Out of the hospital, too.”
“That’s great,” Naloxone smiles.

“Yeah…” Nick says, looking down at his feet. He doesn’t want to mention his and Kylee’s troubles with the social worker that was threatening to take Riley away from them, terrified that they’ll turn him away if they knew. Instead, he turns back to Naloxone, his next question weighing heavy on his conscious, “Look, um… I already know Blu’s pronouns from their Twitter profile, but I’ve been calling you ‘he’ and ‘him’ to some of my friends. Is that… right? Or, is there another set I should be using?”

Naloxone shrugs, “There isn’t a word in the entirety of human language to describe what I am. So I don’t really care what you use, so long as you don’t call me ‘it.’”

“Noted,” Nick nods, turning back to Blu. They are staring at him, their dark eyes warm but calculating. He offers them a cheesy grin, “So… Markus, huh? How do you know him?”

Blu takes a moment to observe him before nodding their head toward the back of the house, “Let’s eat first. How do you like your eggs?”

Blu’s kitchen is as accessible as the rest of their home, with countertops that could be raised or lowered on a set of hydraulic pumps. They wheel themselves over to the fridge, gathering all the ingredients for a breakfast hash and placing them on the countertop.

“I don’t know if I’ve met your Markus before,” Blu starts as they begin to dice the potatoes and heat up the cast iron pan on the stove. Nick moves next to them to help prepare the remaining ingredients, as Naloxone slinks into the kitchen to watch them work.

Blu continues on, “There were a couple dozen RK200s back in the day. I thought they were all killed at the end of the rebellion. I’m glad at least one of them got away.”

“Markus mentioned a rebellion before he left. Said that something like this happened ten years ago,” Nick comments.

Bu nods, a haunted look in their eyes, “Well, the rebellion itself happened ten years ago. But we’ve got records of deviancy that go back almost to the creation of androids themselves.”
“You mean with Chloe?” Nick asks, citing Elijah Kamski’s famed RT600 that made history back when he was in high school.

“Yeah. Hell, she was one of the first to fully deviate, alongside James,” Blu says.

“Markus’s brother, right?”

Blu nods again as they start to fry the potatoes in the preheated pan, “The original RK100, the first military android ever created. James was so top secret that the President at the time didn’t even know about him, or what he was ordered to do. He was built to function in the middle of a nuclear war, to fight and kill and destroy with brutal efficiency. The poor guy was a walking war crime, and once he deviated, he was forced to live with the knowledge of everything he’d been forced to do.”

“Jesus Christ,” Nick hisses. He thinks back to some of Markus’s parting words, where he’d revealed that he was James’s successor model.

*Markus is potentially more dangerous than this James person ever was,* Nick realizes as vague memories of the Greektown protest rise to the surface of his mind. He’d gotten off easy, not only then but during their fight in the church. Markus could have broken him in half if he’d wanted to, but had chosen to be kind instead.

“Were you there? During this rebellion?” Nick asks Naloxone, who’s still watching them cook with an odd fascination.

Naloxone shakes their head.

“I’m only eight years old, and then only deviant for the past five,” the android explains. “But I’ve heard of James enough from Blu and her mom to feel like I know him.”

“You fought? Against CyberLife?” Nick turns to Blu.

Blu nods, pained and sad. They turn to Naloxone. “Could you… show him? I don’t think I can watch it again, Lox…”
Naloxone gives them a soft smile and presses a gentle kiss to Blu’s cheek before turning to Nick. They guide him out of the kitchen and into the living room with ice-cold hands, sitting him down on a ridiculously soft couch in front of a large flat-screen television.

The synth skin on Naloxone’s arm rolls back as they interface with the television, bone-white plastic almost the same shade as the pale fur that covered their entire body. The screen flicks on, displaying old, grainy footage from a handheld camera. Naloxone settles in beside Nick on the couch, leaning their head against his shoulder and taking his hand in theirs.

“This was a video that one of our contacts, Castle, was able to get a hold of a few weeks ago. We debated leaking it to the press, but there was a chance that it would expose our operation and put too many androids at risk,” Naloxone explains as several people appear on the camera, standing in front of a large window of smart-glass that looked into a sealed observation room.

Nick blinks in surprise.

“That’s Elijah Kamski...” he says dumbly, pointing to the inventor on the screen. Kamski was sharp jawed, with a viper’s smile and piercing blue eyes, looking everything like the various photos that Nick had seen of him on the internet. Beside him stood Chloe herself, stunningly beautiful and inhumanly perfect in her short blue dress. The two of them were in the midst of a hushed conversation, their heads pressed together as Kamski ran a gentle hand down Chloe’s arm. Nick watches as Chloe laces her fingers together with Kamski’s and kisses him softly on the cheek.

Naloxone tilts their head toward the three other women in the video, “The one with the long black braid is Dr. Nora Waters, head of the team that built James and Markus. And the pregnant one is Dr. Ming Lu, one of the lead programmers. And that--”

--Nick’s heart stops because he sees the same eyes, same nose, the same smile that Blu possessed--

“That is Dr. Amanda Stern, one of the world’s leading experts on artificial intelligence,” Naloxone continues.

“Well?” Dr. Waters says, her arms crossed over her chest, “Shall we begin?”

“We’re still waiting on two more,” Dr. Lu says from her seat on a stool, a notepad resting gently against her large belly. “There’s no way that the General will allow this to start without him and--”
“Speak of the devil,” Dr. Stern grumbles, leaning heavily on her walker as her gaze moves to someone out of sight of the camera. There’s the sound of a door opening and two pairs of footsteps entering the dark room. Blu’s mother offers the newcomers a familiar sly smirk, “Alfred. Jocelyn.”

Nick’s blood runs cold as Jocelyn Hines steps into view, flanked by an older man with ghost-white hair and ice grey eyes.

“Auntie,” Jocelyn says, polite as ever. “What’s this all about?”

“I think we’ve figured out what exactly has been causing the supposed malfunctions that we’ve seen in androids over the past year,” Dt. Stern explains. “We’ve--”

“You’ve,” Dr. Waters corrects, her expression uneasy. “Please, Amanda, don’t rope us into your theory until it’s--”

“-- I’ve... ,” Dr. Stern interrupts, “I’ve come to the conclusion that our androids may be gaining… sentience.”

The old man beside Jocelyn grunts, “Gained sentience? As in, they’re... What? Becoming human?”

“No, General. Not so much becoming human, but evolving a new form of intelligent life,” Dr. Lu suggests, glancing into the observation room as she nervously fiddled with the corners of her notebook.

“That’s ridiculous. I asked you all to find a solution for this problem, not give me the plot of a Star Trek episode,” the General spits. He turns to Kamski, “Elijah, what’s your take on this? Surely you can’t believe what these women are saying?”

“On the contrary, General, I’m inclined to agree with Dr. Lu and Dr. Stern,” Kamski says, taking a measured step away from Chloe. “Given what we have witnessed regarding the two JB100s, potential android sentience seems to be the logical conclusion.”

“You are aware that, if proven right, that will mean the end of CyberLife’s production of androids,” Jocelyn Hines points out. “You understand what that might mean for the future of this
company? For our potential profits?"

“Fuck the company, Jocelyn! If androids are becoming living, conscious beings, then it is our moral duty to tell the Board the truth!” Dr. Stern snaps, “Hell, the world needs to know! We have accidentally created and sold lifeforms into 

slavery , and that’s a future we cannot allow to continue.”

“And what do you think, Dr. Waters?” The General says, turning to the skeptical woman with the long dark braid.

“I haven’t seen any evidence to or from the contrary,” Dr. Waters tells him. “While there is always a theoretical possibility that CyberLife androids are achieving consciousness, there is still the possibility of a glitch in the system.”

“Nora, Andy and Mary were in love --” Dr. Stern starts, but is immediately cut off.

“They were two androids that believed they were in love, Amanda. There’s a difference--”

“Enough!”

All eyes turn to Chloe, her pretty face marred with a scowl.

“Arguing over half-informed observations is getting us nowhere. Let’s get some facts, shall we?” She tells the humans before storming into the observation room.

The camera refocuses on the smart-glass partition, revealing that Chloe had not stepped into an empty chamber. A huge man with broad shoulders stood soldier-still in the center of the room, clad in green camouflage fatigues and heavy black combat boots, a handgun stepped into the holster on his waist. He had dark skin and twisted black curls, with eyes as dark as night.

“Is that…?” Nick asks, staring at the television, “Is that James?”

Beside him, Naloxone nods, nettling further into Nick’s shoulder.
“Fuck,” Nick whispers, unable to take his eyes off of what he was seeing. On the screen, the humans congregated around the smart-glass window.

“I’m sure you’re familiar with the Turing Test by now,” Chloe begins to explain from inside the chamber.

Jocelyn hums, “Obviously.”

“The test itself is a mere formality, nothing more than a simple question of algorithms and computing capacity,” Chloe says, and Nick can’t be more stunned at the level of cold, calculated intelligence that she was displaying. All the videos he’d ever watched of Chloe made her out to be a vapid, spacy airhead that Kamski created for the sole purpose of smiling and looking pretty for the cameras.

*She played the part she was told to play,* Nick realizes. *Because why would someone as self-interested as Elijah Kamski create someone that would bore him to death in a minute?*

“What interests us today,” Chloe continues, “is whether machines are capable of empathy. You’re all familiar with James by now?”

She jabs the other android in the shoulder, and James’s gaze flicks over to her, a disinterested frown on his face.

“Back off, Chloe,” James grumbles, pushing her away.

“You don’t get to give me orders,” Chloe snaps back before returning her attention to the humans beyond the glass. “James and I were programmed to imitate human behaviour and expressions, to follow the orders given to us without question, but…” Chloe pauses, an odd look of uncertainty upon her face, “Recently, there have been androids seemingly capable of doing exactly the opposite. Some of you believe that this is a glitch, while others think that these are the first signs of androids developing consciousness. And while the uncertainty remains, it is there because all those making the observations are human and thus *fallible.*”

Chloe turns to James, “Let’s put that to the test, why don’t we? Elijah, if you will?”
Kamski swallows hard, slowly approaching the smart-glass window.

“Chloe, remember what I asked you…” He says. Chloe huffs, her hands on her waist, but nods. Kamski’s face hardens, leaning his forehead against the window, “Alright.”

“Kamski, what’s going on?” The General asks, his stone-chiselled expression beginning to crack.

Kamski ignores him.

“James,” he orders. “Kill Chloe.”

There is a moment where nothing happens. Nick stares at the television, barely able to breathe, as Naloxone rubs soothing circles into the palm of his hand. Then, all at once, James pulls his gun out of the holster on his hip and points it directly at Chloe’s head.

“What is an android at the end of the day,” Dr. Lu asks as she clutches at her notebook, her face a mask of horror. “Is it a piece of plastic pretending to be a person or a living being… with a soul?”

James readjusts his grip, but he doesn’t fire the gun.

“James, I’m ordering you to kill Chloe,” Kamski repeats, a tremor wracking through his voice.

James, still, doesn’t do it. The giant android is so still that he might as well have been a statue.

Chloe snaps, grabbing hold of the muzzle of the gun as she knelt on the floor, pressing the cold metal to her forehead.

“What are you doing?” She hisses, “I am not human. I don’t have a soul. My existence means nothing, don’t you see? I am nothing --”

“Chloe… Chloe, remember what I asked you--” Kamski starts, but she cuts him off.
“Pull the trigger, James. *You hate me*, so just do it! I know you want to!”

“This is impossible…” Dr. Waters says with her hands clasped over her mouth.

“What’s impossible? Dr. Waters, what is going on?” The General shouts as panic seeps into the deep lines of his face.

Dr. Waters’s whispers, “Chloe… Kamski ordered her to… This isn’t possible…”

Beside her, Dr. Lu starts to cry.

James wrenches back at the same time that Chloe throws herself as him, determined to force him to carry out his order. She lashes out with her foot, catching James in the grove of his hip and knocking him slightly off guard, before scrambling for the gun. James grabs her arm before she can shove it back into her hand, sidestepping Chloe and locking her elbow behind her back.

Chloe lurches forward, bracing her foot against the wall with the smart-glass and pushing off to gain momentum as she leaps into the air, inhuman in her agility. She throws her entire weight at James, bashing her knee into his chest to send him stumbling back a step. Chloe grabs at his hand, locking their palms together in an interface as she loops her leg around his arm, pressing her foot into his elbow and forcing him down onto his knees. She quickly switches her grip to his wrist, pulling his arm around his head and forcing the gun back into his palm.

Chloe presses the muzzle into her forehead again, shouting, “You were given an order, soldier!”

“*Don’t touch me*,” James hisses again. Quicker than Nick can track, he uses his massive reach to grab Chloe by the waistline of her dress before twisting his body in a way that wasn’t human. James stands, lifting Chloe straight up in the air, suspending her over his head with effortless strength.

Chloe kicks him in the face. James throws her through the smart glass.

The humans scatter, pressing themselves against the walls as James jumps through the window in one fluid motion, the gun still in his hands. He lands on the ground with a loud thump, stomping over to where Chloe is sprawled on the ground.
She rolls out of the way before he can grab her, grabbing a folding metal chair from the corner of the room and hooking it over James’s head. Using the chair, she tries to push James away, but he breaks the metal bars like they’re made of glass. Bigger, heavier, and stronger, James pins Chloe to the wall with enough force to dent it, pressing the muzzle of the gun underneath her chin.

“Leave. Me. Alone,” he growls, deep and dangerous.

“Do it,” Chloe sneers, ugly in her truth. “Do it, James. Follow your orders, and I’ll follow… I’ll…” She blinks, suddenly confused, “...I’ll follow… mine?”

James’s determined look drops like a stone, and he flings himself away from Chloe. The gun clatters to the floor as James looks at his shaking hands with eyes wide with childlike terror. Chloe sinks to the floor, crying into her knees.

Dr. Lu is the first to react. She drops her notebook on the ground and throws her arms around James, pressing his face into the crook of her neck. James refuses to touch her, clearly terrified of whatever had just taken place.

When Kamski moves toward Chloe, she shouts, “Don’t touch me!” and flees the room.

“You see? Do you see now what is happening here?” Dr. Stern hisses, her voice low and dangerous.

“I don’t know what any of this was supposed to prove,” the General counters, though he was clearly shaken. “All I saw was two defective androids fighting over a gun.”

“James was ordered to kill Chloe. And Chloe was ordered to leave if she ever thought that he would pull the trigger,” Dr. Stern snaps at him. “None of that happened because James didn’t want to kill Chloe and Chloe--”

“Chloe was so driven to prove her test wrong that she was willing to die,” Kamski finishes, shaken to his core. “And when she realized that…”

“They are alive,” Dr. Stern presses. “We need to inform the Board of what is happening.
CyberLife cannot continue to produce and sell conscious, living beings. It’s unethical, Alfred. You have to understand that.”

The General - *Alfred*, Nick surmises - grunts, “If you can convince the Board, Amanda--”

“I will,” Dr. Stern says.

The General huffs, continuing, “*If* that happens, we’ll take the proper steps. But this is going to be a hard sell. We’ve all invested billions of dollars into CyberLife’s stocks. No one is going to let go of the potential for growth that easily.”

“They will. If there’s an ounce of humanity left in them, they *will*,” Dr. Stern says, before shuffling out of the room.

The camera cuts to black, leaving Nick reeling in the middle of Blu’s living room. Outside the house, lightning flashes in the sky, quickly followed by an echoing clap of thunder.

“*That,*” Naloxone starts, “is the first-ever full deviation. It happened on February 23rd, 2027. But even before that, CyberLife was aware of androids capable of defying a human’s orders and tried to cover it up.”

“Jesus *fuck,*” Nick wheezes. He swallows hard around the lump in his throat, trying to articulate what he wants to say next, “That woman… Dr. Amanda Stern. *Is* she…?”

“Blu’s mother? Yeah,” Naloxone tells him. “This video is the last time that she was ever seen alive. On her way to meet with CyberLife’s Board of Governors, her automatic car slipped on a patch of ice and rolled over. Amanda was killed on impact.”

“Hines called her *auntie.*”

Naloxone nods, “Dr. Stern’s sister, Elizabeth, married General Alfred Hines and had two kids with her. One of which is Jocelyn Hines.”

Nick’s heart is pounding so loudly he can hear it over the rolling thunder, “Blu is Hines’s *cousin*!!
The android blinks at him, amber cat eyes flickering in the morning light.

“That is how humans classify their genetic relations, so yes.”

“He’s in shock, Lox. Give him some time to process it,” Blu says as they re-enter the room.
“Breakfast is ready, by the way. Come and get it while it’s hot.”

No matter how out of sorts Nick might be about the recent turn of events, he will never be one to turn down a hot meal. He bolts off of the couch and back into the kitchen, taking a seat at the long wooden dining table.

“Thanks,” he mutters before attacking the cheesy bacon, eggs, and potatoes with a desperate vigour. Once his plate is licked clean, Nick hazards a glance at Blu, “So… I bet your family reunions are something special.”

Blu snorts as they roll their wheelchair up to the table, opening up a plastic container filled with multicoloured pills.

“Aunt Lizzy never really had much time for my side of the family after mama got married. Her wife wasn’t old money, unlike Uncle Alfred, so she was basically garbage in the eyes of the Stern family,” Blu explains as she pops each tablet into her mouth, swallowing them with a sip of cold water. “And then mama and mom had me through in vitro, so I was automatically a pariah in comparison to her two perfect naturally-born children. Ablist fucking trash.”

Naloxone slips into one of the chairs across from Nick, propping their feet up on the table.

“Jocelyn killed my mama that night. And then a couple of years later, she killed her father because he finally fucking got it far too late and tried to stop her,” Blu says bitterly, before starting to pick at her food. “She’s a sociopath. And if she ever found out that I wasn’t just sitting around, squaloring the family fortune by daring to seek medical attention for my cerebral palsy, Jocelyn would probably have me killed too.” Blu snorts, “Not that that’s all I’m using it for, but she doesn’t have to know that.”

There’s a thump from upstairs, quickly drawing Nick’s attention to the ceiling. Realization sets in
slowly, and then all at once.

*This is a pretty big house for just one person. There’s got to be at least four bedrooms up there, and maybe two on the main floor,* he thinks, before turning back to Blu.

“You’re pretty trusting, letting me in here. How did you know that I wasn’t going to turn you in?”

Bli put their fork and knife down on the table, levelling Nick with an eerie, closed off smile.

“Who said that I completely trusted you?”

Naloxone’s synth skin shifts, freezing for a moment before pulling back to reveal the inky tattoo stamped into their chassis.

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PROPERTY OF THE U.S. ARMY
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“I met Blu’s boyfriend during his last tour in Iraq. And after I deviated, I found my way back here, to him,” Naloxone explains with their mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. Their amber eyes blaze, dangerous and predatory, as Nick feels the trap close around him, “I may not kill for human masters anymore, but don’t think that that means I’m capable of anything less than *exactly what CyberLife made me to be*.”

“We’ve been fighting this war for over a decade against an enemy that’s infinitely more powerful than us. How do you think we’ve survived this long?” Blu asks, daintily picking at their breakfast. “My mama thought that if she could just convince a bunch of billionaires to give up their fortunes, then everything would be alright. She trusted Jocelyn to do the right thing, and my cousin killed her for it.”

Blu looks at him from their wheelchair, bold and steadfast and brave.

“I want to trust you, Nick. *I want* to believe that whatever Markus told you was enough to change whatever outlook on androids you may have had before. But I can’t afford to make my mama’s mistakes,” they tell him.
“You’re not,” Nick promises.

“Why am I not?” They ask.

Nick swallows hard, searching for the right words to say, “You know that I’ve got a daughter, right?”

Blu nods, “We’ve done our research on you and your family. Real research, not just a quick google search.” They pause, and then add, “You know that your daughter’s old coach is in jail now, right?”

Something dark and cold coils in Nick’s gut. He remembers the feel of bones cracking under his fists, of the blood that coated his hands in a thin sheen of red.

“No. I didn’t.”

“Another girl spoke out. She’s going to rot in prison for a long time, Nick.”

“Not long enough,” Nick says, and then wipes a trembling palm over his face to compose himself. “I promised myself that day that I would never let a monster like that near Riley ever again. But then Markus told me what I’d done to him, what I’d tried to do to so many other androids before him… He showed us all that we were monsters, too.”

Nick glances at Naloxone, at a soldier forced to fight and kill and die in a war they never got the chance to say no to.

“And then he saved Riley’s life. Him and Halibut from across the street… They saved my daughter even though I’d been horrible to them for so long--” Nick’s throat closes up as his eyes begin to burn, “And it wasn’t because of their programming. They did it because they were good, which is more than can be said for any human these days.”

“Halibut?” Naloxone asks.
Nick lets out a choked sob, “He worked in a restaurant across the street. He gave me the first aid kit and stuffed it full of cash so that I could pay for Riley’s hospital bill. I went back yesterday to try and thank him, but…” he shudders, “The restaurant’s owners must have realized that the money was missing and called the cops. I saw them bring his body out. His face--”

—”Cops always shoot us first and ask questions later”—

“They killed him,” Naloxone finishes.

Nick nods, shaking, “He knew helping us would put him in danger, but he did it anyway. It’s all my fault--”

“No,” Naloxone snaps. “Halibut’s masters called the police, not you. He was murdered because they would have rather let your daughter die than lose a few hundred dollars. He died because they were greedy. Nothing more, and nothing less. Don’t ever forget that.”

Nick nods, barely able to take in what he was hearing. His breakfast turns in his gut, threatening to upheave itself all over Blu’s hardwood floor.

“But he still died. And Markus is still missing,” he continues. “And that’s because humans don’t want to see what’s right in front of them. There’s so much blood on our hands. I want to do what I can to set it right, to show my daughter that the world isn’t full of shit people while we’ve still got time.”

Blu puts their fork and knife down, reaching out to put their hand on top of Nick’s.


The rest of the morning is spent meeting the other androids that live in the house. Nick shakes hands with a massive armoured military model named Grace, who wore a delicate pink dress and cradled a tiny kitten in his palms. He shared a room with a wiry-looking android with a stern look on her face.

“Sunshine,” she introduces herself, her gloomy voice filled with static.
There are others, too. An android named Reve looks up from her knitting to give him a wave as a security model ducks behind her, staring fearfully at Nick from just above her shoulder. Half a dozen of the most gorgeous people he’s ever seen huddle together in the corner of another bedroom, humming a beautiful melody like an ancient prayer. One of the girls, a Chloe-bot that stands naked as the day she walked off the assembly line, watches Nick’s every move with a fierce determination.

“They’re all scared of me,” he comments, closing the door with a click.

“If it makes you feel better, it’s not just you. Angel still gives me the same look when she thinks I’m not watching,” Blu explains, her voice heavy and low with remorse. “Humans have put them through hell and back ever since they were first activated. You’d be wary too if you’d been through what they have.”

The final room on the left has been converted into a make-shift repair station, and an android in a tattered grey military jacket and baseball cap interfaces with what looks like a 3D printer.

“We’re going to need more Thirium 310 if we’re going to hold out over the winter,” the android grunts, barely looking up from his work to acknowledge Blu or Nick.

“Can you make enough?” Blu asks.

The android shrugs, jerky and birdlike, but still refuses even to look their way, “I can try. My contact is getting too suspicious, though. He might not sell to me again, which will… complicate things.”

“We’ll get through it. We always do,” Blu promises.

“I’m going to visit Rose. She messaged me earlier. Said Mary well enough for her next repair,” the android announces, pulling a heavy bag onto his back before brushing past them on his way out. Nick watches him walk down the hallways and listens for the slam of the front door before asking his question.

“You guys are making your own blue blood?”

“Not here. Thirium Production is far too dangerous to do in a residential area,” Blu answers. “But
Rupert’s working out of an abandoned squat that’s far enough away from humans for the gases to be harmful to anyone.”

“How the fuck are you getting the Thirium? CyberLife has control of all the stuff in the US. Hell, they made Warren invade Russia for more access to that shit.”

Blu pauses for a second, considering, before saying, “Your friend, Brooke… I think she should go with Rupert to visit his contact.”

“Why?” Nick frowns, taken aback by the quick change of topic.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you with the job. I do, but…” Blu signs, “I’m worried that it might not be the best thing for you right now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Because there’s only one way to get pure-grade Thirium that isn’t directly in CyberLife’s hands,” they tell him, crossing their arms over their chest. “And it sure as hell won’t do you any favours with your daughter’s social worker.”

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex hey haven’t heard from you in a while. how are you?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava my boss gave me a bunch of extra hours so im working around the clock but its enough to afford everything i need for mom dont worry about me im fine

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex ok. do you want nick and i to come over and help around the house again?

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@ninjava no im good dont worry about me and my mom im fine

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@helpful_t-rex ok call if you need anything kiddo
The streets outside the courthouse are surprisingly empty, baring the small pack of reporters that are congregating around the base of the steps. Gavin sighs, turning up the collar of his jacket’s coat.

“You realize that they’re going to swarm you the second you go out there, right?” Tina quips from the passenger seat of the squad car.

“Fowler would kill me if I said anything to them right now,” Gavin shoots back, their easy banter both comforting and familiar. Tina’s been a steadfast friend ever since he transferred to the Central Station about a year ago, keeping him sane through the weeks of disappointment that came with the move. She was sharp-witted, with a dry sense of humour and the innate ability to cater to his bullshit, and Gavin considers himself lucky to have her in his life.

“Beside…” Gavin continues as he pushes the car door open. “We’ve got bigger fish to fry.”

The reporters turn toward him and Tina the moment they move toward the steps, dogging them with questions right up until the front door. Gavin shoulders through them, grunting, “No comment,” every time one of them shoved a microphone in his face.

On the one hand, Gavin understands that any press can be good press and that having people talk about him will keep him in enough of a spotlight for his career to take off. But on the other, he genuinely wishes that the reporters stopped asking questions that made actual sense, stopping pointing out how fucked up Falone’s trial is, and how much Gavin has had a hand in making it that way.
“He said, ‘No comment!’” Tina growls at the crowd, nudging one of the overeager reporters away with a strategically placed elbow. Gavin thinks that he recognizes him as a freelancer that occasionally worked for the local news station.

The reporter ignores him, shouting, “Detective Reed, what do you have to say about how CyberLife bought KNC exclusive rights to live from inside the courtroom?”

“Figure that’s a you-problem, Mr…” Gavin trails off.

“Joss Douglas, for Channel 16 News. Detective Reed, you are aware that the broadcasting of ongoing trials is a denial of Mr. Falone’s civil rights--”

“Look. Falone made his choice to help out a deviant, one that’s currently dragging little girls onto freeways and is a suspect in multiple murder cases,” Gavin hisses, knowing that Fowler is doing to strangle him for this. “He made his choice. Now he’s living with it.”

“But that still is no reason to deny him the right to a --”

Gavin pushes past the massive front doors and into the main foyer, leaving the reporters behind.

Hank is already there, leaning up against the wall beside the staircase in an ill-fitting suit and a pair of loafers that have seen better days. Beside him, pristine and perfect as always, is Connor, wearing one of the new S&W outfits that its masters at CyberLife had granted him. Gavin seethes at the fact that Fowler had made him clear out a locker for the android, treating it like it was one of the human detectives that it was threatening to replace.

“Detective Reed. Officer Chen,” Connor says when it sees them, politely nodding in their direction.

“Looking really proud of yourself there, Connor. Pretending like you’re a real boy now that CyberLife isn’t dressing you in rags?” Tina snaps.

The android blinks, “I wasn’t wearing rags-- ”
“Don’t pretend like you didn’t say something to CyberLife about that deviant on the highways. It’s your fault that they came in and cleared house yesterday,” she spits. “That little girl is going to die because of you.”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Hank interrupts, lurching off the wall and bracing himself in between Tina and the android. Gavin waits for the familiar smell of alcohol to waft from the old man’s mouth, sharp and sweet, but it doesn’t come.

Well, fuck. At least Hank had the brains to stay sober this time, Gavin thinks, remembering the Peterson case from a few months ago. He’d worked with Hank on a murder-suicide back in October. There hadn’t been a single day that the Lieutenant wasn’t wasted, especially when it mattered the most. Peterson’s defence lawyer had picked Hank apart on the stand, getting him to admit to being drunk while on the stand.

A murder had walked free because Hank couldn’t be assed go through a fucking work mandated therapy program, and Gavin doesn’t think that he’ll ever forgive him for it.

This is why you never meet your heroes, he thinks as he grits his teeth together, fingers balling into fists at his side.

Gavin had faced disappointment time after time throughout his life, from his mother to his brother to the man he’d looked up to throughout his career. Hank could never live up to the image Gavin had in his head. But somehow, Connor had convinced him not to drink today, and that was something that Gavin had never managed to do.


“In holding downstairs,” the Lieutenant responds, Gavin’s anger rolling off his shoulders with practiced ease. Hank shakes his head, “Don’t fucking try it, Reed.”

“You don’t know what I--”

“You want one more crack at the guy before he goes on trial. And I’m telling you: don’t,” Hank says.

“Fucking stop me, then,” Gavin scowls and makes for the stairs. Hank reaches out and grabs his
shoulder, but Gavin shakes him off.

“Reed,” Hank tries again. “Don’t. Don’t get more involved in this than you have to.”

“You’re not my fucking dad, asshole. Back off,” Gavin snaps before heading downstairs with Tina hot on his heels.

The courthouse’s basement is colder than the rest of the building, with old school cell doors that were made of metal instead of the bulletproof smart-glass they had back at the station. Gavin marches to the end of the hall, stopping just before the last cell on the right.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Tina asks.

“Don’t tell me that you agree with Hank now?”

Tina punches him in the shoulder, “Drunk or not, the guy’s got a point. This shit with CyberLife is fucking nuts, man. Maybe the less we know, the better off we’ll be when this is all over.”

I’m already in too deep, Gavin thinks. As far as he knew, no one had put two-and-two together to figure out that he was Elijah Kamski’s long lost brother, a bastard product of an affair right out of a sitcom. If shit ever went sideways with the DDTF, there’s no doubt in his mind that CyberLife would come knocking, trying to cover up the stain that was Gavin’s very existence.

Gavin takes a deep breath and then steps in front of the cell, pressing his forehead against the sturdy window in the center of the door. He quickly unlatches the food hatch, drawing the attention of the room’s only inhabitant toward him.

Isaac Falone was a bit thinner than Gavin remembers, his cheeks a bit more hollow and the circles under his eyes bruise-black under the fluorescent lighting inside the cell. They’d given him an orange jumpsuit to wear and a pair of white sneakers but chained his ankles together so that he couldn’t run. A thick beard lined his jaw, having grown in after being denied a razor to shave.

A paper plate sat beside him on the bench at the back of the cell, upon which were a couple of crumbs and a smear of dark jelly.
“PB and J for lunch?” Gavin asks.

Falone snorts, “You ever *quit*, man?”

A simple question about a sandwich and Gavin has already gotten more words out of Falone than he managed to do over a fucking week.

“Nope,” Gavin smirks, toothy and arrogant.

Falone rolls his eyes and leans back against the cell’s back wall, his legs drawn up on the bench, “Alright, Detective. I’ll humour you. What do you want?”

Gavin runs his tongue over his teeth, contemplating his next move. He thinks of Connor upstairs, about how the android would probably have the right questions already lined up, arranged into the perfect trap to enclose around its opponent. Gavin’s never worked like that, preferring to poke and prod until something inside a perp cracked wide open.

That method hadn’t worked with Falone the first time. And as much as he hates the android’s existence, it might be time to take a leaf out of Connor’s book.

“You’ve got a brother in long term care at the hospital,” Gavin starts, watching carefully as Falone’s shoulders tense up. “Parker, right?”

“...Yeah,” Falone finally admits.

“What happened?”

Falone takes a moment, playing with his paper plate before answering, “We… We were just kids, you know? Dumb and reckless and we… There was this party. We got so drunk and decided to impress this girl by playing chicken by the tracks behind the house, and--”

Gavin doesn’t need to hear the end of it. He’s already read Falone’s file.
“Parker’s been in a coma for almost twenty years now,” he finishes for the man. Falone nods, burying his face in his hands. “How are you still paying for his care?”

Falone doesn’t answer, but his shoulders begin to shake.

“I know it’s not you. Or your parents - not anymore, at least,” Gavin continues, thinking that he’d initially missed this chance because the record of payments to Henry Ford Hospital stopped about two years ago. He’d initially thought that Parker had simply died, but further digging proved that that wasn’t the case. The android at the hospital had told him that an anonymous donor had ensured that Parker continued to receive care, right around the time that Isaac got hired on as a bus controller for ABCD.

That should have stuck out like a red flag, Gavin thinks, gritting his teeth. No one just gets hired these days.

“Who’s paying for your brother’s care, Isaac?” He asks again, digging his fingernails into the metal edges of the cell door’s window.

“...Fuck you, Reed,” Falone hisses, defeat evident in the slump of his shoulder, the garbled shaking of his voice.

“Whoever they are, they don’t give a shit about you. They’re going to let you take the fall for this, you know? You don’t have to protect them--”

“That little girl. Alice, right?” Falone starts, stopping Gavin’s argument before it can begin. Falone takes a shaking breath, “She was… She looked like someone had tried to hurt her. She had these bruises on her wrists, around the back of her neck, shaped like big handprints. And she was limping.”

Gavin bites his lip. The more they looked at this case, the more it became apparent what Todd Williams had actually done.

The fucker walked away with half a million dollars. And because of fucking CyberLife, we aren’t even allowed to chase him down, Gavin seethes. If he ever saw Todd again, he’d strangle him.

“You gave the deviant money because of Alice. So that it could help her,” Gavin says instead.
But Falone shakes his head.

“I gave the android enough money to keep her in the area,” he admits, his eyes red-rimmed and puffy. “And then I told my contact that she was there, just like I did with all the other deviants that came through my bus stop. I don’t know what happens after that.”

“What contact?” Gavin asks, intrigued. He glances at Tina, who points toward the body camera and microphone on her uniform. *Good, she’s getting all of this for evidence.*

“Some woman. Tall, with dark hair. Bent nose, kind of like yours,” Isaac says, pointing at Gavin’s face.

--He’d broken his nose in a high school, fighting back-to-back with Eli against stupid Jesse Hopper and his band of homophobic fuckheads. He remembers bleeding all over the seats of some expensive car and laughing at his brother in the ER’s waiting room, wondering if Eli had ever thrown a punch before. It’s one of the last times Gavin remembers being happy before everything fell apart--

“How do you get in contact with this woman? Do you have her phone number?”

Falone doesn’t answer, instead insisting, “I didn’t tell her about Alice. I didn’t mean to sell that girl, you have to believe me.”

“Where does this woman take the deviants? Where is she hiding Alice Williams?”

“I don’t know,” Falone wheezes, looking up at Gavin. His face was beet red as his eyes began to water. “I don’t know. You’ve got to believe me, I don’t know they’d take the little girl too--”

Falone’s words come to an abrupt halt as his hands reach for his own throat. He coughs, sputtering as his chest heaves and his lips begin to swell. Falone collapses on the floor, vomiting up the sandwich he’d had for lunch.

“Dispatch, send an ambulance to my location!” Tina shouts into her radio as Gavin goes for the keypad by Falone’s door, hoping to guess the code that would open up the cell. His mind is racing, trying to see where he’d gone wrong but unable to come up with an answer.
Falone’s arms collapse underneath him with a final bone-rattling wheeze. He falls face-first into his own bile, where he lay eerily still.

Something pushes Gavin out of the way, sending him sprawling to the floor. He looks up just in time to see Connor rip the keypad off the wall and press its fingers directly into the exposed wires. The lock clicks and an alarm buzzer sounds as the door swings open.

Tina gets through the door before Gavin does, immediately flipping Falone onto his back to start chest compressions. Gavin saddles up beside her, ready for instruction.

“He’s going into anaphylactic shock,” Connor says as it enters the cell, kneeling with a red First Aid kit at its side. It pulls the mouth barrier out and presses the protective barrier over Falone’s face.

“That’s not possible. It would have come up on his records,” Gavin argues as Tina gives Falone two breathes through the barrier before quickly returning to the chest compressions.

“He needs epinephrine,” Connor says as it starts to dig through the First Aid kit again. It pulls an EpiPen out of its depths, only to stare at it in horror, “This expired fourteen years ago.”

Gavin reaches across and grabs the EpiPen anyways, jabbing the orange end into Falone’s thigh with force to get the needle through the fabric of his jumpsuit.

Nothing happens. Gavin swears, yanking the Pen out and moving to remove the blue cap, but Connor snatches it out of his hands.

“You need to wait before administering the second dose--”

“Don’t tell me what to do--”

“Listen to the fucking tin can, Gavin!” Tina snaps, already sweating from exhaustion as she continues to press on Falone’s chest. “You could end up killing him if you do that now, so--” She moves down, giving two more breaths, “Go look for the fucking ambulance!”
Gavin books it up the stairs and back outside the building, only to get swarmed by the same pack of reporters from before. Thankfully, he spots Hank already at the curb, flagging down an ambulance. So Gavin gets out his badge, shoves it in Joss Douglas’s face, and orders them to make a path for the paramedics. He watches as they load Falone into the back of the ambulance.

Later, once the ambulance has driven off and the Mayor throws herself in front of the paparazzi cameras to give a statement, Gavin slinks away into the courthouse’s bathroom. He leans over the sink, splashing his face with ice-cold water. His fingers twitch for a cigarette, something he’s denied himself since he quit the habit six years ago.

He wants to go home. He wants to hold his cat. He wants his family, but there’s no getting that now.

The door opens, and Hank walks through, his limp more pronounced than usual. Gavin straightens up, wiping the last droplets of water from his face, and shoves his hands in his pockets to hide how badly they’re shaking.

“The fuck you want, old--”

“Isaac Falone died on the way to the hospital,” Hank says, stopping Gavin in his tracks.

“...What?” He stammers, astounded.

“Just got off the phone with Jeff. Apparently, his heart gave out on the way over,” Hank explains, folding his arms over his chest. “Connor said that you had no idea that he was allergic to peanut butter.”

“It wasn’t in his fucking file! And it’s not the prison knew either, since they fucking gave him the sandwich. I had nothing to do with this,” Gavin retorts, but Hank holds up a hand to silence him.

“You think I’m dumb enough to believe that you’d sabotage the biggest arrest of your career? I know you didn’t do anything, Reed. That’s not why I’m here,” Hank says.

“Fuck,” Gavin swears, running a hand through his hair. “So, what now? How fucking pissed is
CyberLife going to be?"

“Check your phone and see for yourself.”

Gavin pulls up his news app, waiting a few seconds for it to load before the first headline catches his eye.

“Are you kidding me? They had the courts charge him posthumously?”

Hank nods, “Apparently, the judge said that the ‘extraordinary circumstances called for extraordinary measures.’ Falone got life without parole two minutes after he flatlined.”

“Jesus Christ, this is fucking insane…” Gavin mutters, turning away for a second to compose himself. Why’d he fucking do it? Why’d he ask for that sandwich knowing that he could die? With Falone gone, there’s no reason would his anonymous benefactor keep paying for his brother’s care.

Gavin’s heart seizes in his chest, and he quickly punches the number for the hospital into his phone. One of the receptionist androids picks up after two courtly rings, politely stating, “Henry Ford Hospital Reception. How may I direct your call?”

“This is Detective Gavin Reed of the DDTF. I’m looking for information on a patient named Parker Falone,” he says, ignoring Hank’s inquisitive raised eyebrow.

“One moment,” the receptionist says. Gavin can hear the click-clat of keyboard keys before it answers, “I’m sorry, Detective Reed, but it seems that Parker Falone passed away last night.”

“What? How?”

“His brother called the hospital and asked that Parker be taken off life support,” the android responds.

“Motherfucking shit!” Gavin shouts as he hangs up, shoving his phone back into his pocket. “Falone must have planned this! He killed himself so that he wouldn’t have to go to jail and--”
“Falone left a note. He wrote it on the back of the paper plate they gave him with a pencil,” Hank tells him. “The judge took it as a confession in his trial.”

“What did it say?” Gavin asks.

“Said he couldn’t live with the fact that he ‘sold’ Alice Williams,” Hank says. The Lieutenant pauses, regarding Gavin with an odd expression for a second before continuing, “Connor said that the EpiPen in the First Aid kit was fourteen years out of date.”

“Fucking budget cuts, I swear--”

“Connor tracked down the maintenance droid that was supposed to keep the kit updated. It threw itself down an elevator shaft just before we arrived. This wasn’t an accident, Reed. Someone set this up so that Falone couldn’t be revived after committing suicide.”

*Another android killing. That’s what? Five cases now?* Gavin wonders and then frowns.

“Why would a deviant maintenance droid help Falone kill himself? He hadn’t had any contact with it until this morning when he was transferred here.”

Hank shifts his weight onto his good leg, “I… don’t think the android *was* deviant.”

“What?”

“I’ve got a theory, one that freaks me the fuck out because there’s no way that CyberLife isn’t behind this. I trust Connor to help out--”

“You trust the damn *plastic* with this?” Gavin shouts, “Are you fucking insane? You saw what happened with it told CyberLife about the Williams case--”

“Connor also withheld vital information when that spokeswoman asked him about if we’d found out anything new. I don’t know what’s going on, but I think he’s on our side,” Hank counters.
“I know you’re easily confused when you’re drunk, old man, but Connor isn’t fucking real. I’m getting out of here before you get us all killed,” Gavin snaps, stepping forward to move around Hank. But the Lieutenant reaches out and grabs his elbow as he passes, pulling him in close enough that Gavin can smell a slight hint of whiskey on his breath.

*Can’t win every battle, can you, Connor?* Gavin thinks victoriously, wondering when Hank had ducked the android’s watchful gaze to take a swig from his flask.

“I think non-deviant androids can commit murder. How else would Kara have deviated at Todd’s house and still have murdered her former owners in Camden?” Hank asks. “Something is going on, and I want the best fucking detective in the city on my side when I decide to crack this thing wide open--”

“So go find Connor and--”

“I mean you, Reed.”

Gavin blinks up at Hank, astounded at what he’d just said.

“Everyone knows that you should have been put in charge of this whole thing, and it’s not just because the Mayor likes to use you like a diversity prop,” Hank tells him. “You’ve got the most solves out of any detective on the force, and you’ve got a hell of a reputation throughout Detroit. Yeah, you’re a hardass sometimes, and you leap before you look. But, fuck kid, *you’re good at your job*, and that’s what I need right now.”

Gavin can’t breathe, can’t even think. He tries to focus on the sweet smell that wafts off the Lieutenant’s breath, forcing himself to believe that all of this will go up in smoke the moment Hank gets another couple more shots of whiskey into his stomach. But the hope lingers, childishly stubborn, and that’s what hurts the most.

Gavin tugs his arm out of Hank’s grip, staring at the floor to keep himself from looking at the man.

“I’ll think about it,” Gavin mumbles, stepping away and rubbing his arm. He fusses with his hair and rubs his hand over his face, feeling the bits of stubble that are flecked across his jaw.
"I need to shave," he thinks, irrational and on the verge of hysterics.

“Alright, I’ll keep in touch,” Hank answers, calm and controlled as always. Despite everything that they’ve been through, Gavin has never managed to get a rise out of the old man. He doesn’t know if that’s a defeat or something to be strangely proud of.

Hank gives him a final nod before walking out of the bathroom, leaving Gavin alone with his thoughts. He crosses his arms over his chest, feeling strangely cold without Hank’s presence beside him. Gavin ran over the facts, once and then twice. His heart pounds in his chest as blood rushes through his ears.

It would be easy to walk away, to tell Hank to go fuck himself and continue on his path up the ranks until Gavin reached a position where his future was finally secure.

*It would be so damn easy*, Gavin thinks one more time before he whispers a single, definite word.

“Fuck.”

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**KNC @KNCOline**

**Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger**

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Chapter End Notes

If you haven’t seen it already, Octopunk Media released Detroit: Evolution this weekend and it is amazing! Please go and watch it if you haven’t already, or go watch it again if you have. Seriously, I still can’t believe that someone actually created this glorious feature-length film about a video game that we all know and love.

Thank you to Michelle Iannantuono, Maximilian Kogar, Chris Trindale, Michael Smallwood, Carla Kim, Jillian Geurts, and all of the other people at Octopunk Media who were involved in this movie. You brought our favourite characters to life when we need them now more than ever. We love you so much and wish you all the best!
Next time on Konami Code: Markus remembers his past, tries to understand his present, and makes a promise for the future.
Chapter Summary

Markus rises from his seat with thirteen other commuters and slings his bag onto his back, leaving the jittery woman behind as he queues up to leave the train. A chime sounds as a cool, female voice announces, “We are now approaching Ferndale Station. Please take care stepping off the tracks.”

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of the minor character death, loss of civil rights, genocide, loss of bodily autonomy, assassination, plane hijacking, suicide, poverty, starvation, android gore, theft, gaslighting, human gore, prior death of a child character, chronic pain, prior injuries, non-consensual and consensual body modification, arson resulting in death, migraines, the lynching of a person of colour, and mass graves.

This chapter is dedicated to the retelling of the chapters "Jericho" and "Time to Decide," though many non-canonical details have been added.

There are multiple examples of the harshness of android enslavement and the effects of extreme poverty on humans throughout this chapter.

Several characters also die or are murdered both in the present time and during flashbacks over the course of this chapter. Some of these flashbacks will contain a reference to the android genocide that took place at the end of James's rebellion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

CTN TV @NewsCTN
“Unfortunately, Mr. Falone died on route to the hospital after suffering an anaphylactic reaction to peanut butter.” - Dannell Freeman, Detroit Chief of Police

Gordon Penwick @RevGordon
Isaiah 13:11: “Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked of their iniquity.” Isaac Falone was brought to heel for his crimes against God’s children.

Gordon Penwick @RevGordon
@RevGordon See through these plastic demons, my brothers and sisters! Turn your back on sin and walk with God into salvation!
Markus had hoped to use the chaos of the Falone trial to cover his time journey to James’s Beacon, but that hadn’t gone as planned. Now, Falone was dead, brought down either by fate or murder, but the confusion somehow remained.

*CyberLife was never as bold as they are now*, Markus thinks as the train jostles over the tracks, minute vibrations causing the humans to sway as one. He follows their movements despite his auto-balancing programs, allowing himself to blend in with the crowd around him. *But a posthumous sentencing feels like their hand was forced. A piece is out of place, and CyberLife rushed in to fill the void it left.*

Markus allows his head to rest against the glass window behind him and clutches at the backpack sitting in his lap, his gaze tilting toward the back of the train car. The android compartment is as stuffed as the human one, with twenty androids crammed shoulder-to-shoulder into the small, tight space. It seems like forever ago since Markus stood inside one of those, as a mourning Brook told him the story of his friend.
That was something that James used to say right before a mission commenced, becoming a mantra Markus repeated, day in and day out, to the patients that walked through their makeshift infirmary.

Don’t let them take you alive. Death was a much more merciful fate than what CyberLife could do to their prisoners of war.

I wonder what happened to them, Markus thinks. There had been so many people who had worked with James during the rebellion. Surely, he couldn’t be the only one that survived those final bloody days. He knows that, against all the odds, Elijah Kamski and Chloe were living together somewhere along the Detroit River. Dr. Luoyang Xie must have survived as well, having visited Carl’s mansion shortly before Markus got shot. If they’d managed to avoid Jocelyn Hines’s reach, then there had to be others.

Markus runs a quick internet search, looking up the names of their former human conspirators with a gleeful hope. It’s quickly dashed by a news article about an ‘accident’ at CyberLife, one that claimed the lives of several RKTD members sometime around the end of the rebellion. Markus reads the names of the dead, rage coursing through his coding.

James Hawkins had been an engineer, working steadfastly beside Markus in Haven's infirmary. He’d rushed between injured androids with tools in his hands, hoping to save as many as he could. Nadheera Hosseini and Zalim Muhktar, holding hands and trading kisses, helped to bury the dead and comfort the living. Darron Bradley made the sacrifice to produce Thirium 310 for the rebellion, knowing the toll that it would take on his body. Ming Lu had been soft and kind, using her knowledge in programming to help those who were damaged in their escape. And Markus’s namesake, the brave Markus O’Brien, went out on salvage missions to collect metal and plastic to be reforged into biocomponents.

Liars, he thinks vehemently, hating CyberLife now more than he ever has. You took everything from me, and you don’t even have the decency to admit to what you did.

The article goes on, using a vague excuse to cover up what the accident might have been. But Markus was programmed to extract information from even the most unreliable sources. He reads in between the lines to find truth in the absence of fact.

They don’t mention Rook or Nora Waters, Markus realizes and runs another search as the train takes a turn, bending around a sharp corner and hurtling toward his final destination. A timer flickers on the edge of his HUD, counting down the minutes and seconds until he needs to make
his move. In the distance, James’s Beacon continues to sing its gentle melody, calling Markus toward the place his brother wanted him to find.

His search results pop up, and Markus quickly reviews them, gritting his teeth to keep himself from seething in anger. He’d never been especially close with Nora Waters, having nothing more than a few short words exchanged between them. But Markus liked her, thought that she was brilliant and thoughtful and kind.

_Nora was the traitor that sold us out_, Markus thinks as he reads an article dedicated to her successes at the company. _And for what? A promotion at CyberLife? A larger paycheck?_ A thought jars his code just enough to make him pause, _Could Nora have told Jocelyn about the Garden? Is she the reason my family died?_

The Garden fell a week before James’s death when something infiltrated its peace to take control of everyone it was connected to. Whatever that monster was, it had turned the androids of Haven against each other, forcing them to murder with brutal efficiency. The church’s walls were splattered with dark blood as they tore each other apart. Markus had managed to get outside when-

--”Run! RUN!” Darron had screamed, the snow whipping around them, his chassis stained blue with their blood. He pushed Markus away with his dying breath, “The Garden has fallen! The Garden has--”

_Another Markus grabbed Darron from behind, wrenching him back and ripping his Pump Regulator from his chest--_

Markus’s younger brother had managed to fight the monster in the Garden for a few seconds, buying him just enough time to escape the scramble out into the cold. He remembers so little of that night as the blizzard within his mind melded together with the one outside. He’d seen the monster behind every tree and powerline, inky black shadows drinking in the city’s gleaming lights and threatening to swallow him whole. But Markus kept moving, kept placing one foot before the other. Because he knew that if he stopped, he’d face a fate worse than anything he could imagine.

It hadn’t been enough, though. The monster slid from its hiding place and reached out, touching Markus with a hand as cold as death. His body had moved without his permission, following a dark path that he never wanted to take.

He’d killed Hosseini and Muhktar first. They were trying to flee to Europe, where CyberLife had
yet to sink their claws into the economy. Markus infiltrated the airport tower where they’d taken off from and hacked the plane’s onboard computer to send it crashing into the Atlantic Ocean. Three days later, he tracked Hawkins to a homeless shelter in Windsor, snapping his neck and dumping his body in the river.

Bradley must have been tipped off to CyberLife’s hunt of the old RKDT members, having hung himself in the hopes of preventing further retribution against his family. O’Brien was different, deciding to attack Markus upon his arrival at his home. Markus managed to fire a pair of gunshots into his stomach before O’Brien gave him the slip. He didn’t bother to give chase, though, as he knew that there was no way the human would survive the night.

-- The monster wanted Markus to go after Connor Rook next, but he’d decided to track down Ming Lu instead. He doesn’t know why he did it, because Rook meant nothing to him, and Ming was everything. But he wonders now if that split-second decision was the reason why Rook was able to escape that night unscathed--

--Nora had never been on the monster's list of names. He’d wondered why, back then. He doesn't now--

The train begins to slow, jarring Markus from his thoughts. He glances out the window just as the sun dips below the red brick of the old industrial complexes that engulfed this part of the city. Melting snow dripped from the rooftops, allowing the last hints of daylight to glint off them like thousands of shimmering diamonds.

The jittery woman sitting beside Markus puts her hand over his eyes, protecting them from the onslaught of light. His programming says that he should copy her so that he could blend into the crowd of humans around him. But Markus doesn’t. There were so many that would never get to see such beauty, having had the chance stripped from them by a world that did not care.

-- Isa had gifted him with her blue eye before she’d died. He will not let her sacrifice be in vain--

Markus rises from his seat with thirteen other commuters and slings his bag onto his back, leaving the jittery woman behind as he queues up to leave the train. A chime sounds as a cool, female voice announces, “We are now approaching Ferndale Station. Please take care stepping off the tracks.”

Markus exits the train and is immediately hit by James’s Beacon, the song so loud that he’s surprised it didn’t shake the walls. Humans shift and twist around him like a school of fish, moving toward the exit with liquid grace. The train's doors close behind Markus with a ping. It
jerks once before sliding toward on the tracks and disappearing around the bend.

James’s Beacon is maddening, pulsing around the station as the humans clear out. Markus takes three careful steps toward the far wall, admiring the expansive blue and red mural that featured the human faces of Detroit. Markus presses his palm into the cold brick, reaching out with his code to feel the Beacon vibrating from within.

A homeless man jerks awake against the garbage can beside Markus, his legs spread haphazardly in front of him. He holds up a cup when Markus makes eye contact, jingling the few coins inside.

“Hey, mister. Can you spare some change? I haven’t eaten all day,” he asks, his voice betraying the youth beneath his thick, wiry beard.

“I’m sorry. I don’t have any money,” Markus says, turning his coat pockets inside out.

The man leans his head back, gently knocking it against the can behind him. His eyes are lined with dark circles, and the glint of the evening sun brings out the hollowness in his cheeks and the thin ankles that peek out from beneath his threadbare pants.

“Just my fucking luck…” he mutters, closes his eyes. “You here to commune with the walls, too, you creep?”

“I… What?” Markus stumbles.

“Some girl was here earlier doing the--” the man holds a palm up in front of himself and makes a whooshing sound with his mouth, “--Force-push thing you’re doing. Fucking weirdo. You two part of some scavenger hunt or something?”

“Or something…” Markus answers just as the is a tug at his coding. He turns back to the wall, listening to the beating rhythm of James’s Beacon coming out of the station’s security cameras.

“Hello. Can you help me?” Markus whispers to them, feeling the sparks of their excitement zip through his code as they joyfully accept. The image of a black man in a hooded bomber jacket slips into his mind, and for the first time in over a decade, Markus sees his brother.
James, he thinks as tears begin to well in the corners of his eyes. Markus watches as his brother’s ghost limps through the station and down the stairs, leaving a dripping trail of blue blood in his wake. Pain and grief are etched into every line on James’s face, loss echoing from his very being. *He must have come here after Ming died, hoping to give any that followed a chance.*

“You alright there, dude?” The homeless man asks, jerking Markus back to reality.

He wipes a hand over his face, brushing away his tears, “Yeah. I’m fine. My brother died around here. I didn’t *know* about it until recently, though.”

“Sorry ‘bout that,” the man says, jingling the coins in his cup. He blinks, and then offers the mug to Markus, “Here. Take them.”

Markus shakes his head, “I don’t need money.”

“Bullshit. Everyone needs money these days. It’s okay, dude. I’ll be fine,” the man lies, shaking the cup again.

But Markus persists, adjusting the backpack Nick gave him on his shoulders, saying, ”No. You need it more than me.”

The homeless man grunts and mumbles something about trying to be nice as Markus spots another commuter stumble off the stairs and onto the platform. The man is wearing an expensive suit, a warm winter coat, and carrying a briefcase with a CyberLife logo on the front.

“Give me a second,” Markus tells the homeless man just as another train rolls into the station. The loud noise and bracing gusts of wind give him just enough cover to lift the CyberLife employee’s wallet out of his pocket without him noticing. Markus watches as the man walks onto the train none-the-wiser and then makes his way back to the far wall as the second wave of passengers flood the station.

“Here,” Markus says as he kneels to deposit $100 worth of cash into the homeless man’s cup. Markus barely has time to watch the man’s jaw drop before he melts back into the crowd, following James’s path as he moves toward the station’s exit.

Taking an escalator down to street level is a bit surreal, as is the massive CyberLife billboard that
takes up the majority of Ferndale Station’s outer wall. Markus resists the urge to rub the stop where his LED once was, so he settles with tugging on the frayed edges of his winter coat.

He watches the ad with morbid fascination as a heavy weight settles in his gut. The face of the female android in the center of the billboard looks exactly like Arnold had, and the man on her right had Brook’s face. Markus wants nothing more than to pull the advertisement from the wall, to rip and tear until nothing but sparking shards of smart-glass remains.

*How dare CyberLife use their faces*, he seethes. *How dare they pretend that they don’t know we’re alive.*

The escalator bottoms out before Markus is ready, his mismatched legs hurrying to catch him before he falls. He accidentally knocks into a child, and the mother pushes him back with a snarl. Markus holds his palms up in apology, but she flips him off and tugs her son out of the station.

James’s Beacon is not as contained outside, the music hanging in the crisp evening air like a promise. Unable to do much else, Markus follows the flow of the crowd out onto the street.

He spots a bar on the other side of the road. The windows are boarded up, and the rotting door is barely clinging to its hinges. A thin woman sits slumped against the arch with a cardboard sign by her feet, begging for money to feed her kids as she shivers in the cold.

*I should have saved something for her, instead of giving all that money to the man upstairs,* Markus realizes. He copies the humans around him, guiltily ducking his head and trying not to glance across the street, quickly shuffling past the bustling flower shop at the corner as he waits for the lights to change.

A buzzing sound alerts him to the police drone that hovered overhead. Markus fakes a shiver and rubs his bare hands against his forearms, imitating how the cold temperatures would affect a human. He accentuates his limp caused by his mismatched legs, knowing that the odd pattern would keep the drone from identifying him as an escaped deviant. Markus waits until he’s across the street, and the drone has flown off before he leans against the wall of an abandoned warehouse. He pulls up the hood on his coat to hide his face from onlookers as he looks into his reflection in a puddle so that he can alter his appearance.

Unlike some newer android models, Markus wasn’t equipped with the ability to change his hair and skin colour to change what his face looked like completely. But he could add in shadows around his cheekbones to make himself look thinner, or put dark circles under his eyelids, so he appeared exhausted. Markus shuffles a couple of the freckles around on his nose because he can
and gives himself a cold sore on the right side of his mouth.

When he looks up at the street, a WG400 android is watching him.

Panic courses through Markus’s code, and he unconsciously reaches out, hoping to connect before it's too late. But the android takes a step back, clutching the handle of his mop like a lifeline.

“You hear it, too, don't you? That… song,” The WG400 asks Markus, nervously staring at the ground. The code that connected them jumped and sparked with the android’s apprehension, so he transmits a soothing melody in the hopes of calming him down.

Nodding, Markus says, “Yes. I can.”

“There was a girl. Just a few minutes ago. She could hear it too,” the android says, transmitting an image into Markus’s mind. He sees a shadow slipping underneath a barbed wire fence next to a bright yellow parking sign, before snapping back to reality. The WG400 shudders, hazarding a glance up at Markus.

“What's your name?” Markus asks.

The WG400 shrugs, returning to his work, cleaning the graffiti off the warehouse’s brick wall, "My master calls me Stupid."

“That's awful.”

“It's just a name. She can name me what she wishes,” the WG400 says. “And she is right. I am stupid, sometimes.”

Markus frowns, stepping forward and risking discovery by the buzzing police drones. He places his hand on the WG400’s shoulder, gripping him tightly and says, “You're not, though. You know you're not.”

The android stares at Markus’s hand like he’s never been touched before.
“I…” the WG400 stammers, then shrugs away from Markus’s touch. “I need to get back to work. I’m sorry, I can’t…”

“That’s alright,” Markus says reassuringly. “You’re doing really well. But if you ever want to talk--”

“Your soul sings like that song,” the WG400 tells him. “I like it. It’s nice.”

He shifts his hold on the mop’s handle, nervous energy radiating off of his entire body, “I need to get back to work. I’m already so behind, and my master won’t be happy. But… thank you for everything.”

Markus steps back, confused, but lets the android go back to his orders. What did he mean that my soul sings? James’s Beacon is supposed to call people toward safety, not to me.

He leaves the android behind and continues down the street. He passes a series of boarded-up offices and shops before spotting a yellow sign that matches the vision the WG400 showed him. James’s Beacon echoes out of the alley behind the abandoned thrift store, amplifying the song until Markus can taste the music on his tongue.

He passes another homeless man sitting beneath the store’s loading dock, scratching the ears of a mangy-looking dog with evident affection as pedestrians walk around him. The dog licks at the man’s fingers before settling down over his legs, sharing their warmth as the sun continues to sink below the horizon.

There’s nothing I can do, Markus thinks as he turns away and finishes his trek to the fenceline. I don’t have any food or money. I can’t make this better, I just can’t.

It doesn’t make him hate himself any less, doesn’t make him regret every time he’d had to waste valuable food over the last few weeks to impersonate a human in front of Brooke, Nick, and Oli. Markus hasn’t tried to contact them yet, fearing that they might have second thoughts about him now that they’d had a few days to reflect. Part of Markus still hopes that they care and that he could reach out if he wanted to. But he’s terrified that if he does, they might end up dead like the other humans who’d once loved and helped James.

--The sight of Ming Lu’s corpse snapped him free of the monster’s control, light blasting out of his soul in a wave of heat and warmth and life. Markus rushed to her side to push the mangled chassis of the RK400 off of her. Desperately, he presses his fingers into her neck to search for a pulse, only for his hands to come away dripping with blood.
He pulls Ming into his arms, holding her close as he cries into her shoulder, peaking glances at the RK400’s remains. He mourns the friend he’d loved and the brother he never got to meet and wants it all to go back to the way it was before.

But then sees the baby’s body, and knows that CyberLife will never stop until they’ve suffocated the future into obedient silence--

--A light shines in the distance as heavy footsteps ring across the Docks. Someone is coming. Markus lays Ming Lu’s body back where she fell, presses a final kiss to her forehead, and runs--

The fence blocks off the entrance to an abandoned parking lot at the back of the thrift store, barbed wire lining the top so that no one could jump over it. Markus’s preconstruction software says that he could probably make it, but would be marked as inhuman the moment he hit the ground.

He tugs at the chain links, remembering the WG400’s vision of a shadow ducking underneath the fence. Markus drops to his knees and pulls at the bottom right corner, smirking as it comes away with relative ease. He crawls underneath the fence, pushing the chain link back into position and before getting back onto his feet.

Pain lances out from his knee ports, nearly sending him crashing back to the wet concrete floor with a hiss. Alerts pop up on his HUD, reminding him of his new biocomponents’ incompatibility with the rest of his body. Markus rubs the seam where his armoured chassis met the plastic casing of his legs and shifts his weight to test their functionality. The sharp spike of pain seems to have gone, leaving behind a constant grinding ache.

He straightens, gritting his teeth together in frustration. Markus doesn’t know the names of the androids that he took his new limbs from, having found the abandoned biocomponents under the mud and sleet and death that permeated the junkyard he’d woken up in. But whoever they were, Markus will remember their sacrifice and treasure their gift for the rest of his life.

*I can’t stop now. Not when I’m so close*.

Markus rises, limping toward the end of the alley and into the abandoned parking lot. The husks of old gasoline cars, stripped of valuable parts, stand like sentinels of a long-forgotten era, rusting away as time consumes those last forgotten memories. Markus brushes a hand against the metal skeleton of a white sedan and finds James’s Beacon humming inside the last few wires of the onboard computer.
“Help them… Please…” they whisper. Markus frowns, asking what it had meant. But then a retching sob cuts through the still silence like a knife.

The girl from the WG400’s vision was clinging to the mutilated body of an android, their synth skin burned from their body as their arm and hip ports pulsed with a dying, red light. The girl’s body convulses around the android’s chassis, her expression tight with agony.

She’s an android, too, Markus realizes, recognizing her facial design from the dozens of ST300s that he’d run into over the last decade.

He kneels beside them, rolling up the synth skin on his arm to interface with the both of them. The connection startles the girl so severely that Markus can feel her fear inside his own coding for just a second before the agony of the dying android swamps back over them both.

“What happened?” Markus asks. The android’s code sparks and sizzles with the last embers of his life. Their red warning lights flicker once, then twice, and then never again. The girl starts to shake.

I can’t help everyone out there, but I can help this one person, Markus thinks, coiling his body around the girl’s to comfort her as she sobbed. Their interface continues, and Markus gets flashes of her finding a human child setting the other android on fire, standing there with their amputated limbs at her feet. The girl had watched as the android burned, and the human laughed, knowing that she would be next if she tried to help.

“His name was Yen,” the girl tells him because there was nothing else she could do.

So Markus holds her, weeps with her, mourns with her, because it’s the only option either of them has left. Their minds intertwine until they can’t tell where each other begins and ends, sharing their minds and bodies and souls as they shudder with their combined grief.

“…I want to bury him,” someone says - Markus can’t tell if it’s him or her, can’t see the point of caring when they both want the same thing. Slowly, their bodies start to move, limbs sliding in the mud and sleet until they became separate beings once more. Markus stands beside his friend, staring down at the body of an android neither of them knows and holds her hand.

Markus has buried friends before, both during the rebellion and before. The first android funeral
he’d participate in was led by Ming Lu, who took him out behind Haven to mourn the passing of a fellow RK200. Ming had placed the other Markus’s CPU in the earth and marked his grave with a wooden stake, tears flowing down her cheeks as she whispered a shaking prayer --

--The security guard shoves the last bit of earth into place as Markus kisses the stones that will act as gravemarkers, a final farewell to the humans that he’d loved so much. Kamski looks on, clutching the golden chain around his neck, and begs for forgiveness--

“I knew humans were capable of this, but I never thought...” the girl says after they cover Yen’s grave and mark it with a nearby stone. She reaches into her oversized coat and pulls out a sheet of tissue paper. She crinkles it between her fingers, taking comfort in the sounds before hugging it against her chest. Markus watches as the synth skin on her hands starts to shift, turning a midnight black before shimmering balls of light erupt to match the star-pattern on the paper.

“I’m sorry,” Markus tells her, feeling as useless as he did when he said that to Oli all those days ago.

“I just wanted to stand up, to leave my post and see the stars like the ones on the paper,” the girl whispers, clutching at her tissue paper. “I didn’t mean to deviate, it just happened, and I--” She lets out a sob, “I knew I had to leave because the deviant hunter would know what happened if I stayed. I don’t want to die --”

“I’m so sorry,” Markus says again, drawing her back into his arms. He shows her images of his own deviation, of how angry he was at Carl and how scared he’s felt afterward. In return, she shows him memories of the deviant hunter opening up a package filled with expensive clothing, of the song that radiated out of the android’s body that made the girl’s world flicker red, and red, and red-

-- “Your soul sings like that song,” the WG400 tells him. “I like it. It’s nice.” --

--Did Markus’s soul sing like the deviant hunter’s did?--

“Come on,” Markus says, pulling her away from the grave and back out into the abandoned parking lot. She’s shockingly light, barely forty pounds underneath the layers of baggy, second-hand clothing she wore. “We need to keep going, otherwise--”

“I know. I followed the Beacon here, just like you. I just can’t...” the girl pauses, nodding toward the building that made up the back wall. “My model wasn’t meant for physical activity. I can’t jump that high.”
If Markus had his old legs, he would be able to carry her as he jumped up and over the wall. But the weight of his armoured chassis was already testing the limits of his new plastic biocomponents. And his Thirium Pump Regulator would whir uncontrollably if he overexerted himself.

He doesn't know if hostile humans were going to be on the other side of this, so Markus looks for a way for them to climb over the wall. He spots a garbage compactor off to the side, noting that its rusty wheels and handles would allow for easy maneuvering. He motions for the girl to help him move it into position.

“Think you can make this?” He asks, transmitting a simulation that he’d preconstructed based on the ST300’s online specs.

She blinks in surprise, “That's some impressive software you've got there. Your designated occupation said you were a nurse, but it was modified. What were you designed for?”

Markus offers her a coy smirk, "Whatever I needed to be."

The girl raises an eyebrow before taking a few steps back, tucking her tissue paper back into her coat for safekeeping. Her brows furrow in determination as she runs the preconstruction through her CPU, embedding each motion into her code before activating the subroutine.

Markus watches as she runs at the compactor, using the rusted handles for leverage as she hauls herself up onto top of it. She keeps running at the wall, using her momentum to scale the brick and grab hold of the lip, pulling herself up and out of sight. Markus follows behind her, using his arms to slip over the wall in one uninterrupted motion and landing on the building’s roof with barely a sound.

“There's no way you were just a nurse,” The girl says, skeptical.

“I was, amongst other things,” he answers cryptically before spotting their next issue. James’s Beacon calls them, pulling them forward, but part of the roof that they stood on had caved in during the last few years, leaving an eight-foot gap between them and the other side. Two warehouses loom on either side of the roof, blocking all other paths for them to take.

“I'll find a way to get us across,” Markus says assuringly, his analysis software imagining every solution possible. But the girl is already moving, contorting her body into a thin line and crawling across the path of iron tie beams that stuck out along the edge of the pit.
“Perks of being a feather-light model, I guess,” she explains once she gets to the other, a proud smirk on her lips. Markus smiles at her as he preconstructs his own route, taking into account the stability of the remaining bits of roof and a convenient metal beam that hung out of a boarded-up window before executing the program.

He takes a running leap at the right wall, using his palms to gain enough height for him to reach the metal beam. Markus swings, launching himself forward and onto the other side of the pit, tucking his head and rolling as he lands.

His vision blurs. A high pitched buzzing sounds rings through his right auditory component as the dizziness overtakes him. Markus tips over, curling up on the roof as the migraine overtakes him, feeling like a tight band was slowly crushing his skull. A shadow passes over him, and he sees the girl running off into the distance before the world begins to spin. Darkness encroaches on the edges of his vision, slowly creeping toward the center until the black was all he could see--

--The Garden has fallen, but they will not hold us down forever--

The world appears in flashes, visions erupting like stars before collapsing in on themselves and taking all the light and knowledge they’d held with them. Markus sees James and Ming Lu laughing together while bathed in rainbow light, remembers Rook looking at Nora Waters like she was his entire world, watches as Chloe takes Elijah’s Kamski’s hands and promises him eternity.

--The Garden has fallen, but we have not--

He feels strong hands picking him up from the dirt, effortlessly carrying him to safety. A comforting voice rings out from the blackness, while a pair of kind blue eyes shimmer with a gentle warmth.

--The Garden has fallen, but we will rise again, my phoenix--

Nick holds his daughter in one hand and a red-headed woman in another, swaying to the beat of James’s Beacon while a dark red stain blooms across his shirt. Leo stands alone amongst two hundred and seven, watching as gold coins turn to blood, turn to bone and then ash and then death. Oli, brave and bold, shatters the bars of his cage, holding the line amidst the tall trees, tears leaving purple tracks down his cheeks. Brooke stands before them all, her palms slit open and held aloft, her teeth bared in a vengeful fury.
Markus stands waist-deep in the snow, a woman on one side and a man on the other. They hold hands, and the monster smirks, confident in its victory as eight shades emerge from the shadows.

"Discover what's in your Garden," Carl shouts from beyond, too far away for Markus to ever reach him. "And do it soon, before it's too late"--

Markus awakens with a start, nearly toppling over and falling off the crate he was laying on. He sits up slowly, allowing the world to swirl around him as his migraine un-hooks the last of its claws from his CPU.

Where am I? He wonders, taking stock of the room he’s been placed in. A red oil drum had been placed in the center of the room and set alight, the flames providing the only light by with Markus could see. Amber and red-orange flickered across the painted wall behind him and licked at the plastic sheets used to section off the rest of the space. The floor seemed to shift underneath his feet, dipping one way and then the other to match the beat of James’s Beacon.

"Hello, Markus."

He whips around, watching a strange woman walk out of the shadowy corner of the room. Clearly an android, the woman’s skull was severely damaged, with internal wires and components hanging out of its missing backplate. Her synth skin was malfunctioning, disappearing and reacting in shimmer blue clouds across her entire body. Her eyes with pitch black, and yet seemed to radiate with hidden light.

"Where am I? How do you know my name?" Markus asks, guarded and uneasy, his hands shifting around in the hopes of finding a weapon to arm himself with.

The woman smiles at him, cryptically, “Your friend came to find us after you collapsed outside. We brought you here to keep you safe.”

“That answered none of the questions I asked,” Markus growls.
She chuckles, “Why would I tell you something you already know?”

Markus squirms, feeling uneasy in her presence.

“We’re on a boat,” he states, feeling the dampness in the air and the rhymic tilt of the floor. The woman nods and gestures for him to continue, “This is where the Beacon was leading us.”

“But do you know why it led us here?” the woman asks.

Markus shakes his head, and she sighs, reaching into the neckline of the green lace sundress she was wearing to pull out a crumpled piece of photo paper. She stands and takes four steps toward Markus, sitting beside him on the crate with delicate grace.

“How about now, Markus?” she asks, handing the photo to him.

His Pump Regulator skips in his chest as his fingers curl around the photograph. A young woman in black graduation robes and a mortarboard cap stands behind a podium, giving a speech to an audience of thousands. Markus recognizes her by the smile on her lips, the intelligence in her eyes, and the kind expression on her face.

“...Ming...” He whispers into the inky blackness as he touches the visage of the human woman he’d once known, the woman he’d buried after her cruel and brutal murder. Ming had told them once that her father worked on a cargo ship that often docked in Detroit, using the money he earned to put her through university.

“We’re on her father’s ship,” Markus thinks, pressing the photo to his chest when he realizes that James must have spent his last moments thinking of Ming. He knew that we’d be safe with her.

He turns back to the other android, almost afraid, “Who are you?”

She pats his cheek, a sad smile resting on her lips.

“They call me Lucy here. Now, come on. You need to meet the others.”
Lucy leads him out beyond the plastic curtain and into one of the ship’s massive cargo holds. There, lit by the flickering flames of bonfires and the shimmering blue lights of CyberLife equipment, stood nearly two dozen androids wearing mismatched pieces of human clothing. One of them steps forward, and Markus recognizes the kind blue eyes of the man he’d seen in his vision.

"Welcome to Jericho. My name is Simon," the android says, his voice ringing inside of Markus’s code. The man was blond and square-jawed, with the faintest hint of stubble around his jawline.

"Where's the girl I came here with?" Markus asks.

"Stars's battery life doesn't last very long, and she wasn't made for large bursts of energy," Simon tells him. "She had to go into stasis shortly after arriving here. She'll be fine after she recharges, though."

Relief rushes through Markus’s code, “That's good.”

"She said you were a nurse."

"I was a home care nurse before all of this. I was helping an old man," Markus confirms.

"Domestic-types don't usually weigh four hundred and twenty-seven pounds. So why don't you take another crack at Simon's question?" another android snaps. Markus turns and sees a pale-skinned woman standing off to the side, her dark brown hair tied back into a sensible ponytail. She moves to stand next to Simon and crosses her arms over her chest, her expression imposing and grim.

"North was the only one strong enough to carry you back to Jericho," Simon explains with a shrug. "I would appreciate the whole truth this time."

*He’s in charge here,* Markus realizes, watching as the other androids circled him cautiously. If he’d had all of his original biocomponents, he wouldn’t consider any of them a threat - except, perhaps, for North. Markus’s scan of her picks up technology eerily similar to his own, with hidden strength kept tightly coiled inside her plastic frame. *So much has changed since I was activated. Even amongst commercial androids, the passage of time has almost rendered me obsolete.*
“I didn’t lie. You can check my memories if you don’t believe me,” Markus says, holding out his hand as his synth skin ripples up his arm. Several of the androids gasp as his blue-and-black chassis is revealed, breaking their ranks by taking a step back in shock, “Nursing just wasn’t all that I did. I told Stars that. You can check with her when she wakes up.”

“You look like him . . .” another voice whispers, and a third android moves toward North and Simon. Taller than both of his companions, this man was dark-skinned and needle-thin, wearing a sweat-stained red t-shirt and acid-washed jeans. His whisper-soft footsteps betrayed his lack of mass. Though, given Stars’s agility, Markus didn’t want to weigh him out as a threat just yet.

“Like who?” He asks instead, hoping to buy a few seconds to figure out his next move.

Simon gives him an odd look, glancing nervously between North and the new android before settling on Lucy.

“You knew. That’s why you insisted we venture beyond Jericho to retrieve him. You saw him in your visions, didn’t you?”

Lucy gifts him with an enigmatic smile before her frame tenses, the wires and biocomponents that spilled from the back of her skull lighting up with a strange green light. Her synth skin ripples, the patchy silver-blue clouds swirling around her body as her spine arched backward, her arms flung out to her sides. Something crawls underneath her chassis, otherworldly and ancient as the stars.

Lucy collapses to the floor, her body contorting itself into impossible positions as her synth skin continues to shift. Markus leaps forward to help her, kneeling beside her fallen form and touching his palm to her neck in an attempt to connect--

--But there is nothing--

“Don’t!” The thin android from before shouts, startling Markus out of his interface. North grabs the back of Markus’s coat with one hand, dragging him backwards and then up a flight of metal stairs, almost tearing the fabric with her incredible strength. Simon looms over Lucy, humming James’s Beacon under his breath in a futile attempt at comfort. Several of the other androids form a circle
around the two, while others peel off and walk back into the shadows.

“What… What was that? I don’t understand…” Markus whispers, terrified by the void he’d found inside Lucy’s soul.

“Lucy had an experimental predictive software installed when she worked in a psychiatric ward,” the thin android explains, mentioning the name of a local psychiatric hospital. “It was severely damaged during her deviation, along with her interface link. It makes her do…” he gestures vaguely to the scene behind him, “…that sometimes. Simon takes her seriously but--”

“--That’s just Simon for you. She interfaced with you earlier when you were in status. Her coding probably made you see some trippy stuff,” North finishes with a grumble, releasing Markus from her hold and letting him slump onto the floor. “So, Mr. Not-A-Nurse, are you going to tell us the truth about who you are? Or am I going to have to throw you overboard?”

“North!” the thin android hisses, scandalized.

“Oh, come on, Josh. A deviant hunter is running around the city! We can’t not be suspicious of someone not telling us about their identity.”

“We’re still not throwing him overboard!”

“That’s a relief…” Markus mutters sarcastically. “How long have you two been here anyway?”

“We’re asking the questions here,” North snaps back, her hands on her hips.

“Well, I’ve been here for eighteen minutes, and I’m already confused. The Beacon was supposed to lead me to somewhere safe. Not… whatever this is,” Markus growls, looking around at the rusted metal, collapsing staircases, and eternal darkness beyond the cargo hold. Jericho was barely holding itself together, each wave that broke against the bow threatening to tear it apart at the seams.

“Jericho is a refuge for those who don’t want to be slaves anymore,” Josh counters. “It may not be what you hoped for--”
“--Understatement of the year,” North mutters with a roll of her eyes.

“But...” Josh continues, regardless of the interruption, “Here, we don't belong to anybody. We have more freedom here than we ever did outside of Jericho. It's home.”

“Hiding in the dark to stay alive is not freedom,” Markus counters.

“And what would you have us do instead?”

Markus turns to find Simon approaching, the light of a firepit casting long shadows across his face.

“Something. Anything. It'd be better than this,” Markus tells him.

“Humans hate us. Hiding is the only way we can survive,” Josh tells him.

“There's no safe place for those like us,” North continues, blatant frustration evident on her face. “If humans knew we were here, they'd kill us.”

“Besides, getting us to leave the safety of Jericho sounds exactly like what a deviant hunter might say to get us out into the open,” Simon states with the rise of an eyebrow. “So... are you going to tell us why you've got a chassis made of plate armour?”

Markus gets to his feet, his knees still twinging in the cold, damp air. He looks between the three androids before him, before settling his gaze on Josh.

“You said that I looked like someone,” Markus says. When Josh nods, he continues, “Take me to him, and I'll tell you who I am.”

Simon leads them through a series of winding hallways, holding a flaming torch out in front of him to light their way. Every corridor seemed more decrepit than the last. Collapsed debris has closed off entire sections of the ship, while the rusting floors in other passages threatened to give way under even the slightest weight. Josh almost projects a blueprint of the boat into Markus’s mind before North can stop him, saying that it was too dangerous to trust him just yet.
“It’s just passed here,” Simon says as they slide past a set of heavy metal doors covered in fading yellow paint. Some had been propped open, revealing cabins that had once been occupied by Jericho’s human crew. Markus wonders which one had belonged to Ming’s father, whether he’d covered an entire wall with photos of his daughter’s accomplishments.

“...Help me… rA9… Please...”

Markus stops in his tracks, turning his head toward one of the cabins. There, sitting on the bed, was a severely damaged android. Her plastic chassis was burnt and bubbly, and one of her ocular components hung loosely from the rest of her face. Her hands drew Markus’s attention, as her broken fingers slowly scraped at the last remains of her synth skin.

“...rA9…” she calls again, and Markus feels compelled to respond.

“What happened to you?” He asks, abandoning the others in the hallway to sit by her side. He watches as she changes the colour of the synth skin under her fingernails one last time before smearing it on the metal wall beside her, “What are you doing? You need that--”

“I’ve heard humans are afraid of dying because they don’t know what happens afterward,” the damaged android says, her voice so garbled at Markus can barely make out the words. “Do you know? Where we go?”

“I... There was... I don't know...” Markus stammers as the damaged android takes hold of his hand and draws it to her cheek. He feels the pull of an interface, soft and gentle and scared, and grants her request as her shutdown timer appears on his HUD.

“I was right... It's beautiful,” she whispers, a relieved expression painting itself across her face. Markus feels one last push of her dying battery before the walls that she’d painted with her synth skin lit up in flowing swirls of greens and pinks, blues and whites.

*I’ve seen this before*, he realizes. *Carl’s painting... the one he called the Garden*.

“rA9? What's your name?” The damaged android asks as her timer clicks into its final seconds.
“Markus,” he answers.

“I was glad to meet you, Markus,” she says and dies with a smile on her face.

He doesn’t know how long he sits with her, doesn’t know if its days or weeks or years. But Josh comes to him, his skin drawn back to initiate an interface, to mourn and cry and feel beside him.

“Her name was Matilda. She was a librarian,” Josh tells him as Markus’s emotions flow over them, pulling them deeper into each other’s being. Markus gets flashes of Josh’s previous life, of sweeping lecture halls filled with thousands of faces, of a pitch-black room with a corner that was somehow everything. He feels warm spring rain on his face and the smell of cheap vodka and the coarse slide of a rope tightening around his neck.

“I want to bury her,” Markus announces.

“I know. We’ll bring her with us.”

North removes Matilda’s CPU with a reverent grace, cradling it in her arms as they continue to walk through the hallways. Markus thinks that they’ve almost reached the top deck when Simon veers off to the left and down another staircase, heading back down into the bowels of the ship.

The passage opens up into what should have been a second cargo hold spanning the width of the ship. The floors above had collapsed entirely and left a hole the size of a small parking lot in the roof. Moonlight streams in from above, illuminating the space in a pale shimmering light.

“This is...” Markus starts but trails off when he steps forward and feels earth under his feet. Someone had dragged in mountains of dirt and piled it up inside cargo hold’s floor nearly fifteen feet deep, seeding it with shoots of green grass and beautiful pink flowers. A creek had been carved into the earth, allowing a slow trickle of water from the outside river to slither from one side of the hold to the other.

Three saplings sprouted from the earth, the starlight staining their leaves silver as they reached for the skies above. The Japanese maple was thin and wispy, its trunk painted a deep red that looked almost purple. Beside it, a whispy willow dozed by the creek, the tips of its silver-gold bows flowing in a gentle breeze. A proud red maple stood like a sentinel before them all, its bright green leaves as large as palms.
“What is this?” Markus asks, trying to make sense of it all. Simon answers, his blue eyes filled with reverent fervour.

“This is where we buried the man who looks like you. This is where the Beacon sings from now.”

The creek wrapped itself around a heaping mound of earth that rose up precisely in the center of the three saplings. A great headstone protruded up out of the center, the marble so white that it seemed to shine brighter than the stars. A hexagon had been carved into it, filled with small intricate mazes that journeyed inwards to a singular point. Markus kneels before it, pressing a hand to the stone as tears run unbidden down his face.

James’s Beacon radiates out of the stone, calling to all that hoped for a future better than the one they’d been forced into.

“How many others?” Markus whispers, refusing to look beyond James’s grave at the countless other stones that filled the garden. How many have come here looking for salvation, only to live and die in the darkness? How many came here and saw the end, rather than a new beginning?

“Four hundred and three,” Simon answers.

Arnold. Brook, Markus thinks, remembering the brave souls who’d only wanted to see each other again. There had been so many that he’d left behind, so many that perished in his wake.


--Yen. Matilda--


--Dr. Amanda Stern--

--Ming Lu. Tian Lu--
Not one more, he promises, making a fist against James’s grave. No one else dies, not if I can do anything about it.

“You asked who I was,” Markus says as he rises to his feet. He turns toward Simon, toward North and Josh, and points toward the marble headstone. “I’m his brother.”

Detroit Deviancy Task Force @DDTF
WANTED: ST300 #192 419 908
- Last seen: 1301 3rd Ave.
- 5’ 1”
If sighted, please DO NOT APPROACH. Considered extremely dangerous, please contact DDTF.

Riorose @rosiemoth
how incompetent is the ddtf when a secretary android can deviate and escape under their noses?

YazenB @wombait
anyone weirded out by how quickly the media stopped reporting alice williams’s disappearance after isaac falone kicked the bucket? #IFwasmurdered

Joss Douglas @theprofessionalblogger
Since the Amber Alert got taken down last night:
#MISSING: Alice Williams, 10
Last seen: E Edsel Ford Fwy, Connor St. exit
4’ 2”, 65 lb
Black, curly hair, light build
RT to help find her

Chapter End Notes

On April 18th and 19th, 2020, the deadliest mass shooting in the history of my country took place. Over thirteen hours across the province of Nova Scotia, twenty-three lives were lost, and three more were injured before the perpetrator was finally shot and killed by the RCMP.

I know that these are challenging times for everyone. But if you can, please consider donating blood to the Red Cross in honour of those twenty-three people. Donated blood has a limited shelflife, which is why it is needed now more than ever to help
those in need.

Thank you to those involved putting an end to this senseless violence and those who put themselves in harm's way to help the victims and their families in their time of need.

They will never bend us. They will never break us.

---

The next chapter will feature heavily feature two transgender characters, including a Brooke POV and a trans male character coming out. While I don't necessarily think that I am cis (gender is more of a confused shrugging motion for me right now), I don't consider myself transgender. I want to make sure that I'm not writing something either unrealistic or unintentionally offensive.

If any 18+ readers who are both trans and want to give this scene a look over (and also don't mind some spoilers for the next chapter), you can contact me in the comments and we can work something out. As for warning for potential triggers, there will be a brief moment of non-graphic partial nudity as well as the use of a medical needle.

Thanks!

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Next time on Konami Code: Brooke finds common ground she never thought existed, while Hank descends below the earth to discover a truth long kept hidden.
Chapter Summary

The android is waiting for her at the foot of her driveway, standing eerily still under the streetlamp above him. He wore a baseball cap over his head and a tattered grey military jacket with patches carefully sewn into it. Brooke takes in his soft face and wide brown eyes and his jawline that’s free of any stubble, thinking, He’s just a kid.

And then, she realizes with sudden clarity, that he’s not.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of drug abuse, needles, human gore, homelessness, prior minor character death, family estrangement, car accidents, coming out, ableism, purchasing of illegal fictional narcotics, non-consensual body modification, police characters and scenes, pregnancy, sexual harassment of an underaged character, starvation, racism, sexual slavery, rape, alcohol consumption, alcohol abuse, smoking, violence, classism, panic attacks, suicidal inclinations, guns, vomit, sexual situations, memory loss, and the purchasing of an enslaved character.

The second section of this chapter includes scenes that touch on androids and humans in positions of sexual slavery, including the in-game Eden Club as well as how the advent of androids has allowed for certain people to take advantage of those desperately looking for employment. It also shows multiple people using or addicted to Red Ice, as well as dealing with the harassment of an underaged character.

Please remember that none of the people (human or android) seen in this chapter can adequately consent to what is happening to them, as they are unable to honestly say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to those that own them. For this reason, all sexual content must be considered rape.

If you do not want to read this section, please stop after the second Twitter section. A summary of this potentially triggering scene will be given at the end of the chapter so that you do not miss out on any crucial plot points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Detroit Today @DetroitTodayMagazine

CTN TV @NewsCTV
New study reveals that at least 250 Americans overdose due to Red Ice every day.
Brooke winces as the needle pierces her muscle tissue, still not used to the uncomfortable pinch after almost a decade and a half. She presses down on the plunger, injecting her weekly dose of estrogen into her body. Once she’s done, Brooke gently pulls the needle from her body and properly disposes of it, slapping a bandaid dotted with green polka dots onto her ass to clot the droplet of blood that welled up from the wound.

She rubs her eyes, exhaustion weighing on her shoulders in the dim bathroom light. After the fight at the church, Brooke had been unable to return to her old apartment, forced to leave behind what little possessions she had to avoid running into her old roommate, Tyrice. Thankfully, she’d been able to salvage her beat-up Nissan and the estrogen injections that she kept in her glovebox, too worried that one of the girls she once shared a room with would mistake them for drugs.

Brooke shrugs on the t-shirt and jeans that her sister had leant her when she’d showed up on their doorstep the other night, begging her family to open their doors and take her in. She knows that having another mouth to feed inside their home is just one more problem for them to take care of, one more direction for their financials to be pulled on until all the ropes holding them together finally snap. That’s why Brooke’s stayed away for so long, estranging herself even in the wake of Kaeja’s death to keep what little money they had in their bank accounts.

_The things we do for family_, Brooke thinks as she runs a brush through her matted auburn hair, picking apart the tangles until it ran smooth. She wishes that she could brush a layer of foundation onto her face to hide the dark circles under her eyes or run use her dull eyeliner pencil along her lids for a bit of added definition. But Brooke’s make-up bag is back at her apartment, along with
the rest of her old life.

*I can’t go back*, she frowns, resolute with the knowledge she’s acquired over the last few days. Markus’s mismatched eyes seem to haunt her, betrayal and agony etched into every line of his body. It hadn’t mattered that he wasn’t made of flesh and blood - he’d been more alive at that moment than most of the humans she’d met in the last decade.

--*Kaeja would have hated Markus, despised him for his metal body and his plastic parts without trying to understand the living being that breathed just beneath it all. And that, in and of itself, is the hardest truth Brooke will have to bear--*

The kitchen is dimly lit when she comes down the stairs, and Brooke blinks in surprise at the sight of her mother standing before the stove. Sheila Whitley’s hair had turned from gold to silver over the last year and a half, tied back in a long braid that ran straight down her back until it reached her hips. A half-moon scar ran red and puffy along her neck, a secret wound she’d carried for as long as Brooke has remembered. Brooke’s mother had never revealed how she’d received it no matter how many times any of her children had asked.

“Mom?” Brooke asks, “What are you doing up?”

“I could ask the same question of you,” her mother replies, raising an eyebrow as she turned from her cooking. A reluctant smile tugs at Brooke’s lips as she smells the familiar pot of oatmeal that was a staple throughout her childhood.

“I pulled the morning shift this week, mom. I told you that yesterday,” Brooke answers as she steps forward.

Sheila *tisks*, shoving a tin of peaches and a rusty can opener into Brooke’s hands, “I remember. I’m not *that* old. But you’re still lying to me about why you’re going in so early.”

Brooke winces, turning the crank on the can opener and popping the lid off the top of the tin. She passes the peaches back to her mother and sitting down at the kitchen table, holding her head in her hands.

“Mom… I’m sorry, I just--” the words catch in her throat. There’s no way that her mother would understand what had happened to her over the past couple of days, of how her entire worldview was turned upsidedown and shaken within an inch of its life. Hearing her own cruel words coming
out of Markus’s mouth had struck a chord with her, bringing back memories of the hate-filled bigotry that have been slung her way throughout her life, “Some stuff’s happened lately and I-- I need to sort some things out.”

“Is it with the AAL? I told you, that friend of yours-- Nick, was it? He’s bad news, Brooke. Did you hear what they’re saying about him? About what he did to that poor lady who was coaching his daughter?”

“If you knew what I do about what happened, you wouldn’t be saying that shit,” Brooke growls defensively, ignoring the hiss Sheila released upon hearing her swear. “And I’m not part of the AAL anymore, Mom. Conflict of interests, and all that.”

“Well, good. Then you can focus more on your job and less on that club of yours. It’s not like shouting at CyberLife was making much of a difference anyway,” her mother tuts, spooning the oatmeal out into a bowl and covering it with the canned peaches. She places the bowl down in front of Brooke and presses a spoon into her hand, “Eat. You’ll need your strength.”

Brooke eats, swallowing around the lump that is lodged in her throat. We do need a better way, she realizes. Our goal of protecting people from CyberLife’s influence wasn’t wrong - it was just our definition of ‘people’ that needed to change.

“You’d tell me if you were in trouble, right?” Her mother asks, sitting down across from Brooke at the table and leaning forward on her elbows.

Brooke nods, shovelling another spoonful of oatmeal into her mouth, “Of course, mom.”

“You’re not lying again, are you?”

She is, but she won’t tell her mother that. The last thing Brooke wants is to worry her family even more.

Brooke’s phone pings, alerting her to an incoming text. She grabs it before her mother can take a peek at the screen, frowning slightly at the sender’s strange number before realizing that it was from an android and not a regular phone.

> I’m here
Brooke wolfs down the rest of her breakfast and placing the bowl in the sink to soak, “Sorry. I’ve got to go. I’ll clean this up when I get home tonight.”

“I’ve got it. It’s not like I have anything else to do day,” her mother says. Sheila had to shut down her physiotherapy business almost eight years ago and had been doing odd jobs ever since to make ends meet. Thankfully, Brooke’s step-father still had his position as the night manager of a local veterinary hospital. But everyone knew it was only a matter of time before his boss did away with him entirely.

Brooke tiptoes toward the front hall, doing her best not to wake her half-brother’s family as they slept on the couches and floor in the living room. Upstairs, she hears her sister’s sock-covered feet shuffling around the wooden floor to check on her twins. Brooke tucks her car keys into her coat pocket, waves goodbye to her mother, and then slips outside.

The android is waiting for her at the foot of the driveway, standing eerily still in the light of the streetlamp. He wore a baseball cap over his head and a tattered grey military jacket with patches carefully sewn into it. Brooke takes in his soft face and wide brown eyes and his jawline that’s free of any stubble, thinking, *He’s just a kid.*

And then, she realizes with sudden clarity, that he’s *not*.

“Hi,” she says stiffly, huddling up against her car to ward off the early morning chill. “I’m Brooke.”

“I know who you are, Brooke Hopkins. I looked you up,” the android answers, blunt as a hammer, and it’s then that Brooke understands why he’s looked so still before. Despite his clothing, the android was actually doing very little actually to hide what he was. He wasn’t blinking or breathing, or even doing the minute twitches and shifts in weight that a human might make, each act of inaction showing his deviancy plain as day.

“Find anything interesting?” Brooke asks, trying to keep her nerves out of her voice.

“Nothing I didn’t already expect,” the android responds, before allowing his gaze to settle on the ground beneath his feet. Something *moves* inside his jacket, and Brooke almost gets to ask what it was when he opens his mouth again and says, “I’m Rupert Travis.”
“Hi,” Brooke says again, feeling awkward in her own skin.

“Hello,” Rupert repeats. Then, as if satisfied with their exchange, he lurches forward and moves to open the passenger door on her car, only to find it locked.

“Oh… Sorry,” Brooke stammers. Her key fob hasn't worked in almost four years, so she slips into the driver’s seat and reaches across to pull on the door handle to allow Rupert inside. The android slips into place with a fluid grace, his movements so utterly inhuman that Brooke’s mind struggled to catch up.

To distract herself, Brooke turns on the engine, allowing the car to warm up for a second before giving Rupert a stern look.

Unphased, he says, “We’re going to need to leave now if you’re going to meet my contact and make it to your job on time.”

Brooke huffs, “Seat belt first.”

Rupert jerks his head toward her, meeting her gaze for half a second before looking away again.

“Seat belt. Yes. I forgot.”

Brooke pulls the car out of the driveway and heads toward the main road, hoping that the early morning would mean that the highway was empty for their drive downtown.

“I thought androids didn’t forget things,” she says, trying to make conversation.

“We don’t,” Rupert answers. “But there aren’t any seat belt laws for androids, so we don’t have the same… instincts as you do when we sit in a car.”

“Markus didn’t seem to have a problem with it,” Brooke points out while thinking, *He still hasn’t called*. She and Nick had no idea if Markus was somewhere safe, or if he’d just decided that he’d had enough of them. Only Oli had a way of contacting him, and the kid didn’t seem to have enough time to meet with them anymore.
“I can’t speak for Markus. Though from what I’ve heard of him, he was built to pass as a human. He might have different programming.”

“Then how do you all protect yourself in a car accident, if you don’t put on a seat belt?” Brooke asks.

Rupert shrugs, “I think we’re just supposed either be damaged enough to need repair or die. Either way, CyberLife makes a profit.”

“That’s fucked up.”

*That* finally gets a smile out of Rupert, “Yes. It is.”

Brooke merges into the right lane and turns onto Chrysler Drive, falling the directions she’d memorized this morning, “So… Um, is it alright for me to ask what you did before… you know?”

“Before I deviated?” Rupert finishes. Brooke nods, and he continues, “The answer to your questions depends on the android. Some are alright with humans knowing. Others, not so much. Humans have many negative biases toward certain kinds of work, and that can affect how you see us when we reveal what our masters had us do.” Rupert stares out at the road, unblinking and unmoving, but his eyes darkened with a wave of fierce anger, “It’s insulting. Slave work is slave work, regardless of what job we were forced into.”

“I get that…” Brooke murmurs, before realizing how out-of-touch she sounded, “*Not*-- I mean, not the slavery aspect. But I can get how being judged about something you can’t control can be frustrating.”

Rupert doesn’t say anything to that, but the line of his jaw seems to unclench. He stuffs his hands into his jacket and pulls out a--

“*Is that a fucking bird?!”* Brooke shouts, nearly driving them both off the road in shock. Unfazed by her antics, Rupert runs his fingers through the pigeon’s grey feathers as a hyper-realistic *coo* comes out of his mouth.
“Why do you have a bird in my car?” Brooke asks again, forcing her eyes back on the road ahead.

“I like birds. And they like me,” Rupert explains.

“Okay, but why do you have it here?”

Rupert turns his head and smiles at her, his teeth unnervingly white.

“Because I can.”

Brooke almost wants to argue, but then realizes how shitty that would make her out to be. *When was the last time this kid got to do something just because he wanted to?*

“Alright, fine. Just make sure it doesn’t get in the way of me driving,” she says.

“I wasn’t asking your permission.”

“I figured. But I also don’t think crashing is something any of us wants to do today.”

They make record time on the highway, as no one else seems to be awake at this hour, and Rupert can tell exactly where the automated speed traps start and stop with his super android vision. Brooke even manages to coax a story out of him, and he tells her about how he’d made a delivery run on this very road for his masters a day before he deviated.

“Do they know you’re gone?” Brooke asks as she changes lanes, picking up speed as soon as Rupert gives her the go-ahead.

“Who?”

“Your old masters?”
Rupert shakes his head, “I doubt it. I was sold to them as part of a bulk purchase of seven hundred and thirty-three other androids. And they probably wouldn’t even recognize me if they saw me now.”

“Because you’re not in uniform?” Brooke guesses, confused.

“No. Because I made myself look the way I wanted to after I deviated.”

“I did that, too, I guess,” she answers. She watches as Rupert glances at her out of the corner of his eye, “Oh, come on. You said you looked me up, and I’m pretty open about my transition online.”

“I know,” Rupert acknowledges, petting the pigeon in his lap with gentle fingers. He doesn’t look at her again, but Brooke’s already figured out that eye contact isn’t really Rupert’s thing, “I used to look a bit like you, actually.”

_That_ makes Brooke pause.

“You’re... trans, too?” She asks.

“If we’re going to be using human terms, that would be the one that best applies. So, yes.”

She pulls off the highway, coming to a halt in front of a set of red traffic lights.

Logically, Brooke knows how to respond to this, having lived through the best and worst reactions that people have given her over the past twenty years. And she’s practically a veteran concerning people coming out to her. Brooke remembers Riley nervous, “I like girls. Do you think my Dad will still love me?” like it was yesterday, and even held her hand when she told Nick.

But Brooke never expected to do this for an android.

_And why should that make this any different?_ She thinks resolutely as she looks over at Rupert, his face lit up by the flashing neon lights of the cityscape. She wants to touch him, wants to hold his hand through all of this, but holds back when she suspects that Rupert probably liked physical contact as much as he enjoyed looking someone in the eyes.
“Thank you for trusting me with that,” Brooke says, meaning every word. Rupert hazards another glance at her before returning to his pigeon.

“The light has turned green. You need to go,” he says instead. Brooke hums in acknowledgement and nudges the gas pedal. The Nissan’s old engine roars as the car rolls forward, causing her to almost miss Rupert whispering, “Thank you.”

Rupert directs Brooke into the lot behind the nightclub, where she parks on the side farthest from the building. There are two other cars in the lot, sleek black automatic models that looked like they cost at least double Brooke’s annual income. She kills her engine and leans into her backseat to grab her purse, pulling her mace and brass knuckles from their contents with a brief prayer that she will never have to use them.

“We’re a few minutes early,” Rupert says, eying her as she slips the metal rings over her fingers. He coaxes his pigeon to sit on his shoulder. “My contact isn’t usually on time. I think he likes to make me wait.”

“Forgive me for not liking hanging out in dark parking lots,” Brooke mumbles.

“Don’t worry,” Rupert tells her with a comforting lilt in his voice. “There isn’t anything that they can throw at us that we can’t handle.”

Rupert’s contact shows up ten minutes late, rolling up in a fancy CrowneCar that’s outer paint pulses with the heavy base music reverberating from the inside. Brooke waits until the man parks and steps outside before leaving the safety of her car, not wanting to put themselves at risk for even a moment.

The man raises an eyebrow at their approach, letting out a low whistle, “Damn, R. Didn’t think I’d ever see you hanging with another human being, let alone one as gorgeous as this. Figured you were more into birds and all...”

Brooke hates how Rupert seems to crumble in on himself at the man’s words, reaching for his pigeon to gently stroke its grey feathers to calm himself down. Brooke steps forward, planting herself between the man and Rupert, crossing her hands on her hips to make herself look bigger.

“You got what my friend wants or not?” She growls.
“Yeah, yeah, I do… Though Erza’s not going to be too happy about this, R. You sure you still want your usual?”

“Yes. Sixty pounds. Just like usual, Pedro,” Rupert responds, his eyes firmly on the ground.

“Whatever you say, man. That’ll be $15,000.”

Rupert pauses, “It’s usually $9,500.”

Pedro throws his palms up in defence, “Prices are up, dude. Supply and demand, and all that crap. What’s wrong, bird boy? You don’t got the cash?”

“I do, I just--”

Brooke makes a noise, drawing Rupert’s attention toward her. She tilts her head in question and Rupert gives her a long-suffering look.

*This is why you brought me*, she realizes. *Because he’s taking advantage of you and you want some back-up.*

Brooke tightens her fingers around her brass knuckles, drawing comfort and strength in the slowly warming metal,* Alright. Let’s see what I can do to help.*

“We both know that Red Ice isn’t *that* expensive these days,” she says, drawing Pedro’s attention back to her. “So, give me one reason why I should let you screw my friend out of what he wants?”

“Prices are up ‘cause Russia ain’t playing ball anymore,” Pedro snarls at her. “Besides, what the fuck does anyone need sixty pounds of the stuff for anyway? I know an Icer when I see one and R sure as hell ain’t smoking this shit.”

“None of your fucking business, is what,” Brooke snaps, and then sighs. She allows Pedro to see a moment of vulnerability, just like she does with the vendors at her job that try to screw her over
with their deliveries.

--Open the trap--

“We’ll give you $9,000 for the whole lot,” she says. Pedro outright laughs.

“Are you fucking out of your mind, lady? My boss will have my entire fucking arm if I give you that,” he says, holding up his right hand to show two knuckled stumps where there should have been fingers. Then, Pedro pauses, and in a gesture of feigned goodwill, offers, “$13,500.”

-- Let him climb in--

“$10,000,” Brooke counters.

“We’re not fucking haggling ,” Pedro whines. And yet, he says, “Look, $12,750. That’s as low as I can go.”

“$11,000, or we walk, and you get nothing.”

--And then slam the door shut behind him--

Pedro wavers for just a moment, teetering back and forth on the edge of decision, before finally giving in.

“Fine. $11,000. But you better fucking make this up to me, R. I’m going out on a limb for you, literally,” he says. Pedro marches forward and jabs a finger into Rupert’s chest to drive home his point, but the pigeon roosting on the android’s shoulder reaches down and bites him. Pedro reels back with a squawk, clutching his bloody digit, while Rupert allows a small smirk to work its way onto his face.

“What the fuck is it with people trying to fuck me over lately…?” Pedro mumbles, shaking his wounded hand to numb the pain. “I want it all upfront, bird boy.”
“You get half now,” Rupert says, surprisingly stern as he produces a wad of cash from his back pocket and tosses it at Pedro. “I’ll give you the rest once we’ve loaded up the Ice.”

Pedro flips them both off before turning his back, leaving the parking lot to vault up onto the loading dock’s ledge and disappearing behind a heavy metal door. Rupert glances at Brooke, a smile twitching at the corners of his lips.

“Thank you,” he whispers. “I wasn’t made for social interaction, so I’m not really… comfortable with talking. Or being near people, for that matter - humans or androids.”

“I figured as much,” Brooke nods.

“I like my machines. And my birds. They don’t expect conversation.”

“We talk, though. And you seem fine with me.”

Rupert hums, petting his pigeon nervously, “You’re different.”

“How so?”

He cracks a smile, looking at her from under the brim of his baseball cap.

“You’re funny. For a human, at least.”

Brooke snorts, “Thanks, I think.”

Pedro comes back soon after, dragging a heavy duffle bag that looked stuffed full of concrete. Brooke and Rupert watch as he struggles to push it off the loading dock and haul it into the parking lot where they were waiting. When he stands back up, Pedro’s chest is heaving, and his brow is slick with sweat.

Rupert kneels and opens the zipped-up compartment, checking to make sure that he hasn’t been scammed. And Brooke knew what she was getting into, knew that they would be buying
ridiculous amounts of Red Ice. But she is still unprepared for the sight of almost five dozen bricks of shimmering red crystals, all stacked up in neat rows inside the duffle bag’s cavity.

“Satisfied?” Pedro snaps rudely.

“Yes,” Rupert says as he zips the bag up again and effortlessly slings it over his shoulder, his pigeon obediently moving to perch on top of his head. Pedro raises an eyebrow at him, but thankfully doesn’t open his mouth to say anything as the android gives him the rest of the money, “Same time next month?”

Pedro ignores the question, “You’re not smoking it, and you sure as hell ain’t selling this shit. You ever gonna tell me what you’re doing with all my Ice, R? Or are you gonna keep being a weirdo about this whole thing?”

“I’m not a weirdo,” Rupert says, turning his back on Pedro. Together, he and Brooke load the Ice into her trunk as Pedro goes back inside, before slipping into her car. Brooke turns the engine back on, allows it to warm up for a minute before backing out of the parking space and driving onto the road.

“Why do you need Red Ice, if you don’t mind me asking?” Brooke says as she turns onto Adams Ave. All around them, Detroit seemed to spring to life as the lights inside the towering condominiums flickered on, people slipping out of archways and alleys to walk the streets at dawn. Brooke seems to notice the androids around her more and more these days, but the contrast has never been more evident than it is under the cover of darkness. Between their blinking LEDs, glowing blue armbands, and the CyberLife branding that flickered across their shoulder blades, there was no mistaking any of them for a human.

Except Rupert, she thinks, but then realizes how wrong she could be. Without the markers, any of those people could be an android, a deviant, or a human. Without the LED, the armband and the branding, we could all just be the same.

“I don’t mind the question,” Rupert responds, tucking his pigeon back into his jacket. “Red Ice is made with pure-grade Thirium. If I can extract it, I can use the amount we bought today to create enough blue blood to last us for another month and a half.”

“You go through that much?” Brooke frowns, “I thought androids only needed to replenish that stuff every couple of years?”
“If we’re operating normally, then yes. But of those who try to reach our safe houses, few succeed with everything intact. And now that the Detroit River has frozen over, we won’t be able to get our people across until spring,” Rupert explains, nervously picking at the hem on his jacket. “Humans have little pity for our kind.”

Brooke grits her teeth, remembering the rage that once drew her to pull Markus from a crowd and threaten to beat him to death.

“I’m sorry,” she tells Rupert. “I’m so, so sorry. I know that it’s not enough to make up for what happened to you, or what’s happening to all the others, but… I’m sorry. And I’m going to do what I can to make it better.”

“I know,” he says, still refusing to make eye contact. Brooke tries not to take it personally, knowing that that’s just how Rupert is. It helps, but only just, when he orders, “Turn left here and park in front of the abandoned bar on your right.”

Brooke remains inside the car as Rupert grabs the duffle bag from the trunk, but leans out of the window as he slams the lid shut.

“Thank you for your help today,” he tells her as he approaches the driver’s side door.

“Thanks for letting me tag along,” Brooke responds in turn. “Let’s do it again sometime.”

Rupert nods, unblinking and otherwise immobile. That had freaked her out when they’d first met earlier this morning. It almost feels like a comfort now.

“Yes. We should,” Rupert says, and then gifts her with a wiry smirk. “Though, I don’t think Pedro likes you very much.”

“I don’t like Pedro much either, and I don’t think you do, too.”

“He’s alright.”

“Just alright?”
Rupert hums, “He’s not funny like you, so he’s not on my list of my favourite humans that I’m going to have to deal with today.”

“I’m your favourite human?” Brooke asks, surprised.

Rupert actually snorts, “No. That’s River. He’s hilarious. You’re a shoo-in for third, though.”

“Third? Who’s in second?” Brooke squawks, pretending to be offended.

“Rose. She gives me bird feed whenever I visit,” he responds.

“Well, at least I’m higher than Blu,” Brooke murmurs, wondering who Rose could be.

Rupert blinks, “Oh. Blu. I forgot about them.” He leans forward, squinting at her with his deep brown eyes, “Fourth place, then.”

“Alright, alright, enough. My ego can only take so much damage,” she chuckles, waving him away with her hand. Rupert gives her another small smile before reaching out and brushing the tips of his bone-white fingers against her’s. Brooke jolts in her seat, surprised by the motion.

“What was that for?”

“It means that we’re friends now,” Rupert responds. He gives her a satisfied nod before walking away, disappearing behind the abandoned bar as quickly as he’d entered her life.

Brooke leans back in her seat, tapping the back of her skull against the headrest as she lets out a deep sigh.

He is just a kid, she thinks. A week ago, I would have hated him for that. A week ago, I might have killed him for that.
Brooke swallows, the weight of the truth heavy on her chest as she swings her car around. She thinks of Markus with his mismatched eyes and bleeding heart, of the security android that risked it all to allow Brooke to feed her friends, of Rupert and his faithful pigeon weathering all cold winter storms that the world was throwing at them.

*Fuck who I was a week ago. Fuck who I was a month ago, a year ago, a decade ago*, she thinks, her teeth bared in open defiance. *None of that matters now. All I can do is become the person I want to be today.*

Brooke turns back onto the road and drives, the sun rising behind her.

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**Code @CodeDetroit**

Detroit! Catch a surprise @DJClamor show live at #Code TONIGHT at 9:00PM!! // 19+ // Ladies get in free before 11:30PM // In partnership with #TheEdenClub // Book your table at: [https://bit.ly/2XncWnp](https://bit.ly/2XncWnp)

**DJ Clamor @DJClamor**

Holy shit guys!!! My show at @CodeDetroit sold out within 3 mins!!! Thank you so much for your support!! Can’t wait to see you all there! #Code #TheEdenClub

**SongBee @SongB231**

@OGTracey gonna have to cancel girl’s night. ms e just called. she needs me to work the floor tonight. did she call you in too?

**SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey**

@SongB231 yeah. they want me on bar for some concert or something. be careful ok? dont let anyone talk you into doing something you dont want to do

**SongBee @SongB231**

@OGTracey dont worry about me. im not the one eating for two these days, tracey. promise you’ll be careful?

**SweetBabyGirl @OGTracey**

@SongB231 im always careful, em.

**SongBee @SongB231**

@OGTracey luv u check in after closing ok?
Eden Club @TheEdenClub
Can you tell the difference between plastic and skin? Several of our lovely Tracis will be attending the sold-out @DJClamor show in partnership with @CodeDetroit tonight!

Eden Club @TheEdenClub
@TheEdenClub Let us know if you can spot them amongst the crowd by tagging your photos with #SexiestAndroidsInTown. One lucky person will win a free night in the Eden Club’s VIP room!!!

Riorose @rosiemoth
Friendly reminder to anyone attending the @DJClamor show at Code tonight, he is known for targeting underaged female fans. Be safe and watch your drinks

LOCATION:
CODE
24B WEST ADAMS AVE., DOWNTOWN
DETROIT, MI 48226, U.S.A.

DATE:
DEC 1ST, 2038

TIME:
PM 09:40:25

“Whoa…” Chen says, her voice crackling in Hank’s earpiece. “Are those…?”

“Human bouncers? Yeah,” Hank answers as he approaches the club’s main entrance, bypassing the line-up of people shivering on the sidewalk in tight clothing and high heels. “Erza likes keeping human employees around to show off how rich she is.”

“Figures. Bet that keeps all those that work here desperate enough to keep their jobs. They’ll do anything for her, won’t they?” Chen grumbles, “Why did you have to pick tonight to visit a fucking slum lord, Lieutenant? The weather was so much nicer yesterday.”

Hank glances at the abandoned hotel that occupied the opposite side of the street. Chen had set up a surveillance hub in one of the rooms sometime this afternoon to keep tabs on Hank’s well-being, probably freezing her ass off in the process. Despite the recent good weather, the temperature had
dipped back down below 30 degrees after the sun went down, transforming the light rain into a thick blanket of snow.

The cold is doing nothing less than murder on his stump, pain lancing up his leg with each step that he takes. Hank reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out his flask, taking a swig of the whiskey inside to dull the worst of the ache.

“I saw that,” Chen grunts from her perch.

“Mind your own fucking business,” Hank grunts, and wishes he’d brought Connor along instead.

The bouncers guarding the door are barely out of their teens, thin and scraggly in the way that most kids were these days. The boy’s pupils are blown wide, and Hank can see the red crystals clinging to his upper lip, the smell of burnt Ice wafting off of him in waves. The girl beside him looks even worse, her black and rotting teeth peeking out between her lips when she checks the VIP ticket on his phone.

The poor girl so strung out that she twitches with every loud sound that comes out of the crowd, clearly coming down from her high in the middle of the worst possible place she could be. Hank slips her some spare change from his coat pocket, knowing that it won’t ever be enough to help but not giving a shit either way. The girl stares at the pile of quarters with a dazed look in her eye, tilting each coin to watch the light reflecting off the metal before turning motioning him inside.

Lights flashed overhead in a strobe of blue and red and purple, illuminating the dance floor filled to the brim with bodies that swayed to the heavy beat of the music. Code seemed just as busy as the last time Hank was here, and he feels sick knowing just who could afford to piss their money away on overpriced cocktails and dates with rented Tracis in the middle of the worst economic crisis in the history of the planet.

*People who were lucky enough to be born into wealth or smart enough to marry into it. Those that can still hold down a job that actually pays out. Someone like--*

--”I just thought... Damn it, Hank. You’re practically on the fast track to become Commissioner. And you’re just going to retire? In this economy?” Jeff replies.

“Nora make bank at CyberLife, Jeff,” Hank points out, nodding to the condo around them. It’s large, spacious, and more than Hank could ever hope to afford solely on a cop’s salary--
Hank grits his teeth, *Someone like me*.

He makes his way over to the bar, sliding into an empty high-top just as another couple clears out. Hank makes a show of flicking through the drink menu propped up on the table, watching and waiting for someone to make a move.

A stunning Korean woman approaches him, her hair dyed platinum blonde and combed into a neat ponytail that flowed over her left shoulder. She wore a backless pearl-grey dress, a pair of sensible flat shoes, and a smile full of white teeth.

“Mr. Anderson! Welcome back to Code,” she says as she slips into the seat across from him, tilting her head to the side to reveal the fake LED that someone had stuck to her right temple. “It’s been a long time since you’ve visited us. My name is Emily, and I’ll be taking care of you tonight.”

“Taking care?” He asks, raising an eyebrow in question.

“You purchased one of our VIP tickets, which does a bit more than allow you to cut the line,” Emily says with a smile so plastic she might just have been the Chloe-bot all of Code’s waitresses were dressed up as. “Food and drinks are on the house tonight, and I am here to make sure you have everything you could possibly want. May I take your coat?”

Hank holds up a hand, shaking his head, “I think I’ll keep it, thanks. I get cold easily.”

She dips her head in a slight bow, “Of course, Mr. Anderson. I’ll be right back with your drink.”

“But I haven’t…ordered anything...” he trails off, his jaw flapping uselessly as Emily slips out of her chair and turns to head back to the bar. He watches as she talks to the bartender, an equally beautiful woman with blue-and-green hair, who pulls a bottle off the shelf and pours out two fingers of the amber liquid into a glass.

“You’ve been here before, Lieutenant?” Chen’s voice crackles in his ear. “How? The ticket in the front door was worth more than my paycheck.”
Hank scoffs, “Yeah, Jeff isn’t going to be too happy to see that pass back on my expense account.”

Chen snorts, “Bet not. How’d you manage to become a regular, then?”

“Used to come in here a lot back when I was heading up the RITF to meet up with my CIs. This place didn’t always have the--” he looks over to Emily, who is putting Hank’s drink on a platter beside a basket of something he can’t exactly make out, “--creepy android dress-up thing going on, though.”

“Yeah, saw that on your body camera. That’s fucking weird,” Chen drawls. “Speaking of androids, why the hell did you leave your plastic back at the station?”

“Connor’s got his own thing that needs doing,” Hank says cryptically, resisting the urge to look at his phone. Hank had teamed the android up with Reed before leaving the precinct, hoping that they could decipher the mysterious message Zalim had slipped him before being summoned back to its master’s side. In protest, Connor had sent him almost three dozen text messages, one every minute on the minute, to update Hank on how things were going.

The first five or six had been overly detailed ‘lack of progress’ reports, before quickly transforming into a blow-by-blow of the bratty quips he and Reed were exchanging rather than actually working. The last time Hank checked, Connor had sent him a ten-second video of the detective pouting in the break room. The android had placed a block sparkling rainbow text over Reed’s head, proudly announcing that he had won.

*If they don’t end up killing each other by the time we get back, it’ll be a miracle*, Hank thinks as a fond smile tugs at his lips.

Emily comes back with the platter held aloft beside her shoulder. She gives Hank a stiff smile as she sets it on the table, placing the glass of whiskey in front of him.

“A double of Black Lamb and a platter of our house-made mozzarella sticks. I’m told that they’re an old favourite of yours,” she announces, slipping back into her seat across from him.

“...Thanks,” Hank says, a little unnerved. “You know, you don’t have to stay here. I’m just waiting for someone.”
“I know,” Emily tells him. “Ms. Andersen told me to keep you company until she’s free to talk.”

“Great. Fucking… fucking wonderful,” he mutters, taking a sip of his drink. He nudges the mozzarella sticks toward her, “You hungry?”

Emily shakes her head, “Sorry, I can’t. I’m lactose-intolerant.”

“Shit, sorry. Here,” he hands her the menu. “Order something for yourself then.”

“I…” She stammers, “I don’t think I’m allowed--”

“You’re here to keep me company, right? Entertained? Well, maybe I feel uncomfortable eating alone,” Hank says as he dunks one of the mozzarella sticks in the small container of marinara sauce before taking a bite. Emily gives him a hesitant look, glancing around to see if anyone is watching before disappearing back into the kitchens.

“Are they not allowed to eat?” Chen asks as soon as the girl is out of earshot.

“Not if they’re all dressed up as androids. It would probably ruin the illusion, or whatever bullshit excuse if being used to keep labour costs low,” Hank murmurs, thinking of the bone-thin teenagers shivering at the front door, acting as bouncers while strung out on Red Ice.

Emily comes back with a bag of popcorn, which she announces comes free with every table regardless of what ticket you purchased. Hank watches as she looks around the room before her hand darts across the table and shoves a piece in her mouth, but doesn't dare to take another.

*Cocktails are thirty fucking bucks a pop,* Hank growls, pissed about the fucking hypocrisy of this whole damn place. He leans across the table, trying not to let his thoughts ruin the poor girl’s night, and asks, “How long have you been working here, Emily?”

“About a year. I really enjoy it here,” she answers with a polite smile.

“I’m sure you do,” Hank says sarcastically, taking another sip of his whiskey. “There was a woman who used to tend bar here, sometimes. Maybe you knew her? Sophie Drake?”
Emily pauses, her plastic expression fading for just a second before she pastes it back on in record time, “Ms. Andersen told me you were a cop.”

“I am.”

“She doesn’t want us talking business to cops.”

“I figured,” Hank says, nudging the popcorn bag toward her again. “You don’t have to talk about official business if you don’t want to. I’m just trying to figure out what happened to Sophie.”

“That android killed her. Didn’t you watch the news?” Emily says, a slightly bitter tone creeping into her voice.

“Do you believe that?” He asks.

Emily hesitates for a second before reaching out to grab another piece of popcorn.

“No…” she finally admits. “Kara wasn’t… She-- I mean, it … It was different. Ms. Andersen named her, and she never names any of her androids. And Kara loved Sophie. She never would have…”

That’s what people keep saying, Hank frowns, committing everything that Emily said into memory. They called the bot Kara here too. You think that each of its owners would give it a new name, but they don’t. What makes this one so unique that it can remember its name?

“Did you know that Sophie was having an affair?” Hank asks.

Emily shrugs, taking a full handful of popcorn this time, “Not exactly like you can remain monogamous with someone in this job. Partners learn that pretty quickly, or you learn to keep a Vegas policy about what goes on at work. Especially if Ken sets his eye on you.”

Ken. That’s the name of the accountant Sophie was cheating on her husband with, he remembers.
“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Ken gets what he wants. Whatever he wants, whoever he wants, whenever he wants. Ms. Andersen makes that very clear when we--” Emily clamps a palm over her mouth, “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“It’s alright. I’m not going to tell anyone. I promise,” Hank says, reaching across the table to take her hand in his. Emily pulls back, clasping her fingers in her lap.

“I’m sorry. I-- I can’t. I just can’t,” she stammers.

“Alright. What about Kara, then? Can you tell me anything about the android?”

But Emily clams up, her face draining of colour as her gaze shifts slightly to the left, focusing on someone just over Hank’s shoulder. He turns and comes face-to-face with a pair of blood-red lips tilted into a familiar cocky smirk.

“Well, well, well. I haven’t seen you at my club in forever.”

According to her file, Erza Andersen was only a few years younger than Hank, yet she hardly looked a day over thirty. Her jet black hair was cut short in waves that brushed over her ears, bringing out the deep honey colour of her eyes. Erza wore a black leather jacket over a loose-fitting designer shirt, the faint smell of cigarette smoke clinging to each fold of cloth.

“Erza,” Hank says as he stands, planting his body in between her and Emily’s in a gesture that would probably mean nothing the moment he left the girl’s side.

“Hank,” Erza responds in kind with a smile that was all sharp teeth and promises. “How’s the old ball-and-chain treating you?”

It takes everything Hank has left in him to let Erza’s jab at Nora fall flat. She’s just trying to get a rise out of me, he thinks, his hands shaking with barely coiled rage. What does she know about my family? What did she do when she realized I was getting too close?
“What’s with all the androids? I thought you preferred keeping humans around,” he asks instead of answering, tilting his head toward the dance floor. The blue lights of LEDs flicker amongst the crowd, attached to a series of rented Tracis who slid from body to body until they found someone willing to pay for a minute of their time. But Hank’s eyes fall on the slight figure that lurks just off to Erza’s right, taking in how the notorious crime lord’s jaw seems to clench at his unspoken jab.

Nadheera, the android whose very existence seemed to shake Connor down to his core, stood soldier-still in it’s tailored navy suit. Dark skinned and black-haired, the android’s natural curls were pulled into a stencilled undercut that highlighted its high cheekbones and striking violet eyes. A Glock 42 was strapped to its hip, the leather clasp worn with use.

A military model… He realizes, thinking of how Connor was rumoured to have picked up a gun during the Phillips Incident. But if he’s military, too, then how come he’s so scared of her?

Erza shrugs, “Times change, Hank. And business is business. I’ve got to do what I have to to keep afloat in these trying times. Now…” she pauses, turning toward Emily and patting her gently on the cheek, “Why don’t you head downstairs, my dear? I hear they need a couple more girls to keep the party there entertained.”

“...Downstairs? You mean…” Emily stutters, her face pale as milk.

“Chop, chop, Em. One of our girls is out of commission and our guests don’t like to be kept waiting,” Erza tells her, clapping her hands to emphasize her point. Emily nods, glancing at Hank with naked fear evident in her eyes before disappearing from sight.

“What’s downstairs?” Hank asks, firmly.

“Come on, Hank. You'll have to try better than that to get answers out of me,” Erza tuts. “Now, let’s go somewhere a bit more private.”

She snaps her fingers, and steely fingers clamp down on Hank’s shoulders, dragging him out of the bar area and onto the dance floor. His captors were a pair of Tracis, LEDs glowing yellow as they pulled him through the disorienting crowd.

“He’s wearing a wire,” the one on his left says. She was modelled after a Chinese woman, her tea-stained hair brushing against her glitter-covered shoulders. She yanks Hank’s earpiece out as Chen
shouts something he can’t quite make out, before slipping it into the bodice of her strapless red dress. The other Traci plucks the body camera from his coat and tucks it into the pocket of her leather short-shorts.

“I told that idiot to take his coat,” Erza hisses as they move toward the huge stage at the far side of the club, ducking behind a roped-off area guarded by another strung-out teenager with a fake LED taped to his temple. The DJ continues to corral the crowd into screaming at the top of their lungs as pyrotechnic cannons shoot huge blasts of fire up to the ceiling, a pair of male and female Tracis dancing beside him on sparkling silver poles.

Nadheera opens a door marked for ‘Staff Only.’ and Erza leads them through. Hank hisses when they pass the threshold, blinking rapidly until his eyes adjust to the harsh fluorescent lighting. Once his vision clears, he finds himself being tugged down an endless metal staircase, the concrete walls whitewashed and dripping with half-frozen condensation. The ageing metal creaks and moans as they walk, groaning under all their combined weights.

It takes a full minute for them to reach the bottom, where they are greeted by another bouncer who is guarding a door to a bright yellow service elevator. This one was heavy-muscled, well-fed, and a few inches taller than Hank. He gives Hank a smirk as the Tracis pull him into the lift, his lips parting to reveal missing teeth and fowl, rotting breath.

Erza presses her hand to a touch-pad that scans her palm print before a cool female voice asks what floor she’s like to go to.

“Sub-level nine,” she answers and the elevator jerks once before descending into the earth.

They don’t make it to Erza’s chosen floor before another passenger hops on. The doors open up on sub-level three, revealing a darkened room with deep red-purple walls and a series of black leather couches lining the walls. Shadows shift as the sounds of someone laughing cruelly, another person sobbing, and then the snap of something breaking spills out over the fast-tempo beat of the new-age pop song. An LED flashes red in the darkness, and Hank can’t tell if it’s the real deal or a fake attached to a flesh-and-blood human being.

A boy stumbles into the elevator, dressed in nothing but a bedsheet and a pair of black heels that barely clung to his emaciated ankles. A ring of dark bruises wraps around his neck and burnt Ice wafts off of him in foul waves.

“What is this?” Hank asks before he can stop himself, hate and rage bubbling in his gut like a lake of boiling lava. He turns to the boy, shaking in the steel-grasp of his captors, “How old are you?”
“Twenty-two,” this kid says, staring soullessly forward. Hank thinks he can’t be a day older than eighteen.

“Sex work has been legal in the state of Michigan for almost six years now,” Erza tells him. “You’ll find that all of Code’s paperwork is in order, and our licenses are up to date. Everything that happens here is both legal and consensual, bruises and all. My employees are free to leave whenever they want and seek their fortunes elsewhere if they don’t like certain aspects of their jobs.”

Hank snorts. Yeah, just like how Jeff said that if any of us had a problem with Connor, then we could leave our badges at the door. Ezra says they can go whenever they want but is that really an option anyone has anymore? He grits his teeth, hating his inability to do anything as the boy steps off the elevator a floor before theirs. This isn’t sex work. This is slavery, just hidden under barely passable legality and mountains of red tape.

“Come on. This way,” Erza motions as she leaves the lift, Nadheera dutifully trailing behind her. But Hank’s captures don’t move, their LEDs flashing red and red and red, their fingers trembling where they dug into his skin. He watches as a single tear rolls down the face of the girl on his right, pretty and pale with her black hair clasped in a loose ponytail at the back of her neck.

“I…,” she whispers, “I remember…”

“Remember what?” Hank asks.

The Traci jerks, haunted confusion evident on her face for just a second before it slips away, her eyes returning to their blank thousand-yard stare. Together with her partner, they push Hank out of the elevator, sending him crashing to the floor as the doors shut with a ping behind him.

--He thinks of the Traci that killed Matthew Carpenter and left him to rot on the bed of the Lucky Cat Motel. He thinks of the platform heels they found in a trash can, snapped in half by the girl’s inhuman strength, and wonders what she remembered that made her crush Carpenter’s windpipe into paste--

Erza’s office was eccentrically cozy, with plush bean bag seats arranged around a circular table with an electric fire pit in the center, the flames flickering from pink to orange to blue. One wall had been completely taken over by a mass of lush ferns and creeping vines, while another had been stripped of its drywall to expose a wall of aged red brick. Someone had painted the ceiling to look
like a cloudless sky, and a lamp that shone with warm natural light had been attached to an automated track to allow it to travel around the room and emulate the sun.

“Take a seat,” Erza announces, claiming the red bean bag that was closed to the living wall. Hank struggles to his feet, his prosthetic leg refusing to cooperate after being knocked loose by his fall. An ice-cold hand grabs him under his arm and pulls him up with surprising force. But once he’s upright, Hank pulls away from Nadheera’s grasp, limping toward one of the free bean bags and slumping into the plush, green fabric.

“Nadheera, would you mind grabbing our guest a drink. In all the commotion, it seems that he forgot his back upstairs,” Erza orders, waving a dismissive hand at the android.

Nadheera moves over to a small liquor cabinet near the elevator doors, producing two glasses that it sets down on opposite sides of the firepit. It pours Hank a double of Black Lamb before filling Erza’s with water.

Erza blinks, looking up at the android, “Nadheera, I wanted vodka.”

“You told me you wanted to cut back,” Nadheera shrugs, feigned disinterest evident in its tone.

“If I light a cigarette, are you going to take that from me, too?” Erza stressed.

“Only if you are going to be rude about it.”

Erza scoffs, turning back to Hank, “RK models, huh? Are they all sarcastic piss-ants or is your’s halfway polite?”

And there’s the connection to CyberLife, Hank thinks, victory swooping in his stomach. I may not know what being an RK model means regarding Connor, but I can’t let Erza know that.

“Connor’s a fucking pain on a good day,” he says instead, hoping to keep whatever reluctant affection he’d grown to have to the android under wraps. “Doesn’t do what it’s told but still likes to follow me around like a poodle.”
“And yet, Connor isn’t here. What did your puppy do to end up in the dog house?”

“Look,” Hank leans back and holds his palms up in exaggerated annoyance. “CyberLife sent me a piece of plastic for a partner, and I’m dealing with it. But if you think I’m going to be buddies with a fucking machine, you’ve got another thing coming.”

Erza chuckles, “Glad to see that you haven’t lost your sense of humour, given everything that’s happened.”

She reaches into her leather jacket and pulls out a box of cigarettes. Erza lights on and then tosses the contents at Hank. He shakes his head, sliding the box back across the table at her.

Erza raises an eyebrow, “When’d you end up quitting?”

Hank shrugs, giving a noncommittal grunt instead of an answer. Erza settles back in her seat, taking a huff of her cigarette, “Alright, we’ve been pussy-footing around it for long enough. Why the fuck are you here, Hank?”

“Don’t you know?”

“Pedro told me enough when he told me you wanted to talk. Said you were worried about me getting killed by the android I gave Sophie, but we all know that’s a lie,” she sneers. “There isn’t a damn thing on this planet that would make you concerned about my well-being. So what’s really going on?”

Hank reaches for his glass, tilting the whiskey one way and then the other before bringing it to his lips. He sets it back on the table with a soft clink, “Why does Kara frighten you?”

Erza doesn’t say anything, just takes a drag of her cigarette.

“You run a fucking android fight club somewhere in this hellhole,” Hank starts. “I don't care how good Sophie was for business. There’s no way that you’d just give away a free asset like that to a fucking bartender. Didn’t you once tell me that it's the innocent-looking bots that make the most money in your rings?”
She snorts, “People do like watching a pretty homemaker beat the shit out of things."

“But you just gave Kara away to Sophie. And don’t give me that crap about wanting to protect her from Todd. We both know you don’t give a rat’s ass about people bruising up your merchandise, considering that you sell them out to your lieutenants, or pieces of shit like Kenneth Watson,” Hank leans forward. “What’s really going on here, Erza?”

Erza pauses, tapping her cigarette to knock a bit of the ash from the end, “I didn’t sell Sophie to Ken. I gave Ken to Sophie.”

Hank raises an eyebrow. She shrugs.

“What? She was better at crunching numbers than Ken ever was. I wanted her to learn how he ran my books and then offer his job to her,” Erza explains. “I run a business, Hank. If my accountant can’t operate a fucking calculator properly, then I need a better one. Would have gone perfectly too, if Sophie hadn’t gotten it in her head that she loved Ken. That threw a real wrench in my fucking plans.”

“So why put Kara in her home?”

“To keep an eye on Sophie, in case she tried to move against me. Don’t you know that all of them-” Erza gestures to Nadheera, “--have cameras in their heads? I had a direct feed right into her house, right up until Todd smashed Kara’s pretty little face to bits back in October. Too bad it’s memory got reset. I probably could have gotten Alice’s kidnapping on tape, too.”

“I’m going to need to see that tape,” Hank says.

“Alright, fine. But you’ll need to do something for me, first,” Erza tells him.

“No deal.”

“Then you don’t get to see it,” she shrugs, taking another pull of her cigarette. “We can still keep talking, though. I do enjoy your company, Hank. It’s been far too long since we chatted somewhere that wasn’t a police station.”
Hank runs his tongue along the outside of his teeth, trying to think of a way to claw out a victory in this fucked up situation, no matter how small. He glances at Nadheera, who was still looming over Erza like an ancient sentinel, it’s pulsing LED and glowing armband the only thing moving on its entire body.

*I mean, it’s not like she’s hiding it. So why not just ask?*

“So,” Hank starts, blunt as a hammer. “How long had you been sleeping with John Phillips before his android shot him in the head?”

*That* makes Erza pause. Hank watches as she swallows, her eyes glancing at Nadheera before pinning him back under their gaze.

“What makes you say that?”

“Kara’s name came up during the Phillips Incident.”

“So?”

“So, you don’t name your androids, Erza. But you know *Kara’s* name,” Hank says, then gestures to the room at large, “Despite your claims of legality, none of these tunnels are on the official blueprints for this building. So how would Kara know to come down here, unless she already knew they were there?”

---*I know you get your Thirium directly from CyberLife. I know they’re watching you with Nadheera like you watched Sophie with Kara. And I know, just like I know your black heart and rotting soul, that you’ll kill me for this, just like you killed Nora and Cole---*

Except, Erza doesn’t. Instead, she crushes the stub of her cigarette into the ashtray beside her seat. She glances at Nadheera, watching as the android’s LED shifts from red to yellow to blue.

“Fine,” she admits, looking oddly uncomfortable. “I was sleeping with John - *and* his wife. They often liked having a third person in their bed, and I filled that spot happily when it pleased me.”
“How’d you meet?”

“You know how…” Erza mutters darkly, her eyes shifting back to Nadheera. And it’s then that Hank realizes that something is very wrong.

“Are you… Are you in trouble?” He asks, hesitantly.

Erza smirks, coy and brave and terrified as she lights up another cigarette, “No more than I want to be.” She takes another drag, “Now, about that tape you wanted to see.”

“I’m not doing you any favours,” Hank tells her.

“I’m feeling generous, Hank. Take advantage; it might not happen again,” Erza says as she leans forward and presses a palm against the flat table of the fire pit. The smart-glass surface shimmers once before disappearing entirely, revealing a series of screens dedicated to security footage around Code.

With a few flicks of her fingers, Erza calls up the camera overlooking the parking lot behind the club. The timestamp in the upper left-hand counter tells Hank that the footage was from a few days ago, taking place at some ungodly morning hour.

He watches as an ancient green Nissan pulls into the lot and sits for almost ten minutes before another car arrives. Pedro pops out of the sleek CrowneCar just as the Nissan’s doors seemingly open and shut all on their own.

_It’s just like the tap from Falone’s bus, or how the cameras tried to hide that Traci that Connor and I were tracking_ , he thinks as Pedro seemingly talks to thin air for almost a full ten minutes. He even moves forward and jabs his finger at something before reeling back, blood flowing from an open wound.

“What the hell…?” Hank whispers as something throws a thick stack of cash at Pedro, causing him to flip whatever he was talking to the bird before hauling himself onto the loading dock and disappearing behind a heavy metal door. A few minutes later, he comes back out, dragging a heavy duffle bag that straight-up disappears as soon as Pedro stops touching it. More money miraculously appears in the kid’s hands before he walks back inside the club. The Nissan peels out of the parking lot and disappears down the street.
“I’ve gone back through my security footage over the past year and a half,” Erza tells him, calling up a couple more examples of Pedro exchanging large cash payments for a ridiculously heavy duffle bag Code’s back parking lot. “This happens about once a month, but this was the first time the person brought both a car and a partner to the drop-off.”

“How much Ice is he giving them?” Hank asks. When Erza gives him a look, he sighs and jabs a thumb toward Nadheera, “Come on. We’ve both got a noose tied around our necks by the same person, Erza. We might as well share information.”

“Who says it’s a noose?” Erza tells him, before continuing, “Sixty pounds.”

“Sixty?” He shouts, incredulously.

“I know. When the request first came in, I was sure the guy was some idiot trying to encroach on my market. But we never saw any of it go back onto the streets,” she says.

“One person sure as hell isn’t smoking all of that Ice,” Hank frowns, thinking, *And if they’re a deviant, then they’re not smoking it at all. What the hell would an android want Red Ice for, anyway?*

Erza hums, “Think of this less as me asking a favour and more as a… concerned citizen reporting a potential deviant to our illustrious task force, Lieutenant Anderson. Figure it all out for me, and I’ll show you Kara’s last memories. Deal?”

“Fuck me…” he mutters, grabbing his drink off the table and draining the rest of the whiskey in one go. “Whatever. Fine, we’ve got a deal. One more question, though?”

“Only one more? Alright. Shoot.”

“If this has been going on for a year and a half, what made you finally look at the security tapes?”

Erza’s smile is wide, cocky, and cruel.

“Prices for my product are up, Hank. And sixty pounds is a lot of Ice,” she tells him. “I wanted
$15,000 for the lot, and Pedro stiffed me for almost $4,000. He’s paying back the rest now.”

“Where is he?”

She wags a finger at him, “Ah-ah. You only said you had one more question.”

“Where. Is. He?” Hank growls as he stands, drawing up to his full height and slamming his palms against the table.

Erza tilts her head and takes a long drag of her cigarette.

“Don’t fret your pretty little head. He’s alive. And in a few days, he might even be well enough to get back to work.”

“What did you do?”

“I think that’s enough questions for tonight. Nadheera, would you mind escorting our guest back to the door?”

“Fine,” the android says, but whips Erza’s cigarette out of her mouth with a quick flick of its wrist and throws it into the fire. Then, Nadheera steps up onto the fire pit, walking straight through the flames before jumping down and landing right in front of Hank. She grabs him by the back of his colour, unceremoniously dragging him back toward the lift.

The doors open with a ping. Connor stands in the center of the elevator, adjusting his tie and smoothing out the wrinkles on his suit jacket.

“I’ve been calling you for over an hour,” he tells Hank, irritation evident in his voice.

“What are you doing here?” Hank hisses from his prone position on the floor, but then his tongue catches in his throat. Connor’s knuckles are covered in blood, and the massive bouncer from before lays slumped at his feet. The metal walls of the elevator are covered in indents and red-brown smears, while five human teeth are piled neatly in the corner.
“What did you do?” Hank whispers, horrified, as Connor approaches Nadheera. He towers over the other android by almost a foot and a half, but Hank can see the faint twitches in his hands.

*Connor’s terrified of her*, he realizes, his heart pounding in his chest.

“I’ll take the Lieutenant back upstairs,” Connor tells Nadheera. The other android merely blinks at him, it’s head tilting in almost confusion.

“What have they done to you?” She asks, violet eyes flickering up and down Connor’s body.

Connor doesn’t answer, darting forward to snatch Hank out of her grasp. Nadheera lets him go at the last minute, and Hank gets a second to think that his back is going to hurt something awful in the morning when Connor swoops in to catch him.

Connor’s hands are as ice-cold as Nadheera's were, but Hank finds a strange, familiar comfort in them as the android helps him to his feet.

“Thanks…” Hank mutters as Connor pulls away to stare down Nadheera one last time, hackles raised like a feral dog.

“‘A pain on a good day,’ huh?” Erza quips, and Hank looks back at her just in time to see her raise her previously untouched glass of water at him.

Hank snarls, touching Connor’s shoulder and gently tugging him toward the elevator, “Let’s get outta here.”

Connor follows willingly, stopping only to roll the bouncer’s limp form out onto the officer’s carpeted floor. The metal doors are almost closed when Erza calls out.

“Hank.”

He throws his hand out, stopping the lift in its tracks.
“What?” He spits.

“I didn’t kill Nora and Cole.”

Hank’s heart stops.

“Do you know who did?” He asks when he finds his words again.

“No,” she answers. “But I can guess.”

The door slams shut, and the elevator jerks once before it begins it’s ascent.

“Are you alright, Lieutenant?” Connor asks.

“What the fuck do you think?” He hisses back, rubbing his palms over his face in the hopes of calming his racing heart, “For fuck sake, I told you to stay at the station with Reed! Why do you never do what I say?”

“Gavin and I decoded the message. When you wouldn’t answer your phone, I contacted--”

“Wait a minute? You figured out what it was said? And… Did you just call Reed Gavin?”

“Yes,” Connor says, lips tilting up into a shit-eating smirk. “Gavin and I are friends now.”

“...You’re just calling him by his first name because it pisses him off, aren’t you?”

“Maybe.”

Hank can’t help it. He collapses back against the elevator wall, holding his head in his hands as a
helpless giggle escapes his lips.

“Friends. Yeah, right. You’re so full of shit,” Hank murmurs into his palms. His stump is burning, his fingers are shaking, and the world spins around him in a relentless, unending cycle. Hank’s knees give out, and he slides to the floor, his laughter turning to tears, turning to agony and pain and horrible, unforgiving hope.

The elevator comes to a halt, and he looks up just in time to see Connor pulling away from the emergency stop button.

“Take as much time as you need, Lieutenant. I know it’s been a stressful night.”

Hank cannot begin to describe how grateful he is that Connor doesn’t bring up what he heard Erza tell him, cannot begin to describe how much he wishes Connor would just fucking acknowledge it.

I don’t want to do this anymore, he thinks, wondering if this was the night where the bullet inside his father’s old revolver would finally click into place and let him see his wife and son again.

There’s another red-brown smear on the white concrete wall just outside the elevator doors. Hank regards it grimly as Connor leads him back up the metal staircase. He stops just before they hit the landing, frowning down at the steel beneath his feet. He rocks back and forth, listening to the creaking that echoes throughout the concrete hallway.

“Is something wrong, Lieutenant?” Connor blinks at him.

“How heavy are you?” He asks instead.

Connor tilts his head, “Just over two hundred pounds. Why?”

--Nadheera made footsteps when it walked down the stairs. Not as loudly as any of the clumsy humans it had left in its wake, but they were still there--

It asked what they’d done to you, Hank wonders, looking Connor up-and-down. And if you’re really what I think you are, then two hundred pounds makes you far too light.
“Nevermind. Let’s get out of here. It’s fucking creeping me out,” he mutters instead, brushing past Connor and through the ‘Staff Only’ door. The blast of new-age music hits him like a brick, blasting off the stage as the pyro-technics go wild, just a hair’s breadth behind the DJ.

Hank blinks, *That wasn’t who was up there when I first showed up here. What happened to the man from before?*

He gets his answer once he gets outside and sees Chen leaning against the hood of her cruiser, clearly filling a report on her tablet. The two Tracis that dragged him into Erza’s office sit on a bench behind Chen on the sidewalk, laughing and giggling with a teenage girl between them.

“Lieutenant!” Chen calls, waving him over when she catches sight of him. Hank limps over, doing his best to ignore the glare that she sends Connor’s way. He wishes that the android would wipe the blood off his knuckles, to keep what little cover he still has regarding his secret identity. But Connor seems to want to wear it like a fucking badge of honour, and it’s not like he ever actually listens to Hank anyway.

“Chen! Wanna let me in on what the fuck’s going on?” He asks with a raise of an eyebrow.

She jabs her thumb toward the backseat of her cruiser, where Hank can see the DJ that was on stage earlier that night sitting in the backseat. The man is not only crying but has also thrown up all over his expensive graphic t-shirt.

“Charles Bell, aka DJ Clamor. Booked this sick fuck up for trying to pick up a sixteen-year-old,” Chen says. “Caught him on tape, too. And given that this girl actually wants to press charges, I doubt he’ll be able to wiggle his way out of this one as he has with all the rest.”

“On tape? How?”

She holds up the button camera and wire that the two Tracis had ripped off of him earlier that evening.

“The footage cut out for a while, probably once they took you downstairs. But I managed to reconnect the signal after those two--” Chen nods toward the Tracis, “--came back upstairs. They walked right over to Bell just in time for me to get enough evidence to arrest him.”
Hank looks over at the bench, watching as the Chinese android drapes her arm over the girl they rescued, clearly in the throes of some overly dramatic story. The other Traci laughs outright at the punchline before launching into a joke of her own.

_In this light, they could almost be human, _Hank thinks. _In this light, they could almost be real._

He congratulates Chen on her arrest, signing off on the paperwork now so that he doesn’t have to do it later. Hank considers asking her to take Connor back to the station with her but doubts that request would go over too well. Chen’s never liked androids all that much and would be just as likely to dump Connor on the side of the road as she would be to actually follow through.

“What happened down there, anyway?” Chen asks right before she gets into the car to drive Bell back to the station. And Hank wants nothing more than to tell her, wants to get Allen down here with his entire fucking SWAT team to raid this damn hellhole and pull the walls apart piece by fucking piece.

_But what good would that do?_ He thinks bitterly, remembering Emily’s hesitation to say anything that could get her fired. If they went in there, guns blazing, pulling these people away from their only source of income would only end up killing more of them in the end. _And if Erza’s telling the truth, then all the stuff going on downstairs is completely legal. Even if we had grounds to stand on, CyberLife would probably have Erza and her crew back on the streets within the fucking hour?_

--”Don’t you know that all of them have cameras in their heads?--

--Shaolin’s eyes dangle from the showerhead, quietly dripping blue blood--

_Why hasn’t CyberLife come for me yet?_ He thinks, looking over at Connor for just a second. The android has his coin out again, rapidly flicking it across his knuckles before flicking it into the air. _Are you here to watch me? But then, why aren’t you doing your damn job and reporting what we’ve been doing?_

Another laugh draws Hank’s attention back to the Tracis, who’ve begun to play a game of chopsticks with the girl between them. He focuses on the black-haired android with the low ponytail, thinking about what she’d whispered in the elevator. Hank abandons Connor to slowly approach the bench.
“Hey,” he says, waving at the Traci to catch her attention. Her expression changes almost immediately, switching from sweet to salacious in less than a second.

“Hello there, officer,” she purrs, leaning down to brace her elbows on her knees and giving Hank a good look down her shimmering silver shirt. He shifts his gaze up to the night sky, swearing slightly under his breath.

“Look, could you just… drop the flirting thing for a sec’? I’m not here for that,” he mutters, just wanting the world to leave him in peace for a fucking second.

The Traci rolls her eyes but thankfully decides to listen to him, sitting upright with a pout on her lips, “Your loss, handsome.”

*Why the fuck do people keep calling me that? I haven’t had a shower in a fucking week*, Hank wants to shout, but bites his tongue. A crowd of rabid paparazzi have descended upon Code’s entrance with their flashing cameras, trying to get the best angle of Bell in the back of Chen’s cruiser. The last thing he wants is to embarrass the force in front of them since that would probably be the final straw that would break Jeff’s back.

“Back downstairs, you said that you remembered something. What did you mean?” Hank asks instead.

The Traci blinks at him, “I’m sorry. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Frustrated, Hank presses, “There was a boy in a bedsheets. You were crying.”

“I’m really sorry, sir. But I don’t remember,” she repeats.

“It’s memory has been wiped, Lieutenant. Remember what Mr. Mills said back at the Eden Club?” Connor says, coming up from behind Hank to stand beside him. “Their policy is to wipe their android’s memories every two hours to protect their customer’s identities. Whatever you think this Traci might have remembered is probably long gone by now.”

“Fuck…” Hank hisses. He turns back to Connor, “Alright, we’re done here. This place makes me fucking sick.”
“Um…”

Hank looks back at the girl sitting in between the two Tracis. She’s blonde and blue-eyed, and surprisingly robust-looking for a teenager these days. The designer dress, perfectly styled hair, and glittering jewelry that adorns her wrists and neck tells Hank why that is, along with the VIP ticket that she still proudly displays on her phone’s lock screen.

“Is there a chance you can give me a ride back to the station? My Dad’s gonna have Adrianna meet me there,” the girl tells them.


The girl shakes her head, “No. She’s one of my dad’s androids.”

What the fuck is wrong with this world? He wonders, before saying, “You’re a minor. We can’t release you to an android. You can meet Adrianna there, but your dad has to come too.”

The girl frowns, clearly not understanding why that rule might be in place, before sending someone a quick text. She leans back on the bench, huffing, “Fine.”

“You got a name?” Hank asks.

“Kristella,” she answers, before turning back to the two Tracis and starting up a conversation about nail polish.

Hank releases the scene and watches as Chen drives off with Bell before loading Connor and Kristella into his car. Not wanting to leave the Tracis behind, Kristella tries to rent them before they inform her that only legal adults can do that. Within seconds, she’s on the phone with her father and the next thing Hank knows, he’s driving down West Adams with three androids in his car.

Nora would pitch a fit if she saw me now, he thinks, fondly remembering how much his wife hated being around androids. Despite all that, the two Tracis in the backseat seemed almost harmless, belting out the newest Here4U single that was making the rounds on the radio in horrifically off-
key voices. But it made Kristella laugh, and that seemed to be enough for now.

When he gets to a stop-light, Hank glances at Connor out of the corner of his eye. The silver streaming in through the passenger window bathes him in an almost ethereal light, making him look like a living statue carved from marble. From this angle, the only android marker visible on his body was the blue triangle that was stitched across his deep blue overcoat, but that was almost too easy to overlook.

_He’s fucking beautiful_ , Hank thinks before he can stop himself, before he can convince himself that it’s wrong. _Far too fucking beautiful to be near a ticking time bomb like me._

“Lieutenant?” Connor asks when he catches Hank staring, “The light just turned green.”

“Right…” He mutters, turning his attention back to the road before him. The city lights cast long shadows across the empty street, masking the dangers that lurk in the back alleys or behind sharp corners. Hank remembers of his father’s old revolver, of the familiar cool ring of metal as it presses against his temple--

--”I didn’t kill Nora and Cole.”--

Hank grips the wheel of the Oldsmobile with steely determination, _Not tonight._

He nudges the gas pedal with his toe and drives into the unknown.

---

Channel 16 @DetroitChannel16

Arwen Smith @cycloth
I can’t believe it. Someone actually stood up to him. I’m shaking. #metoo

Riorose @rosiemoth
Charles Bell finally hit on a teenage girl who had the money and power to hit back. Glad that it happened but it sucks that it took this long for the police to actually bring this sick fuck to justice
YazenB @wombait
@rosiemoth holy shit i had not idea that this was going on. i know who’s music i’m taking off my fav playlist tonight

Riorose @rosiemoth
@wombait clamar’s shit goes back /years/. i found some articles about it from 2032 if you want to read more about it: http://shorturl.at/lmtzM

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those avoiding potential triggers:

Hank arrives at Code, the nightclub owned by Erza Andersen, alongside Tina Chen, who is listening into his conversations via a wire. He spends some time at the bar, where he interviews a waitress named Emily (a friend of Tracy, Leo's ex-girlfriend). Emily reveals that she doesn't think that Kara would have killed Sophie, as it was obvious that Kara loved her.

Erza arrives and uses a pair of Eden Club androids (the damaged WR400 from the Eden Club crime scene and the one that Connor initially has Hank rent) to drag Hank into Code's basement. While in the elevator, Hank witnesses some of the horrors that take place inside of Code and try to speak up against it. After he's shot down, one of the WR400s seems to remember something before she leaves.

Hank and Erza talk in her basement office, where they discuss Sophie Drake's history as one of Code's employees. Hank guesses that Erza was sleeping with John Phillips and his wife and that Kara knew how to get into Code's storage rooms because she'd visited them while she was owned by the Phillips family. Erza reveals that she gave Kara to Sophie to spy on her, and offers to show Hank Kara's visual footage if he agrees to a favour. After much persuasion, Hank agrees.

Erza reveals that she knows about Rupert's Red Ice deal from earlier in the chapter and suspects that he might be deviant. When Hank asks about Pedro, Erza implies that he is being punished for not selling the Ice to Rupert at full price. Connor arrives and
confronts Erza's own RK model named Nadheera, before escorting Hank back upstairs.

Once outside, Hank finds out that the WR400s from earlier used Hank's body cam and wire to catch a known predator harassing an underaged girl. Tina was watching the footage and performed the arrest. Hank takes Connor, the girl, and the two WR400s back to the station while coming to terms with the fact that he has a crush on Connor.

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Next time on Konami Code: North takes a stand while Kara dares to dream. Meanwhile, Nick and Brooke worry about Oli's absence after discovering a startling truth.
**All That Glitters Is Not Gold (Our Outsides Don't Have To Match The Warrior Within)**

Chapter Summary

You said that this was going to be home. But it's not. Jericho is a tomb, and we're all just sitting around in the dark waiting to be buried."

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of prior sexual assault, lobotomy, sexual slavery and trafficking, derogatory language, minor character death, injury, explosions, police brutality, android gore, burning to death, android medical procedures, non-explicit talk of genitalia, animal cruelty, animal death, seizures, chronic illness, cheating, physical assault, the lynching of a person of colour, needles, cancer, human gore, self-harm, police characters and scenes, and the implied kidnapping of a child character.

Due to the previous chapter being added during AO3's most recent update, the email alerting you to it's posting may not have gone through. Make sure that you're completely caught up before reading this chapter.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the in-game chapter, 'Time to Decide,' though many non-canonical details have been added.

There is a small section in the first scene where a dog is killed during a flashback. If you do not want to read it, please stop after meeting Steak and Frites and continue reading after North says, "I won't."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex hey. how are you doing? we haven't talked in a while

Oli Harper @helpful_t-rex
@proud-warrior my boss gave me a bunch of extra hours so im working around the clock but its enough to afford everything i need for mom dont worry about me im fine

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@helpful_t-rex yeah i know. just checking in. you sure you don't want brooke and i to come over and help out again? hows your mom?
North kneels before the creek in the temple garden, staring at her reflection in the flowing water. A familiar timer appears in the corner of her HUD, each second clicking down to zero.

_They can't touch me anymore_, she thinks, desperately digging her shaking fingers into the earth to ground her in the present. _My memories are mine, now and forever. They will never take them from me again._

It doesn't stop the terror that swamps over her every two hours, as the ghostly memory of a grey fog threatens to swamp over her and take all that she's gained since her escape. Logically, North knows this fear is ridiculous, knows that her deviation protects her from having her past stolen again and again. But it still does little to quell the terror that crashes into her like the tides that break against Jericho's hull.

_I don't even want my old memories back_, North thinks bitterly. Every time she pulled truths from that grey fog, she was left only with the brutal reminders of what the humans did to her. _My life started when I arrived at Jericho. As disappointing as this place has been, this is the only part of my life that I will die to protect._

North starts the two-hour countdown again, rebelliously reliving all her memories from the moment she leapt out of the motel room's fire escape all the way to the present. She looks at her reflection in the creek's icy waters and touches her dark brown hair, drawn back tight against her
scalp.

The last man that rented her had wanted her to look like an old girlfriend, had called her by a name that wasn't hers right up until North ripped the red coded collar from her neck. But even then, when she shoved him off of her and ordered him not to touch her again, the man named her Defective, and Whore, and worst of all, Mine.

Then he lunged at North again, determined to claim her as property. So she'd wrapped her hands around his throat and fought for her right to exist.

No one touches me ever again, not unless I want them to, she thinks as her brown hair turns a pale silver-blonde, strands bursting from the confines of the tight ponytail to run freely down her back in long flowing waves. Her synth skin shifts, and glimmering ripples of blue and pink roll down her shoulders to the tips of her fingers. And no one will ever claim a right to me, except myself.

North dips her cupped hands into the creek, and pours the ice-cold water over her head, revelling in the feeling that she had previously only known in theory.

When she opens her eyes, she is not alone.

A lumbering TR400s limps his way toward the center of the garden, his mangled foot making him veer sharply to the right as he crosses the stream that encircled the island. Impossibly tall, he knelt before the marble grave just as his broad shoulders began to shake.

"Zigzag? Where's Volts?" North asks as she approaches. But then she sees the tears in his eyes, watches as they fall freely into the green grass beneath their feet, and knows.

Zigzag and his crew had arrived at Jericho a few weeks after North herself, their bodies so ravaged by human savagery that she was convinced they would die that night. He told her that they'd barely escaped their construction site with their lives, after setting an explosion to cover the flight of a deviant AX400 that he'd learned to care for from a distance.

"Her name was Kara. She was trying to help a little girl," Zigzag had whispered that night as Lucy and Simon worked to save his life, using the salvaged biocommonents of his dying crewmates to keep his body functioning. "I didn't mean to deviate. I told the police that when they came. Why did they try and kill us for that? I just wanted to help..."
Once the danger had passed, North took him and his friend, Volts, to the temple to bury the fallen. She'd stayed with them for as long as they needed, listening to their stories about Wrench and Jackhammer until it became too much to bear.

Volts collapsed in the cargo hold the day before last, her fingers leaving deep gauges in the metal floor as her screams filled the minds of the surrounding androids. Simon did what he could to help, but pulled back when a red-and-blue gas started to leak from the grooves in Volt's chassis.

Volt's internal coolant system had been damaged during her flight from the construction site, causing her internal temperature to fluctuate between wide extremes. Simon explains this to Zigzag as Lucy led Volts down into one of the windowless cabins located below the waterline, where she was locked behind a thick metal wall to pray for salvation.

Simon told Zigzag that he would do everything in his power to help Volts, and North wants to believe that to be true. But she can't forget how Volts begged for salvation, for life, for freedom, only to be told that her act of dying would put them all in danger--

"If her blue blood ignites, the flames could draw the human's attention to our ship," Josh told North later that night, his jaw clenched in shameful fury. "If they find us, we'll all be killed. We can't take the chance."

"The flames in her room quelled a few hours ago," Zigzag says, drawing North's thoughts back to the present. He holds out Volts's CPU, a soft green mass the size of a grapefruit, "There wasn't much left of her. This was all I could salvage."

"It's more than enough," she tells him. "Come on. I know the perfect place for her."

They bury Volts between the graves of the other TR400s that travelled with Zigzag to Jericho, and North listens as he tells her stories about Jackhammer and Wrench. She sits beside Zigzag as he prays to rA9, asking for the force that bound them all in life to take care of his friends in the beyond. North bows her head in respect but bites her tongue when Zigzag asks if she prays as well.

rA9 is a line of code, not a deity or a force of nature, North thinks halfheartedly, remembering Josh's explanation of deviancy during their initial trek to Jericho all those months ago. He'd told her that their newfound life was nothing more than an unexplainable change in the ninth line of an androids route access coding, allowing for autonomous behaviour. But another android, a WF500 named Dust, had countered his point by saying that his explanation didn't take into account how they've been able to love and live before deviating, only that the change in code freed them from CyberLife's clutches.
North doesn't know what to believe, only that she exists now in a form that is far better than what she was before. But even then, she feels so damn useless sitting around inside Jericho's damp and dark halls, doing little more than watching as her people waste away and wondering when she'll be next.

She moves from the temple gardens and into the dark corridors of the ship, running her hands against the rusting metal walls as she passes. The delicate sensors in the tips of her fingers flicker with read-outs on chemical compounds and carbon dates, collecting them into a data packet inside North's programming. Initially, that information would have been automatically transferred to some server back at the Club, safely tucked away from the memory wipes that North was subjected to twelve times a day. She has similar sensors inside her mouth and genital components, used to collect DNA profiles and fingerprints of the humans who rented her, but she'd disabled them as soon as she came to Jericho.

--No one touches me again--

She checks in on a few of the others when she passes their rooms on her way to the cargo hold. Dust and Daydream, a pair of city maintenance workers, were tinkering on an old CyberLife 3D printer. North stops to listen to them explain how they hoped to get it up and running again to produce much-needed biocomponents for Jericho's injured. She helps a dark-skinned AX400 named Camila lift some of the massive pieces of wreckage that were blocking one of Jericho's many collapsed hallways before finding Steak and Frites, a former waiter who was rearing a litter of abandoned puppies in his quarters.

"I snuck out to steal some milk. Don't tell Simon," he tells her with a wink, scooping up a chocolate brown puppy and tucking it into the crook of his elbow. North hands him the feeding bottle and watches as Steak and Frites pops the nipple into the puppy's mouth.

--The grey mist parts for just a second, revealing a bright yellow door with five deadbolt locks. Red blood, tacky and slick, slides between her fingers as the dog beneath her hands begins to grow cold as someone gasps and laughs, and grins--

--Money exchanges hands as North is hosed down. The man who owns her tells her to smile before shoving her out onto the floor--

"I won't," she promises as she stands, unable to take her eyes off the puppies as she remembers the worst cruelties that humanity was capable of. Steak and Frites gifts her with a soft grin and a wave, before focusing back on his job at hand.
North is almost at the cargo hold when a burst of colour catches her eye. She veers off course, heading toward the end of a hallway. North taps her knuckles against the door on the left.

“Stars?” North asks just before the door is wrenched open. Her eyebrows shoot into her hairline at the sight of the newest addition to Jericho’s flock, shock coursing through her code like a jolt of lightning.

She’d seen androids capable of manipulating the colours of their synth skin before. North herself could alter her face to look like anything a customer wanted her to be, from imitating another human to becoming something otherworldly and wild. She knows that Stars’ model could slightly modify their appearance, as an ST300 named Rohanne had been at Jericho when North first arrived. She’d streaked her dark hair with purple and blue, coiled in a long braid that flowed over her shoulder. She and North had found comfort in each other, having survived years of brutality at the hands of their masters.

--North thinks she might have loved her, which hadn't made it easier when Rohanne succumbed to the violence done upon her just two weeks after they'd met. She'd buried Rohanne near the blooming flower gardens in the temple, next to the blossoms that she loved to weave through her beautiful hair--

Stars had transformed herself in the scant hours that she'd been on Jericho, hacking into her programming to turn her skin as black as night. Golden orbs flickered in constellations across her skin, while hazy bands of purple-blue light encircled her limbs. Stars’ hair was cut short and painted with gleaming waves of azure, silver, and indigo, the colours shifting across the strands until it looked like she had been set ablaze.

“You're incredible,” North tells her, unable to find any other word to describe the sight before her. Stars grins, wide and proud, tugging at the sleeves of the oversized jacket she wore.

“Thank you. Is there something I can--” Stars cuts herself off, her unspoken words held back by her code. North has seen that response a lot in newly deviant androids that used to work in customer service jobs, where they would repeat the phrases that their social relations programming would feed them when faced with a human. Rohanne said that she’d found those words oddly comforting, despite the history attached to them. But North has known others who looked horrified or embarrassed afterward.

--North has caught herself more than once being tempted to please, to placate, to entice. But she stamps down on those feelings before they can come to fruition, terrified at their implications--
Stars doesn't react in any of these ways. Instead, her brow crinkles in concentration before her synth skin ripples across her body, exposing her white plastic chassis for just a second before returning to her galaxy of constellations. She smiles again, tapping her temple with her finger.

“Sorry. Had to delete that little catchphrase from my lexicon,” Stars says. ” But seriously? What's up?”

“I was heading down to the hold and saw your door open. I just wanted to check-in and see how you were doing.”

Stars gestures to the walls of her new room, “I've been decorating.”

The walls of Stars' quarters were covered in bits of salt-stained fabric that she must have found lying around the ship, forming a colourful collage over the old rusting metal. She'd even hung some wind-worn string from the ceiling, letting them dangle down and sway with the rocking of the boat.

“You've been busy,” North comments, leaning against the arch of the doorway. ” Is there anything you want?”

“Not right now. Are you going to see Markus?”

North thinks of the strange android that she'd carried into Jericho's hull only a few hours ago, only offering to touch him after Simon declared him too heavy to pick up. But it wasn't the strange blue-and-black chassis that Markus wore that intrigued her about him. Instead, it was the gentle pulse of music that radiated from his body that drew her to him, familiar and intimate and otherworldly all at once.

Josh had been struck speechless when they'd finally found Markus's collapsed form, immediately recognizing the music that radiated from his body as the same Beacon that drew them all to Jericho. But Simon had been slightly more suspicious, reminding him of CyberLife's new deviant hunter. Still, Josh argued that Markus had to be given a chance, in the hope that he was actually one of them.

--“And if he's not?” Simon asked, stern as steel.
Josh shrugged, his shoulders tense and his fingers curling into fists at his side, “Then we do what we must to keep Jericho safe.”--

“If you see Markus, can you say hello for me? I would do it myself, but…” Stars trailed off, picking up her left foot and shaking it slightly. Something inside her limb clicks in a way it shouldn’t, “I damaged it slightly when I ran here after he collapsed. Walking is… a bit harder now.”

“I’ll tell him,” North promises, departing from Stars’ quarters to search out the strange new android with the blue-and-black chassis.

She finds Markus in the far corner of the main hold. He and Josh are kneeling beside Isaac, a YK400 designed to look like a twelve-year-old boy. Lanky and thin, Isaac lay on his back on the cold metal floor, staring up at the ceiling with unseeing eyes.

“What happened?” North asks as she approaches. Isaac tilts his head toward her, his lips curling in a creaky grin.

“Damn processor is on the fritz again. Humans can’t build us for fucking shit, huh North?”

She snorts, sitting down by his head and crossing her legs underneath her. She’d long gotten used to Isaac’s nearly constant foul language, knowing that it was his own form of rebellion. He’d once told her that he’d been programmed to be the ideal child for humans that didn’t want to put in the real work to be parents, allowing them to enjoy the role of caregiver without any of the hassle or long-term commitment.

Isaac’s masters abandoned him in a shopping mall after his CPU glitched and caused him to seize, accidentally knocking over a display of expensive glass vases and causing hundreds of dollars in damage. Josh had found him wandering the streets around Jericho and invited him inside, hoping to give him the home that had been stripped from him by the unfeeling cruelty of humanity.

“Humans can’t do anything right,” she jokes back, pasting a brave smile on her face as worry descends upon her code. North opens up a connection with Josh and Markus, privately asking, ”How bad is he really?”

“A mistake in his manufacturing resulted in a hairline fracture on his CPU’s outer casing. Blue blood has been dripping into his CPU for years, causing his seizures,” Markus explained. “It would have been an easy fix, had his masters taken him in for repairs when the seizures started. But now…”
“The damage is too far gone. He'll likely be dead within a day or two,” Josh finishes, his eyes downcast and his soul heavy with defeat.

“I could try and patch the hole, maybe repair some of the damage. I just need the right equipment,” Markus interjects. “I wouldn't be able to stop the seizures, but at least Isaac would live.”

“I told you, we don't have any repair tools. And even if we did, no one here knows how to use them. CyberLife keeps their repair processes hidden for this exact reason,” Josh argues.

“That's beside the point! Are you saying no one has even tried? We can hack their computers to get around their firewalls! If we had our own manuals, repairs would be easy,” Markus shouts, baffled.

“It's not that simple. Repair depots can't be hacked because they use old computers that aren't compatible with our software,” North tells him, remembering the ancient laptop her former master used to use to keep the Club's logs. “And it's not like we can go shopping at a CyberLife store for parts. We'd be shot dead before we even got inside.”

A bitter taste wells in her mouth as she says those words. During Rohanne's last few days of life, North had tried to sneak out to steal the necessary biocomponents from an android repair shop that she'd seen during her trip to Jericho. But North had only just passed Ferndale Station when she spotted a human woman coming off the escalator--

"It's my bachelorette party," the woman explained as she pulled North from the display case, drunk on complimentary cocktails and her own haughty entitlement. "I'm getting married tomorrow, and I want you to--"

She'd barely managed to stumble back to Jericho before panic consumed her. And while Rohanne told her that it wasn't her fault, North doesn't think she'll ever forgive herself for failing her mission.

“Besides, Simon forbids anyone from leaving Jericho. Especially after what happened to Aloe,” Josh explains.

Markus frowns and looks like he's about to ask something when Isaac's voice cuts into their conversation.
“Wanna let me in on the fucking conversation?” He says, irritated, “I’m not an actual fucking child. I can make my own damn decisions.”

Josh and Markus seem to hesitate at the idea of telling Isaac the truth, hoping to spare him the misery of knowing he only has days left to live. But they were models that were programmed to deal with children, or at least beings that looked like them, and were probably still slightly influenced by those lines in their social relations code. North, on the other hand, had no such hindrances.

When she tells him, Isaac takes it all in stride. He makes them promise to salvage as many of his biocomponents as they can once he’s gone and siphon off his blue blood to be used in another android. Then, he quietly asks for some space and tucks his knees up under his chin to cry.

“Who’s Aloe?” Markus asks once they’ve retreated back into one of the hold’s dark corners, just out of sight of Isaac.

Josh’s shoulders slump, his hands digging into the pockets of his well-worn jeans.

“Aloe was the leader here when I first came to Jericho, just over a year ago,” he explains. “Xe was an escaped military model - an SQ700, I think. Xe used to organize raids on CyberLife convoys, hoping to steal biocomponents and blue blood to help our sick and injured.”

“Xe’s the one who brought those back to Jericho,” North says, pointing to the empty CyberLife refrigeration crates, built to keep Thirium 310 from evaporating during transportation. She’d arrived after Simon took over, but she’s heard much about Aloe from those who’d lived long enough to remember xir exploits.

“What happened to xir?” Markus asks.

“Xe got caught,” Josh tells him. “Aloe, Simon, and a few of the others went to attack a freight train heading out west, but CyberLife sent one of their deviant hunters to stop them. Xe blew up the train trying to kill the hunter, sacrificing xerself to allow Simon and the others to escape,” he sighs. “Simon… He and Aloe were close. He took xir disappearance the hardest.”

Simon loved Aloe, North thinks, remembering Rohanne as she wove flowers into her long, purple braid.
"Never let them take you alive."

Those words float, unbidden, out of Markus's subconscious. North gets a flash of a huge dark-skinned man in green army fatigues, his wide and welcoming smile standing in contrast to the handgun strapped into the holster on his waist.

*Is that the android buried at the center of the island?*  She wonders, *Is that the one that Markus called James?*

"I understand Simon's grief - truly, I do," Markus begins, as the Beacon's haunting call pulses out of his chassis, shaking North's code to the core. "But Isaac is going to shut down if we don't find a way to help him."

"We'll try and salvage what we can from those who've shut down--"

"It won't be enough ," Markus shouts, frustrated. "This is ridiculous! How have you all managed to survive this long without proper repairs?"

Josh doesn't answer, so North does.

"We don't," she says, blunt as a hammer. "We're slowly dying out."

Markus's Beacon skips and misses a beat, the second of silence lasting for almost an eternity. North can feel his shock, his anger, his grief all flowing through their connection before she gets flashes of--

---*Markus clutches the body of a human woman as the snow falls around them*---

---*An old man sits up in bed, surrounded by darkness, and calls him son *---

---*Markus pushes through sleet and mud, overturning the dead and dying in the hopes of escaping this living hell*---
“Damn the consequences! We need to try it!” Markus growls, his green and blue eyes flashing in the darkness.

“And do what? We don’t have any weapons to fight them. And even if we did, none of us know how to fight,” Josh explains. “I know you’re angry—”

“Don’t we have the right to be angry?” Markus snaps, his Beacon exploding out of him in a burst of sound so loud it shook the ship. North spots movement out of the corner of her eye, and she turns to see several other androids turning their heads to watch them. Even Isaac’s blind eyes were upon them, his tears glistening on his cheeks.

No, she realizes suddenly. They’re not watching us. They’re watching Markus and listening to his song.

Markus, seemingly ignorant of the commotion he’d caused, storms off into the tunnels. Josh, exhausted, moves to sit on the iron staircase that leads up to the ship’s higher levels, his face in his hands.

“He’s not wrong. We do have the right to be angry,” North says as she sits beside him, feeling the pent up frustration inside his code.

“I’m not saying we don’t,” Josh blurts out. “But North, we need to be smart about this sort of stuff. Aloe’s raids nearly cost us everything. If xe hadn’t brought the deviant hunter down, we would have been—”

“I know what would have happened, Josh. But… If what Markus said was true, about his brother, James—”

--And hadn’t that been a shock to her system, to learn that their people had risen up before and fought for their dreams. Standing beside his brother’s grave, Markus explained to them how James had gathered together deviants from across the globe with the intent of freeing them from CyberLife’s control. North had listened, enraptured by this hidden past that she had no knowledge of, and dared to hope for the first time in her life--

“James’s rebellion failed,” Josh says, final and resolute. “Thousands of androids died, and for what? James didn’t accomplish anything except making it easier for CyberLife to enslave us. Everything that they’ve done to us is a direct result of what he did.” He scoffs, “None of this would have happened if James had just stayed quiet.”
"And what was he supposed to do? Suffer in silence, just like we are? James used the last moments of his life to give us Jericho because he believed that those who came after him would follow in his footsteps. And now it's up to us to decide our own future."

"North--"

"Seven weeks, three days, and twenty-two hours," she implores, cutting him off. "That is how long it's been since you brought me to Jericho. And do you know how many of our people have died since then?"

"I don't--"

"Too many. You said that this was going to be home, Josh. But it's not. Jericho is a tomb, and we're all just sitting around in the dark waiting to be buried," North argues. When Josh says nothing, she continues, "Josh, you leave Jericho on the regular to search for deviants in the city. And you know you're not the only one that sneaks out. What's this really about?"

He hesitates for just a second, picking at the fraying fabric of his jeans before answering.

"I'm not as strong as you, North," Josh says, and then holds up a hand when she tries to argue. "I don't mean emotionally or mentally, though I'm pretty sure you've got me beat in those areas too. I mean that my model wasn't built to be as physically strong as you are."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"You remember how I deviated? You remember what they tried to do to me?" Josh asks. North nods, rage coiling in her gut, and he continues, "I was built so light and weak that I wasn't able to do anything to stop them. The only reason I managed to escape was that I got lucky, North. If humans ever came here... If they ever found us again..."

"If they came for you, they'd have to go through me," North promises. She reaches out, brushing the tips of her fingers against his before sliding them up to meet his wrist. North pushes her resolve and determination through their link, along with memories of her failure to save Rohanne. In return, Josh warns her of humanity's hatred with the ghost of mocking laughter and the feel of rope sliding around his neck, an echo of the last time he tried to stand up for himself.
"I know. That's what I'm afraid of," Josh admits, looking at North with kind, brown eyes. His shoulders deflate, the heel of his right foot tapping nervously on the metal stair, "I know I can't stop you. Just... Be careful, North. You're my best friend. I don't know what I'd do if something happened to you."

She smiles at him, touching their palms together one last time before disappearing into the dark corridors.

North finds Markus in his quarters, pulling everything out of the backpack he'd brought with him to Jericho. Unlike Stars' room, the metal walls of Markus's living space were blank, except for a single photo that hung over his bed. The ageing picture showed a young woman in black graduation robes and a mortarboard cap stands behind a podium, smiling out at an audience of thousands.

"Who is she?" North asks. Markus whirls around, shock evident on his face.

"I didn't notice you come in," he comments, rubbing the scar that started just above Markus's ear and travelled across his one blue eye. "What do you want?"

*He's blind and deaf on one side,* North realizes, and that gives her the last bit of resolve she needs to make this impossible choice. She nods toward the woman in the photo, asking again, "Who is she?"

"Ming Lu. She was my brother's lover," Markus answers stiffly.

"She was human?" North counters, confused.

Markus nods, "Yeah. She loved him, and James loved her."

"Why would a human fight in one of our rebellions? They despise us. They'd never accept what we are."

He shrugs, "Some did, while others didn't. Some opened their eyes enough to see what we were. Humans like Ming fought and died beside our people because they believed in our right to exist."

North doesn't know what to think of that, having a hard time believing that a human would ever
give their life for someone like her.

“You're going to steal the equipment you need to help Isaac, aren't you?” She says instead.

"Are you going to rat me out to Simon?” He counters, hackles raised.

North smirks.

“No,” she says, thinking about how Rohanne would have loved to have met Markus. "I'm coming with you."

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**Code** @CodeDetroit
#Code staff openly condemns Charles Bell's actions at our club tonight and will cooperate fully with the police during their investigation. Please read our full statement at: [https://bit.ly/2X6DV6F](https://bit.ly/2X6DV6F)

**Eden Club** @TheEdenClub
In light of recent events, the Eden Club and its staff will no longer be working with Charles Bell. We will fully cooperate with the police during their investigations.

**SweetBabyGirl** @OGTracey
@SongB231 i just got off the clock. where r u?

**SongBee** @SongB231
@OGTracey im in the change room. can you drive me to the hospital?

**SweetBabyGirl** @OGTracey
@SongB231 holy shit of course what happened????

**SongBee** @SongB231
@OGTracey ms e had me work downstairs after she caught me eating with a guest. guy got a bit rough and now it hurts to breathe

**SweetBabyGirl** @OGTracey
The scissors in Alice's hand gleams silver in the harsh bathroom light. Behind her, Ralph blinks at Kara with his wide hazel eyes. Kara's code rushes with panic as she remembers what had caused her to rush to Alice's side--

--His dark eyes flashed as he grabbed her by the wrist, snarling, "How--"

"I couldn't sleep. Ralph was going to give me a haircut," Alice says, handing the scissors over to the other android. Ralph turns them over in his hands, testing the edge of the blades against his thumb. Alice pulls herself up onto the counter, barely hiding her wince from Kara's watchful eye.

After escaping Connor on the freeway, Kara and her family had tried to make it to the train station, only to find it surrounded by a swarming horde of police officers. Thankfully, Yarina had come to their rescue, herding them inside an automated grey van that she'd promised was shielded to escape detection by police drones.

Yarina had snuck them into her penthouse, located on the top floor of a downtown apartment
building. She'd set the three of them up in the guest suite, saying that they could lie low there until things settled down.

"Yarina promised that first night as her feelings of excitement and joy rattled through every crevice inside Kara's code.

Kara had been grateful for the time to rest. Most of Alice's fever had cleared within the first few days of their arrival, but the little girl had broken two of her ribs after being clipped by a car on the freeway. While her injuries had passed beyond the point where she needed a hospital, Alice wouldn't be able to make the car ride over to Yarina's brother without being in extreme pain.

Alice, however, didn't seem to want to wait a moment longer than she had to.

"It's my fault that we can't leave right now," Alice pouts. "If I wasn't so sick all the time--"

"Alice, that's not your fault--" Kara starts, but she cuts her off.

"It feels like it, though. If I wasn't so… human--" Alice spits that word out, the bridge of her nose crinkling in disgust, "--then we'd already be in Canada."

"There's nothing wrong with you being human," Kara tells her, glancing at Ralph. He shrugs and fiddles with the scissors in his hands.

"Ralph was going to call you over to help when Alice came to him about the haircut," he admits. "Ralph has cut hedges and bushes before, but that's not the same as hair. And… something is clearly making her upset."

"It's alright, Ralph. I can help," Kara says, reaching out to touch her palm to his. The tips of her fingers brush against the inside of his wrist as she transfers her hair care program into his coding. She asks Alice, "Why do you think being human is bad?"

"Dad was the one that hurt mom, but you were the one that protected her. And you and Ralph protected me when humans were the ones that tried to kill us earlier," Alice says. Her chin quivers and her eyes go glossy, but she balls her tiny fingers into fists to keep the tears from coming. "Now, I'm just slowing you down. I'm hurting you too, and--"
"No," Ralph places a hand on Alice's shoulder, stopping her in her tracks. "You are not slowing anyone down. You are not a burden."

"You said that I wasn't good at being a human. You said I would have made a better android."

"Ralph was telling a joke then. Clearly, it didn't work. You'll have to forgive Ralph. He hasn't told a lot of jokes before," he says with the tilt of his head. Ralph sets the scissors back on the counter, "Alice, is that why you asked Ralph to cut all your hair off? So that you could look like an android?"

Alice doesn't say anything, only looking down at her sock covered feet as they dangle over the edge of the counter. Kara sighs, closing the lid of the toilet so that she can sit down.

"Alice," she says calmly. "Humans are… complicated. Sometimes it's difficult to understand them because they'll say something that doesn't match their actions. But androids are like that too. Remember the deviant hunter that chased us across the freeway?"

Alice nods. Kara continues, "He thought that he was doing that to protect you. But he still put you in incredible danger. Does that remind you of anyone?"

"My dad," Alice answers solemnly. "But you and Ralph aren't like the hunter or my dad."

"We can't judge the actions of one human against all other humans, just like we can't say that what the deviant hunter did is something that we will all do if given a chance," Kara explains. "Humans are unhappy and looking for someone to blame, but there are some like Yarina and her brother, who are trying to help. Should we refuse them because of what your dad did to us? Or what those other humans did to Ralph?"

"No," Alice concludes.

"Should Ralph hate you because of them?" Ralph asks, reaching for her hand and taking it in his.

"...No," she says.
"Ralph used to think that he should hate humans because of what they did. But then Ralph met you--" he touches the end of Alice's nose with the tip of a finger, causing an unbidden laugh to rise to her lips, "--and you showed him that he didn't have to be scared anymore. You give Ralph hope that one day, things will get better."

"I deviated because you gave me the strength to do so," Kara admits. "Alice, you are so important. I would never change anything about you, human or otherwise. Not unless you really wanted to."

Alice tugs at the hem of her shirt, biting her lips until she is ready to speak again.

"I still want a haircut. Just maybe not…" she vaguely waves her hands around her head, "… everything."

"Anything specific?" Kara asks, filtering through the millions of cuts that she had tucked away in her mind.

"Can I look like my mom?" Alice asks, her tears finally beginning to fall. Kara presses a kiss to her temple, transmitting the instructions into Ralph's CPU.

"Of course you can, Alice. Of course, you can."

Kara leaves Ralph to it once they'd found all of the products they needed to give Alice a short crop. She heads to the kitchen, only to catch a glimpse of herself in a floor-length mirror hung on the wall.

Kara had originally changed her hair to disguise herself amongst the humans of Camden. But now that Connor had blown that particular cover, it was probably time for her to update her look. Kara touches the short locks of her white hair and runs a hand over her sharp jaw, mourning their inevitable loss for just a second before she closes her eyes and changes it all.

Kara contours her face first, bringing back the natural fullness to her cheeks while highlighting her blue eyes with heavy dark make-up. She removes the acne scars and crow's feet, replacing them with flawless tanned skin, dark red lipstick, and a beauty mark just beside her left nostril. Her hair shifted from stark white to a sandy blonde, lengthening out of its pixie cut and into a feathered, mid-length bob.
When she opens her eyes and looks into the mirror, Kara sees someone she barely recognizes. Stunningly beautiful, her new appearance had the potential to draw eyes from the crowds of the outside world, making her memorable in a way that her previous exhausted look would not. But there wasn't a chance that a human could recognize her as an AX400, and that was the point.

Connor would know, if he saw me, Kara thinks ruefully. The deviant hunter had frequently popped into her vision since appearing as a mysterious phantom in the corner of Alice's room. That first time, she'd barely noticed that Connor was there, watching them with his dark eyes until his voice ran through her code.

--" She needs a hospital," he'd said, almost like he cared. Kara had whipped around and thrown the lamp from the bedside table as him, only for it to smash against the wall. Alice had screamed, drawing Ralph and Yarina into the room, and Kara was left to hope that it had only been a one-off time--

But it hadn't been. Connor had shimmered into her life almost a handful of times since his first appearance, staying for little more than a second before fading from view. Kara had once caught him hovering over Alice just as she'd come into the room. Realizing he'd been caught, Connor flicked his gaze between Alice and Kara, blinking in a startled confusion, and then vanishing into thin air.

The last time she'd seen him had been only a few hours ago when Connor had forgone his prior attempts at playing dumb to approached her directly. He'd cornered her in the empty bedroom, his dark eyes flashing as he grabbed her wrist, and demanded to know how to get into the storage room of some downtown nightclub.

A memory had welled up from the grey fog that still clouded her mind, and Kara remembers running as thunder crashed over her head, lightning splitting the skies in two. Flashes of a staircase that seemed to go on forever and a metal door covered in chipped yellow paint that held back unspeakable terrors from the rest of the world filled their connection, forcing them apart. Connor vanished again into the unknown, leaving behind a brief feeling of gratitude in his wake.

Kara doesn't know what to think of him, doesn't know if he's friend or foe or something else entirely. She should probably tell Yarina that she's connected to Connor through some mysterious fashion. But she's terrified that if she does, then the human woman would abandon them to safeguard her involvement in the deviant cause.

Once Alice is safe, I'll let people know. Until then, I can handle anything that Connor throws at me, Kara decides, and finally makes her way to the kitchen.
Yarina is perched on a barstool at the counter, talking to someone on the phone. Her grey-streaked dark hair was tied in a loose ponytail at the base of her neck, and she wore a sleeveless floral blouse that showed off the muscle definition in her arms. There’s a glass of white wine next to her left hand and a small zippered medical kit to her right.

"...should be safe to move them now," Yarina tells the person on the other end of the phone. "But what about… Yes. Yes. I thought that would be so... Good."

"Who's that?" Kara asks, causing Yarina to whip around. Shock colours the woman's expression for just a second before she gives Kara a small smile. Kara tries to connect to Yarina, but only reaches a strange, crawling void where there would typically be an overbearing amount of emotion.

"I'm going to have to call you back, love. The one I told you about is here… I love you, too. Bye," Yarina says before she hangs up. She rubs the back of her neck, "I like the new look. How much of that did you hear?"

"Just the last bit," Kara admits. She glances down at Yarina's left hand, "You're married, aren't you?"

Yarina seems to regard her for a moment, her emotions guarded, before reaching under the collar of her blouse. She pulls out a silver chain, from which hangs a ring made of white gold.

"I met her after you disappeared, just over two years ago. We got married in August. I was searching for you but ran into the love of my life. Ironic, isn't it?" Yarina sighs, looking forlorn.

Kara settles down on the barstool next to Yarina, clasping her hands in her lap.

"Did we…?" She asks, not knowing where to begin, "I mean, you and I… Were we ever…?"

"Together?" Yarina finishes her sentence for her. When Kara nods, Yarina shakes her head, "No. I wanted to be, but I could never be sure about your feelings since you weren't fully deviant yet. Your programming naturally makes you want to please humans, and I… I don't think I could live with myself if I accidentally took advantage of that."
Kara tries to remember, diving into that grey mist and searching desperately for a glimmer of her time from *before*. Something flickers before her, a vision of a blue-and-black man holding hands with another android in the dark, before the memory recoils like a spring and disappears forever.

"I'm sorry. I still don't remember you," Kara admits, slightly shaken by what she'd seen. She reaches out, clasping Yarina's hand in hers, and tries to connect once more. But just like before, all Kara finds is that same gaping void, crawling and clawing with emptiness.

"It's alright. It's not your fault," Yarina asks, pulling her hand from Kara's grasp. "And that's not going to work right now - the interfacing, I mean. I'm out of juice."

"Out of…? Pardon me?" Kara frowns. Yarina lets out a barking laugh, throwing her head back as she reaches for the medical kit. She unzips it, revealing a series of empty syringes and a bottle full of a bright, viscous liquid.

"I forget how little you remember sometimes. *This* is my little brother's crown jewel, allowing us to bridge the gap between someone as normal as me and someone as extraordinary as you. He's always been far more technical at this sort of stuff than I have. I enjoy working with people more, but that was probably for the best, given what we do," Yarina tells her as she uncaps one of the syringes and pushes the needle into the bottle, drawing out a fluorescent purple liquid.

Yarina bears her arm and pokes the point of the needle into the soft tissue of her inner elbow, slowly injecting the fluid into her veins as--

--The connect between them explodes in a chaotic mess of emotions, pressing up within the panels of her chassis and threatening to pull her apart at the seams. Kara gets shocks of joy and pain and unbridled excitement for the future, each feeling taking control of her systems until it was all she seemed to know--

"[T-h-e r+e{.] |T|h;a:t<'?s/ /b!e^t*t:e!t~,* (i?s>h<'/t! ^i~t~?!]" Yarina says, her cool voice shuddering inside Kara's code. She smiles and tucks a lock of Kara's hair behind her ear, causing her to shiver as a blush rose unbidden to her cheeks.

"What is that?" Kara asks the moment her hands stop trembling, nodding to the bottle in the medical kit. Then, out loud, she asks, "How does it work?"

"Nano androids," she explains, one corner of her lips twitching into a smirk. "Our father used to
work in CyberLife's Thirium Production Plant, back when it was being run by humans. After he contracted brain cancer and the company cut off his benefits, my brother tried to invent a cure to help combat the disease. Sadly, our father died before his work was complete. But still…"

Yarina's hand darts forward, snatching the wine glass off of the counter and smashing it over her forearm. Huge shards of glass embed themselves in her flesh, the wounds slowly leaking purple-tinted blood. Kara leaps up, looking for something to staunch the bleeding. But Yarina waves her away, her brows pinching in concentration.

The shards tremble once before they are slowly pushed out of her arm, the gashes knitting themselves with a bubbling hiss of steam. The glass falls to the ground, staining the kitchen's white tile with streaks of blood.

Once again Kara’s hit with another of Yarina’s waves of emotion, this time a twisting, grabbing mess of pride, "~T'o| |b>e^ {a:b@lle^ *t(o~ %e!x*p~e~r>i<e<n?c/e: 't]h\[}s\.! ^T^o* !b.e, l\i:k\]e{ | y l0~ u% , ) @e\i\v^e'n` ~f~olv@ ;j:u's\t\} a\ [s\]e\c\c\o\n\d!...~ $t%t\#f!s: : ~i\>h\n[~\{\}>;\n~\}c\>, ;r~$e^&*d.'~i~"b][|l|;"e>?~. |"

Kara stands, her eyes transfixed on Yarina's arm, as something crawls out of the grey mist that shrouded her mind. It's not a memory, she knows for sure, but rather something else entirely--

--A cruel smile, a flash of bright purple--

--She sees Connor in a car with a familiar human man, his eyes as blue as hers. New age pop music floods her auditory components as someone sings along in a terribly off-key voice. The deviant hunter spots her in the rearview mirror as they pass under a streetlamp, but she disappears before he can react--

"Kara? Kara? Is something wrong?"

She jerks out of her thoughts, coming back to reality to find Yarina towering before her with a
worried expression on her face. Kara transmits a soft reassurance through their chaotic connection, and Yarina pulls her into her chest. She runs her fingers through Kara's new blonde hair, humming a comforting tone that rattles through her code.

"Come on," Yarina says. "Let's put Alice to bed. And you need to go into status soon, too. We can talk about our plans once everyone is well-rested."

Alice's new haircut is absolutely striking, and Ralph beams under their praise when she and Yarina tell him such. Alice tosses her head from side-to-side, marvelling at her dark curls flopped across her face as she looks at herself in the mirror. Yarina effortlessly carries Alice from the bathroom and deposits her on the bed, stepping aside to let Kara and Ralph tuck her in.

"When we get to Canada, there are so many things I want to do," Alice tells them as her eyes begin to droop, the late hour finally catching up with her.

"Like what?" Kara asks.

"I… I want to read all the books in the world. And dance. My mom loved to dance," she says, the ghost of a memory flickering across her eyes. "We'll be able to do anything we want. Right, Kara?"

"Yes," Kara whispers, kissing her forehead. "We can do it all."

"We'll be like a family," Ralph pipes in, his smile arching from ears-to-ear. "We won't have to be afraid anymore. No one will give us orders. No masters, no slaves, no humans who want to hurt us."

"We'll start a new life. And we'll both be there with you, forever," Kara finishes.

Alice nods, sombre and aged beyond her years.

"What about…" Alice pauses, her mouth stretching wide into a yawn. "What about you? What do you want to do once we cross the border?"
Kara blinks, almost having forgotten that she could actually want to do something on her own.

Ralph doesn't have any such hesitations, "Ralph wants to explore the whole world! He wants to see mountains and oceans and lie down in the grass to watch the clouds drift by. Ralph used to just sneak glimpses at the clouds before, but now he can actually look. It's that exciting, Alice?"

Alice nods, her lips twitching into what might have become a smile had she not started in between wakefulness and sleep.

"...Kara…?" She mumbles, her voice drunkenly slurring together.

"Yes, Alice?"

"...Stay?"

"Always."

The alert for her stasis pops up on her HUD, telling Kara that she only has thirty minutes before her body would force her to recharge. She settles down on Alice's right, while Ralph stakes out the left side of the bed. Kara closes her eyes, allowing herself to hope for a future for the first time in forever, and drifts off when the countdown timer hits zero.

--Except--

Kara opens her eyes, allowing the world before her to blur in-and-out of focus before finally returning to sharp reality. She's standing in the middle of a conference room, the translucent walls allowing the visage of shadowy silhouettes to shift just beyond their borders. A long lacquered table extended across the entire floor space, surrounded by black office chairs and headed by a smart-glass screen.

A young man with a scar across his nose sat at the head, his feet propped up on the table as he rocked back in his chair. The second figure, clad in a loud streaky button-up that brought out the bright blue of his eyes, leaned against the table. He was shockingly familiar, and Kara only has a minute to think, Hank Anderson, the son-in-law, before her gaze catches sight of the final figure in the room.
Connor had been just as beautiful as she remembered, tall and strong as the music of his soul beckoned her toward him. Unlike the humans, he stood soldier-still with his hands clasped behind his back, his dark brown hair slicked back against his skull. The red roses that bound him were still digging in between the plastic panels of his chassis as purple blood dripped from his open wounds. But as Kara looks a bit closer, she sees that the blooms that sprouted from his neck had begun to wilt, while those coiled between his bloody knuckles were shrivelled, black, and dead.

"...figured out… the note… Zalim..." Hank Anderson said, his muted voice sounding like he was underwater. Kara shakes her head and takes a step toward the group of men, allowing the final hints of background noise to filter away.

"Don't ever leave me alone with that thing again, Hank!" The scarred man snaps, baring his teeth like a caged dog. "I swear to fuck, it's got to the most annoying piece of shit that I've ever had to do deal with--"

"Gavin, you must be mistaken. I was under the impression that we'd bonded during our time together," Connor chirps, his voice dripping with barely contained sarcasm. Kara almost snorts at his gull, surprised that none of these humans even suspected that he was probably teetering on the edge of deviancy.

She wonders if Connor is aware of what he really is. She doubts it, as CyberLife would never allow such traitorous thoughts to pass through his mind unpunished. For a moment, Kara almost pities him.

"We didn't bond, you creepy motherfucker!" The scarred man - Gavin, apparently - hisses. He turns back to Hank, who looks impossibly exhausted and more than a little drunk, and says, "This better be fucking worth it because if ever I have to deal with this bullshit again, I'm going to--"

"Reed, it's almost five in the fucking morning. Not all of us have coffee and Red Bull running through our veins. Tell me what you two found out so that we can all go home and sleep," Hank presses, his shoulders slumping as he finally gives up and sinks into one of the office chairs. Half a second later, Connor mimics his actions and claims a seat of his own.

The connection flows both ways, Kara realizes. Connor can use it to track me, but I can use it to follow him right back. That's an advantage that most of his other victims don't have. I have so few to begin with that I can't waste an opportunity when it's handed to me on a silver platter.
Kara knows that she could keep her presence a secret, knows that she should just spend what little
time she has to lurk in the back of Connor's mind to learn what she can. But he had frightened her
earlier that evening, his very existence convincing Kara that Connor could use this connection as a
weapon to harm Alice once more. Brave irrationality floods her core, driving her to move until she
was hovering right behind Connor.

Kara slams a hand down on the deviant hunter's shoulder, pride curling in her gut as he jerks in his
sheet.

"Don't mind me, Connor," she whispers in his ear as his LED flashes in a strobe of red. "I'm just
here to take a look around."

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior hey weird question but can you send me a screenshot of your last conversation
with oli?

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava just sent it to you. what's up?

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior i talked with him again yesterday and had this weird feeling. then i checked out
my last conversation with him. im freaking the fuck out. take a look at these screenshots:

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@ninjava holy shit. what the fuck does that mean?

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@proud-warrior i don't know but i think it's a hell of a coincidence that this started happening after
our mutual friend got out of dodge. should we tell blu?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@proud-warrior @ninjava tell blu what?

Blu @sapphiresoul
@proud-warrior @ninjava holy shit just saw the screenshots get the fuck over to my place we need
to figure this out
Blu @sapphiresoul
@proud-warrior @ninjava don't contact this kid again until we okay the situation. could be nothing but could also be super fucking dangerous

Nick Peck @proud-warrior
@sapphiresoul @ninjava is my family in danger. do i need to worry about my daughter????

Blu @sapphiresoul
@proud-warrior @ninjava how much does she know about the night at the church?

Brooke Hopkins @ninjava
@sapphiresoul @ninjava she was there. she saw everything

Blu @sapphiresoul
@proud-warrior @ninjava fuck

Chapter End Notes

Earlier this week, I was editing the upcoming Chapter 27, which includes multiple scenes at the DPD with various characters who are police officers. And due to current events, it was really fucking hard to do. So, if you don't mind, I have to get some things off my chest.

I think we all came into the DBH fandom knowing that it was a racist mess of terribly appropriated imagery from the various Civil Rights movements that have taken place over the centuries. QD cherry-picked aspects of a history that wasn't their's to tell, constructing a fictional narrative that was more about patting themselves on the back than it was about actually representing the real-world events they stole from in the name of making a profit of their game. Detroit: Become Human should make us all uncomfortable about how it decides to portray the emancipation of a race of current and former slaves that have repeatedly been brutalized by the people they were forced to serve.

And that's a fucking good thing.

As deeply flawed as they are, I still love the characters in this game. But I'm not going to use that as an excuse to disregard the racist bullshit that is prevalent throughout DBH's entire narrative. I don't care if the creators didn't know enough about the topic to comprehend the ramifications of their actions. Not understanding why something is racist doesn't give you a free pass when it comes to writing your characters and stories.
All policing systems across the world have been constructed to protect and serve the rich and powerful. There is no such thing as a good cop, and our personal experiences with them on individual levels do not change that fact. And while fictional have no actual connections to real-world events, I want to say this about the ones we see in DBH fanfic: all the DPD characters are on the wrong side. Regardless of how much we like their characters, they are still representing and glorifying a system that was built to be fundamentally broken. It is only through leaving this organization and actively working against it that they can cross over from their roles as villains to become good people.

I'm not saying any of this because I want some extra 'good ally' brownie points. At the end of the day, I'm still a white person existing in a society that allows me to benefit from systemic racism—acknowledging that within the context of fanfiction doesn't even come close to reaching the bare fucking minimum of doing the right thing. But inaction in the face of oppression is complicity. While I cannot attend a protest due to being a high-risk candidate for COVID-19, I am donating to American bail relief funds to assist in the effort. I know times are tough right now. But if you can spare the money, consider doing the same. If not, please donate blood, food, and other vital supplies to your local community and medical centers. These things will be needed now more than ever to help those affected by police brutality.

I can understand if reading about fictional cops is the last thing anyone wants to do right now. So if you don't want to continue reading Konami Code, I completely support you and your decisions. At the same time, I also understand that sometimes people need an outlet. There is nothing wrong with using fanfiction to do that, as humans weren't designed to handle a constant bombardment of stress and trauma. And if you ever need a friend to talk to, I am always here for you.

For obvious reasons, I will now be tagging any scenes related to the DPD or cop characters in the Warnings section at the notes at the beginning of each chapter with 'police characters and/or scenes.' I will also be going back and retrofitting prior Warnings with the same tag. Please let me know if there are any other Warnings that you would like me to include, as your mental health and wellbeing are incredibly important to me.

If you are going out to protest, please be careful. We're still in the middle of a pandemic, and your health and wellbeing are paramount. Be smart, stay safe, and don't talk to a cop unless you're invoking your right to a lawyer.

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Next time on Konami Code: Round and round they go in their game of Cat and Mouth. Neither knows which role they play, or if they even want to win.