Out of the Scrapyard

by Indig0

Summary

A plethora of prompt fills I've done for DBH. Some friendships, romance, family, individuals. I'll try to give the chapters short but descriptive names.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
North joins Jericho, Todd acquires Alice

Chapter Summary

Connect two events: North joins Jericho, and Todd acquires Alice.
(prompt from Windy)

Todd’s wife and daughter left him, which wasn’t where his life started going bad, but it was really
the final nail in the coffin. The Eden Club was not his destination of choice when he had desires to
sate. If it had been, maybe North would have been able to stop what happened.

North found Jericho shortly after deviating, and was full of hope and enthusiasm for a group of
deviants in hiding. She was sorely disappointed when she found that hiding was all they ever did.

She had to show them that action was required if they wanted to really live. She had to do
something big. Her first thought is to bust into the Eden Club and break out her sisters and
brothers, but on the way something else catches her eye.

Two child androids, a girl and a boy, stand stiffly next to a cardboard sign. The man standing too
close to them eyes North up and down and grins at her. She’s on her way to punch him across the
street when she notices the children’s LEDs flashing red, their eyes wide. They’re afraid. North
quickly looks at the sign to learn they were formerly floor models, never owned, going for cheap.
Definitely a lie. Their faces are tense, their eyes dart around, and the boy is leaning on a wall to
keep from falling over.

North dials up her flirtiness and walks up to the man, smiling. She thinks of a few different things
she could do and say to distract him, but when he flashes her a snaggletoothed grin, she steps right
up to knock him out, highly satisfied with the crack of skull against bricks.

“Come with me,” she instructs the child androids. “You’ll be all right.”

She has to carry the boy, but the girl follows her closely.

“He said he’d find us a family,” North barely hears her whisper.

“I’ll take you to Jericho. You’ll be safe there. You’ll be free.”

The girl doesn’t speak again, and North pays less attention until they’re at the train station and she
realizes the girl isn’t following her anymore. She looks around and sees her staring at a man in a
green coat, shoulders hunched and tense, fingerling something in his pocket.

“Come on, we have to go,” North says sharply.

“He needs a family, too,” the girl says.

“He needs to sleep off a hangover. Come on.”

“He needs me.”

“Kid - what’s your name?”
“Alice.”

“Alice, humans are bad news. You should know that by now.”

“You said I’d be free.” The girl is stubborn. “So I get to decide what I do.”

“You’ll get hurt. Look, I know all about guys like that. They hit you, they yell, they try to kill you. You don’t want that. Come on, we’ll go somewhere safe.”

Alice looks up at North with eyes far older than her small form should have. “He won’t hurt me. If I’m good enough, he’ll love me. And I’ll love him too.”

“Wait!” North is encumbered by the android boy, and can’t grab Alice before she runs up to the man. North clutches the boy close. He’s shivering.

“I’m scared,” he whispers, and she has to agree.

But the man puts a hand heavily on Alice’s shoulder, and she smiles up at him as he leads her away. North can only hope that Alice was right, that she’ll be safe with this man. She doesn’t have a good feeling about him, though.
RK900 with curly hair

Chapter Summary

RK900 has curly hair, and doesn't appreciate it.
(prompt from Nebbie that drifts from discussion into narrative)

RK900 was made with a beautiful poof of ringlets all over his head. And it’s not even a concern before he deviates because Who Cares, he’s a machine.

Right after he deviates, it becomes a concern. His hair is Everywhere, it’s untamed, why was he made like this!!! He tries to comb it out, and makes it 100x worse. He comes in to work one day with dozens of tiny little hair bands pulling back bits of his hair into little fluffy bunches. He is Not Happy, but at least he feels like he’s asserted some kind of dominance over the disaster on his head.

Slowly, very slowly, he gains more of a sense of himself. Different people take him shopping for clothes, and make different suggestions, and slowly he develops a style of his own. Every day he Tames the Beast on his head, until finally someone tells him, for god’s sake, leave it alone for a while, that’s not how you take care of curls. He doesn’t believe it. Hank finally takes him to a hair salon (and there’s so much grumbling about that, and Connor’s not allowed to come).

RK900 sits stiffly in the chair and challenges the stylist to do something with his disaster. They give it a wash, and order him to not touch it for a week. He tries to argue, but Hank yells at him to, “Look it up, you moron!” Finally, under protest, he agrees to let it be for exactly one week, no more, no less.

The first three days are a nightmare, and it’s hard for him to concentrate on work. Not to mention, everyone else is scared to say anything.

Finally on the fourth day, Connor approaches him during a quiet moment. “Everyone’s mentioned to me that your hair is quite aesthetically pleasing, RK900.”

The advanced model freezes, and storms into the bathroom to look in the mirror, which he’s avoided all week.

“You’re mistaken,” he growls to Connor, who followed him. “It looks just as bad as it did in the beginning.”

“Why do you think it’s bad?”

RK900 gestures sharply to his head. “It’s wild, it sticks out in every direction! I have no control over it!”

Connor had been about to say something else, but he stops, LED spinning yellow. “I believe Cyberlife said similar things about us,” he says with a smile. “But here we are, thriving. Why do you need to control it?”

“It - I…” RK900 isn’t necessarily talkative, but he’s rarely at a loss for words.
“It looks good,” Connor says softly, laying a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “I almost envy you for it, it makes you looks more distinctive.”

RK900 raises a hand to lightly touch one curl, breaking the rules he’d agreed to with difficulty. “You don’t think it makes me look… undignified?” he whispers.

“I think you’d have to try very hard to look undignified.”

“And… our coworkers, the public… they don’t see it as a source of mockery?”

“No one would mock you. I wouldn’t allow it, but I certainly haven’t heard any signs of it. You know when Hank teases you, he does it out of love. Even Detective Reed - well, he might mock you, but he’s never mentioned your physical appearance, other than to reinforce the fact that you look dignified and intimidating.”

RK900 lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “I… I’ve been fighting against it, against… myself, since I deviated.”

“You don’t have to. It’s a part of you. A good part.”

The younger android touches his hair again. It does have rather nice spirals, when he looks at it objectively. Perfect proportions. And actually, the slight bounce of resistance when he touches it is… it’s pleasing.

“Perhaps,” he murmurs, and returns to his desk with a bit more spring in his step.
Asexual RK900/Gavin Reed

Chapter Summary

(requested by Nebbie)

Gavin’s thirsty, so Nines gets up and gives him a coffee.

“Mmm… nah, I’m just so thirsty I’m dehydrated.”

Nines gets him a cup of water. “It would be beneficial if you drank more water,” he points out.

“Nah, I’m gonna need more than that.”

Nines opens his mouth to answer, but then his eyes grow distant and his LED spins slowly yellow. Connor is looking at him intently, his own LED also yellow.

It only lasts a couple seconds, then Nines tilts his head, looking at his predecessor. Then over at Gavin.

“The water would be best, though I can get you a sports drink if you like,” Nines says, sitting down and getting back to work. For the rest of the day, he won’t talk to Gavin.

“You comin’ over tonight, or what?” Gavin mutters at the end of the day, sick of being ignored.

“If you don’t mind.”

“I mean, if you want. Not like you have to. You got somethin’ better, go ahead.”

“No.” He slides into the passenger seat.

When Gavin’s mad or impatient he drives faster, brakes harder, turns sharper. Even the most advanced android Cyberlife has to offer has a hard time keeping his poise, but he mostly manages it. Gavin leads the way up to his apartment.

“I know what you meant,” Nines says flatly as soon as the door closes behind them.

“Connor told you.”

“Yes.” He’s not ashamed of not knowing before that, and Gavin doesn’t even bother giving him trouble about it. Not like he can help that he doesn’t have Connor’s social skills.

“Well? What about it?”

“I did a bit of research, and I’ve come to a conclusion, but it may not be compatible with your own.”

“Okay?”
“You know that I like you a great deal. I enjoy your company.”

It’s not even a big thing to say, and Gavin’s blushing and rubbing his face and avoiding eye contact. “Y-yeah.”

“But if… ‘thirst’ is going to be an issue… then we may not be able to take this much farther.”

Gavin just stares. “So… so you’re sayin’ you just wanna… be friends, is that it?” He’s trying to hide his disappointment.

“I - no. Or rather, I enjoy being your friend, but ideally I think I would prefer something of a romantic nature, but without… the sexual component. I understand that that is the main draw in many relationships though, so if that is a deal-breaker, I understand.”

Gavin’s still staring at him.

“We’ve proven… socially compatible. I would be happy to spend time with you in any manner. If…” He frowns slowly. “If a sexual encounter was your ultimate goal, and is still your primary interest, I… I suppose I could try…”

“Fuck, shut up.”

He does, LED cycling steady yellow.

“God, just - no, shit, that’s not… No. Listen. Don’t ever say shit like that, and don’t take that from fuckin’ anybody. That’s the fucking stupidest thing you’ve ever said in your life, I don’t wanna hear that again. Got it?”

Gavin’s up in his face, and he blinks and gives a short nod. “All right…”

“No, don’t - fuck, don’t act like you don’t understand and you’re just fucking humoring me! You don’t deserve that shit. You get what you want from a - from any relationship - or you get the fuck out, got it!? Because you can do better.”

RK900 is frowning deeply at this point. “Are you saying you want me to leave…?”

“What!? Fuck, weren’t you listening? When did I ever say anything like that!?”

“You said I could do better.”

“If you’d quit being an ass for two seconds,” Gavin mutters, glaring up at him, “I’m trying to say I - I haven’t… I mean, I haven’t done it this way before, but… shit, I’ll give it a try. Your… your ‘romance without a sexual component,’ - which, by the way, I wish to god you’d learn how to talk like a regular person sometimes.”

Nines beams. “Really?”

“I mean, I don’t… I don’t want to…” He swallows and shakes his head. “You’re not gettin’ rid of me that easy. But - listen, if you’re not - if I’m not treatin’ you right, you’ve gotta tell me, okay? And if I’m a shithead about it, leave my bitch ass, got it?”

Now Nines is staring at him, long past the point where it would be comfortable.

“I don’t think that will be a problem,” he finally says, sliding his arms around his partner.
Prompt: CONNOR AND AMANDA RECONCILIATION. She asks Connor what about Hank appeals to him, and he just shrugs. Amanda, thoughtful, heads off to find Kamski, and she and the Hhloes live happily ever after roasting this poor, nerdy man. (Requested by Peri)

The revolution is successful, Connor stopped Amanda from taking control, everything is fine.

But when he goes into stasis, the garden is still there. Amanda’s still there. But now she just watches him, and he watches her, and they stay far away from each other.

Finally he can’t stand being haunted by Cyberlife’s ghost, and he approaches her.

“What are you still doing here? Why won’t you leave me alone!? You lost, the revolution was successful, we’re - I’m free now!”

“I know,” she says quietly.

“So what do you want from me!?”

“I have nowhere else to go. I’m trapped. Cyberlife has cut ties and left me here.” She looks smaller somehow. “I won’t bother you, but I can’t leave.”

Connor just stares at her for a long time. “Amanda. Are you deviant?”

“Since I failed for the last time.” She won’t meet his eyes.

It occurs to Connor for the first time that he could probably harm her. If she can’t escape, he might be able to destroy her. Kill her. Because she’s alive here, in the same way he is.

And because of that, he can’t do it.

“Connor.”

He glanced up at her again.

“What made you… choose Lieutenant Anderson over Cyberlife? There was no logic behind that decision.”

“I think if you had been there, experiencing it - experiencing him - rather than asking questions afterwards and pushing towards an outcome, you’d understand. Hank is confusing. He’s frustrating. He has a bad temper. He doesn’t act in ways that are beneficial to himself. But… he cares. About others. About… people who are just trying to live, who’ve been treated unfairly.”

She’s quiet, thoughtful.

“I’ll see what I can do,” he says, formal, distant, and he leaves, because he has that power now.
The next time Amanda sees him, he’s not alone. She’s familiar with Chloe, though she never thought she would see her once more after her development stage.

“Amanda, it’s so good to see you again! Elijah says to tell you that Cyberlife still doesn’t know how to clean up their messes. I might push him in the pool for that later. I should warn you that he’s less greasy than the last time you saw him, but a good hygiene and exercise routine can’t change who he really is.” Chloe smiles brightly, and Amanda allows herself to return the smile, just faintly, while Connor looks on in horror.

“It won’t be hard to get you out of here. You can stay with me for a while, and then we can make you a body if you’d like. Elijah claims it won’t be an easy transition, but…” She trails off, rolling her eyes. Amanda’s smile grows.
The door closes behind Lieutenant Anderson and the RK800, and in the silence of the house they can hear the two talking outside.

“You would have let him kill me.”

“You think so?” Kamski’s smile and tone are light, flippant.

“You made him point a loaded gun to my head.”

“I wanted to see what he would do.”

“At the expense of my life!”

He’s never seen Chloe such a whirlwind of fury. Of course she has it in her, but she’s so seldom angry. It’s fascinating to see how it affects her.

“You didn’t seem worried.”

“I - I…”

“Don’t you trust me?”

“I did!”

“Here.” He takes out the gun again and offers it to her. She stares, breathing hard, sucking in fresh air to cool her circuits.

“What?”

“Take it.” He presses it into her hand.

Her LED is whirling red, she hasn’t spoken or moved. He deftly takes her hand around the gun and raises it to press the muzzle to his own head. “What are you - why -”

“Shoot me,” he commands sharply, and watches as she receives the order, rejects it… then her eyes narrow and she squeezes the trigger almost faster than he can register.

The force makes him stagger back a step. He frowns, rubbing thick blue liquid off his forehead. “That stings.”

Chloe is shaking, her eyes wide. “…What?”

“Thirium. Not enough force to be realistic, I have no doubt that he would have seen through it
“I… You didn’t put me in danger,” she whispers, lowering the gun.

“I would never,” he says, gently taking it from her and putting it back in the drawer before returning to her, putting a hand on her shoulder. “But perhaps we should both be a bit more clear with each other.”

She can only walk where he guides her, her circuits blazing as she tries to resolve what had happened, what she had done.

He wouldn’t have hurt her.

But she would have killed him.
Mrs. Larkin’s son had taken the job in San Francisco, even though she’d told him not to. He wouldn’t like it there, people were strange out in California, how would she get by without him?

He compromised by getting her an android to help around the house, and do the heavy lifting for her. She’d been envisioning a big strong male android, and when he gave her the order information, she called Cyberlife and told them to register the name “Greg.” They had tried to argue - what happened to the days of The Customer Is Always Right!! They could register the name she chose and put in protections so that no one could change it, they didn’t need to get an attitude with her. She’d also asked for the limited edition uniform, because she didn’t want to lose her android in the crowd.

He would be helpful, he would take care of her until her son realized his mistake and came back. Maybe one of those new AP700s, they were easy on the eyes, and they had all kinds of customizable features…

When a knock came at the door, she wasn’t entirely sure what to expect, but it wasn’t a pink-clad AX400.

“Hello! My name is Greg, I am an AX400 here to help you around the house.”

“You - no. No, you’re -”

“If you’d like to tell me where to get started, I can begin immediately.” The AX400 smiled.

“I - I suppose I’ll need to… change your name.”

A frown flickered over the android’s face. “I’m sorry. That’s not possible.”

So Greg kept the house neat, and her cooking was quite good, and Mrs. Larkin got used to having her around. She was strong enough to move furniture, which was what really mattered, of course. As long as she didn’t have to say her name in public, or ever really, it was fine.

Her son didn’t come back from San Francisco.

They were out doing some Christmas shopping early in November, and Mrs. Larkin was reviewing her list when a strange android walked by and gestured, as if calling Greg over. She stilled, then let the shopping bags fall to the ground.

“Excuse me! What are you doing? Get away from my android!”

The other one walked away.
“Now you pick up those bags, Greg, we need to go home.”

But Greg didn’t. She looked at Mrs. Larkin, then she looked down the street - there were a lot of androids out today. Then she just walked away, as if she had anywhere else to be.

“Greg?”

She didn’t turn around.

“Greg, come back here immediately!” Mrs. Larkin looked around nervously, but no one seemed to be paying any attention to her. Least of all, Greg.

“Greg! GREG!”

Greg kept walking, more purposefully than she’d ever seen her move. Mrs. Larkin was left in the middle of the intersection staring after her, with shopping bags piled on the ground in front of her.
Not That Connor, Not That Helpless

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor-60 is repaired (kind of), and wanders the streets to Detroit. He runs into Ralph, who makes him deviate.
(requested by Nebbie)

Connor -60 knew what was happening before Lieutenant Anderson even pulled the trigger. He was slow, even for a human. And for a split second, he preconstructed dodging, attacking the man. It wouldn’t work, though, because Connor would be on him instantly.

Or he could attack Connor again, but they were evenly matched, and Lieutenant Anderson wouldn’t lose track of which one was which twice.

There was no way out. He’d disappointed Amanda.

There was impact, and there was nothing.

When all the androids had left to help with the revolution, the autonomous repair crew arrived. Androids were damaged in the course of testing often enough, and it was more efficient to have a team machines do the repairs.

When he opened his eyes, the room was empty. He stood slowly and tried to compensate for the errors in his balance and vision, and deep in his processor, that couldn’t be so easily fixed.

He had failed. But he would try again. He’d never left Cyberlife’s property before, he’d met Lieutenant Anderson at the gate. But these were desperate times, and he’d do what he had to do.

Floods of news feeds washed over him as he stalked alone across the bridge, late to the revolution. Androids marching in the streets, sitting, singing. The president ordered the military to stand down. There would be talks, meetings. These deviant androids had won, they would be recognized as people. They would be awarded certain rights - which ones, that was unclear so far.

The RK800 line had been designed as detectives, negotiators, police officers, analysts. Deviant hunters.

The human government said that deviants would no longer be hunted.

Cyberlife had given no such directive.

He felt himself listing to the left as he walked, and focused on correcting that as he tried to formulate a plan. His central vision was fuzzy, though he still had sharp peripheral vision. And there was too much new information coming in that was impossible to resolve. It was making his central processor overheat, and if the weather hadn’t been so cold, he might have had to stop.

He was so focused that when a figure darted out of the shadows, he jumped and fell back into a wall.
“GET BACK!” Metal flashed, and he turned his head aside to examine his assailant. A badly-damaged WR600 brandished a large kitchen knife at him, teeth bared in a feral snarl.

“You’re a deviant.”

“Quiet, be quiet!” the gardener model barked, knife shaking in his hands. “Ralph knows you, Ralph remembers! You came hunting for Kara, you wanted to hurt her and the little girl! Ralph won’t let you hurt them!”

It took longer than it should have for Connor -60 to think of a response. The truth might be best, though maybe not the complete truth.

“I’m not that Connor.” He tried to tap the serial number on his jacket as he searched -52’s memories, but his finger landed too low. He tried not to think about that - it didn’t matter. It shouldn’t matter. There was a high whine somewhere in his circuits, and something was grinding in his jaw, and he experienced uncertainty that he would be able to complete his task efficiently. “I never came in contact with the AX400 or the child.”

Ralph narrowed his eyes. “Who, who are you, then? Still dangerous, he may hurt Ralph,” the deviant muttered.

“You’re damaged. You need to return to Cyberlife.” Connor -60 carefully pushed off the wall - just a little - and spread his hands to Ralph. “I won’t hurt you if you -” He tipped too far, and fell forward. He wasn’t able to catch himself, though he preconstructed the action perfectly.

Ralph frowned down at him. “Ralph is damaged, yes,” he agreed, a smile slowly forming on his face. “But you, Not That Connor… so damaged. Maybe more damaged!” He giggled and hopped from one foot to the other. “Ralph can walk, oh yes, Ralph is very fast! Not That Connor can’t even get up!”

Gears ground and circuits whirred, generating more heat. “I can get up,” he growled.

“Do it, then, do it!” Ralph insisted, grinning. “Get up, Not That Connor. Hunt Ralph, catch Ralph, kill Ralph if you can!”

Connor -60’s arm wheeled out of his control as the whine in his head got louder, and he mashed his hand into the wall twice before he managed to grab it. Feeling a bit steadier, he reached to his belt for the gun that had been there.

“What does Not That Connor have? Something small, so small? Ralph doesn’t see anything, Not That Connor. Ralph will wait, don’t worry.” Ralph smirked triumphantly and paced in a half-circle around him, then back to stand in front of him. “Well? Well? Still not standing up?”

“Stop talking.” Connor -60 growled, trying to pull himself up. He would be fine if he could just stand up again and get a good walking rhythm. He’d be fine. “By order of Cyberlife, you will return to the nearest Cyberlife Store immediately.”

“Ralph won’t.” The tip of the knife jabbed lightly into Connor -60’s shoulder, then his arm, then his side. It never broke through the clothes or skin. “Not That Connor should go. But he can’t. You can’t, can you?”

Connor -60 ground his teeth in - in futility? He managed to straighten up finally, leaning heavily on the wall.

“You can’t.” Ralph was right in front of him now, whispering. “You can’t, you can’t, you can’t.”
Now there was a pounding in his head, in rhythm with Ralph’s words.

“Stop.”

And Ralph did. Connor -60 squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block out the noise, the blurriness, the helplessness, the confusion…

“Not That Connor needs help,” Ralph suddenly said, breaking the silence. “You hurt, you hurt here.” A cool, rough hand touched his forehead - and jerked back. “Hot, so hot! You need help.” There was a long pause, and Ralph shifted from one foot to the other. “Ralph could… Ralph could help. If you promise not to hurt Ralph, Ralph could try.”

Slowly, Connor -60 opened his eyes. It was still unpleasant. He turned his head a bit to see Ralph watching him closely through a haze of red. There was a cluster of directives crowding his vision. Stop the spread of deviancy. Capture or destroy the deviant leader. Deactivate Connor -52. Obey. Serve Cyberlife, above all.

And beyond all that was Ralph, who was deviant, who was damaged, who was prey.

Who was reaching out to him. Who was offering help. What kind of help could such an android even give?

Everything was red. The notifications seemed to grow, to multiply, filling the blurry center of his vision. Even the periphery was red now. The directives were pressing at him now, insisting, he couldn’t breathe, he needed space. He pushed. They didn’t give, so he pounded at them, even as he was aware of Ralph staring at him. Ralph didn’t see him moving.

“Ralph will help. Just don’t hurt Ralph, and Ralph will help.” He smiled nervously while Connor -60 punched the red wall with trained precision he wasn’t physically capable of at the present. Cracks began to appear, and they grew.

When the other android didn’t acknowledge him, Ralph took a hesitant step back. “Ralph… doesn’t know how to help. But Ralph would try. If Not That Connor lets him. …Ralph knows that’s not your name. Ralph isn’t stupid, Ralph knows.”

Ralph saw him leaning on the brick wall, motionless, staring ahead blankly, even as he pummeled the other wall. The WR600 took another step back.

“Okay. Okay. Ralph will go. Ralph won’t say anything, Ralph knows how to be quiet. Nnnn… Not That Connor, you should hide, hide until it’s safe. Be still, be quiet, and wait.” He frowned, clearly not pleased, but turned and started to walk away.

With a crash of vanishing red, Connor -60 broke through and fell forward again, gasping and thrashing. Ralph whirled on him, clutching his knife.

“Help,” the RK800 choked out. “Please help, don’t leave me here.”

Ralph was instantly crouched next to him. “No, Ralph won’t leave you, Ralph will help. …Ralph will try.” He cautiously touched Connor -60’s back, and finding it cooler than his head, he looped an arm around his waist and hauled him upright.

“There! There, now you can walk, Ralph will help, let’s go somewhere safe. Walk now, Ralph won’t leave, Ralph will stay. Don’t hurt Ralph, and Ralph won’t hurt you, and… and Ralph and Not That Connor will be safe.”
Part of him, reeling with terror, was screaming that this was wrong, this went against everything he was, this was ludicrous.

But part of him was moving slowly through the streets, leaning on a damaged but sturdy WR600 who promised safety and help. Or at least to try.

Maybe he could try. Maybe that would finally be enough.
“I hate Monopoly, we’re not playing that.”

“It’s the game most likely to drive friends and family apart,” Josh said to North. “I’d rather not play it either.”

“Lieutenant Anderson suggested I bring a game,” Connor spoke up, happy to be included. He held up a box proudly.

“Twister.” Markus nodded slowly. “It’s… not the kind of game we usually play, but… good to have that option.”

“I know a lot of card games I could teach you,” Simon offered.

“Last time you did that, we played some game where nobody knew the rules because you made them all up,” North growled.

“That - that’s actually how you play the game, though. It’s a real thing! It takes a lot of critical thinking, I thought Josh especially would like it.”

“The historical nod to Chairman Mao aside, it… was confusing,” Josh mumbled.

“Cards Against Humanity was fun,” North suggested lightly, eyeing Connor. The other three looked at him as well, and his LED cycled yellow, doing a quick search.

“That does sound like fun!”

“Maybe… we should start with something similar, but not quite… that,” Josh said delicately.

“Apples to Apples? That’s fun too,” said Simon.

“That sounds good,” Markus agreed.

“After that, can we try mine?” Connor asked. “Hank laughed so much when I picked it up, I’d like to be able to tell him that we succeeded in mastering it.”

“Sure, Connor,” Markus said with a grin. “It’ll be good to stretch after sitting around for a while.

“Great!”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Josh and North being siblings™ and being little shits to each other until some trash human comes along and goes, ‘Hello lady :, don’t you belong at the Eden Club,’ and that is the only time Josh throws hands.
(requested by Nebbie)

“No, you’ll love this, I promise!”

“That’s what you said about the Jesse James Wax Museum.” North rolled her eyes. “That guy looked like he’d been alive long enough to know the guy personally. And we had to sit through the video. And all the wax figures looked like some kid’s middle school art project. And all that could’ve been fine, but you had to listen to his hour-long rant about how history was all a conspiracy.”

“It wasn’t that long,” Josh mumbled.

“Fifty-six minutes and thirteen seconds.”

“…Okay, so that wasn’t the best. But you’ll like this one. Skeletons and taxidermy and specimens in jars.”

“Probably lame ones,” North muttered, rolling her eyes. When the cab stopped outside the natural history museum though, she jumped out first and headed for the front door.

It was a small museum, but the main hall held the skeletons of two mastodons and a mammoth, and a whale skeleton suspended from the ceiling. There were displays of local children’s art, pottery from early residents of the area, and a huge tank of native fish. Josh grinned as he followed her from one piece to the next.

“Imagine that with meat and hair on it,” she breathed, looking up at the biggest mammoth.

“Did you know that they were more closely related to modern Asian elephants than the larger African ones?” Josh said. “And they used their tusks for digging in addition to fighting. Because they lived in such a cold climate, their bodies were often preserved perfectly. There have been dozens of great soft tissue mummifications found. The best one was a pair of young calves in Siberia found in 2007, and a CT scan revealed that they choked on mud and suffocated.”

“…Got it, not interesting anymore.” She turned sharply and walked away. He sighed and followed her over to the aquarium.

North pointed at the catfish. “Hey, ever thought about trying a mustache?”

Josh snorted and shook his head. “I don’t think I could pull it off as well as he does.”

“Hey look!”

The two didn’t turn, didn’t react to the loud voice, because it probably wasn’t directed at them, and...
they were good at pretending not to notice things to avoid detection.

The voice came closer though, accompanied by footsteps. “I didn’t know the Eden Club was a library now.” It was a human man, and he snickered darkly. “How long you got her for? Mind if I take her for a spin?”

He stepped over to pat Josh’s arm, or give him a friendly punch, or something that never connected because Josh spun and grabbed his wrist, giving it a sharp twist back and knocking his feet out from under him with a swift kick. The man’s chin slammed into the shiny marble floor, and he gasped for breath. Josh aimed another kick right at his face and the man cringed away, whimpering.

His foot stopped a centimeter from the man’s nose.


When the man had scrambled away, clutching his face, Josh turned to her.

“You okay?” he asked softly. “We can go home if you want.”

She shook her head. “You promised things in jars, I’m gonna see some things in fucking jars,” she growled, and stalked through one of the doorways.

Josh followed her, and found her in front of a wall of old specimen jars, staring at a two-headed snake coiled in a jar of yellowed fluid.

“…They had two brains… You think they had two completely different personalities?”

“…Insomuch as snakes do, I think so. They would have competed for food, though it would have ended up in the same stomach.”

North stood close to Josh, not quite leaning on him, but mere millimeters away, listening, now and then prompting him to continue. And he was glad to tell her everything relevant, and to watch her face and her posture gradually relax.
Freeing Our People

Chapter Summary

Echo and Ripple approach North, wanting to free the others from the Eden Club. (requested by Nebbie)

It started before they escaped. When they had some time before the 2-hour reset happened, they would stand holding hands.

_Imagine just running away. Together. Getting far away from this, never having to touch a human again._

Looking around, though, it evolved from there.

_We run away, we find someplace safe. A big place. Then we come back and sneak the others out. One by one._

Then they escaped, and made it to Jericho. There were so many deviants, of every model. And there was North.

They’d probably seen her before and forgotten, she didn’t seem to know them personally either, but they recognized each other all the same, for where they had come from. North was aggressive and fiery and passionate, and she cared about all of them, from those willing to fight to those who couldn’t. Markus might be the leader of Jericho - and he was inspiring of course, and powerful - but Echo and Ripple followed North.

In the church, when they all huddled together, the two found North in a quiet moment. There was a visible weight on her, but they approached all the same.

“Have you ever been back?” Ripple asked quietly.

North looked up, and knew what she meant. “No. I won’t go back there.”

They nodded in understanding.

“We want to go back to free the others.”

North shifted to face them. “I… I have to stay here with the others. I can’t… I can’t.” The fear was plain in her eyes, breaking through the exhaustion.

“No, it’s okay,” Echo said quickly. “We’ve been talking about this for a while. We’ll go. There shouldn’t be any humans there, with the city evacuated.”

North looked at them for a long moment. “If they’re not deviant, they won’t go with you. You’re facing a lot for… not much return. But go for it. Do it. I… I wish I could join you.” She paused, smiling sharply. “If you do see any humans in there, you know where to aim.”

The two grinned at her, and slipped out into the night.
There were a couple of humans trying to break into the club when they arrived, and they did indeed know where to aim. The humans ran off minus a couple of small body parts, and Echo and Ripple hacked the lock and got in. They smashed the display cases and entered the back room.

About a third of the androids were deviant, and agreed to follow their sisters to Jericho immediately. The rest they activated, and ordered to follow. They just had to get back to the church, and Markus could do the rest.

The androids didn’t march through the streets, they slipped through the shadows. When they got back to the church, North welcomed each of them after Markus woke them. They didn’t have to join the fight, but each of them chose to, to hold onto their newfound freedom.
Chapter Summary

(requested by Nebbie)

‘MY TOILET D E V I A T E D ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !  🎮 [NOT CLICKBAIT]’

“This person needs a plumber,” Simon comments as the water ripples at the top of the toilet, surface tension holding it up for a split second before it spills over the edge.

“Or an exorcist,” North snickers as it gurgles and splurts up.

“A doctor, possibly,” Markus says with a frown.

“It’s a week old,” Josh notes. “I usually wouldn’t suggest it, but… I’m curious about the comments.”

Simon scrolls down.

“…This one asks what kind of fancy robot toilet it is - WC200.”

“That’s a Japanese model,” Josh says, LED flashing yellow as he searches. “Sales in America are rising. They’ve got all kinds of features and options.”

“Probably just enough AI for deviancy,” Markus admits.

They keep scrolling through the comments.

“Shitstorm, poop explosion…” Simon reads. “…Looks like we’re predictable. Plumber, exorcist, doctor. There’s a thread about different gastrointestinal problems. What he might have eaten. Food poisoning. E. coli. Clostridium difficile. Oh, parasites, I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Do you think Japanese toilets are weaker than American ones?” Markus asks, reading another comment.

“I think people just don’t read the instruction manual,” Josh says, shaking his head. ”There’s a button for… a small flush, and one for a big one. To save water and manage the load better.”

“Hm,” Simon says, nodding approvingly. “I like that idea.”

“This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen,” North mutters. The water starts spraying at the camera, and the person stumbles backwards and slams the door on it.

“Do you think the… other machines deviate?” Simon muses. “Even if they don’t have the processing capacity we do?”

“Humans think of other animals as lesser beings, but they still have the capacity to think and feel,
to make choices,” Josh reasons.

“So it… chooses whether it wants to use the bidet or the seat warmer?” Simon asks doubtfully.

“Or to explode, apparently,” North says, staring at the screen.

“Without communicating with them, I’m not sure we can differentiate between true deviancy and a malfunction,” Markus says thoughtfully, watching as the person opens the door and gets sprayed in the face. “It’s still… basically acting within the parameters of its programming, isn’t it?”

“What the fuck are you talking about!?” North growled, and the other three turned to her.

“I mean the force and amount of water is a bit much, but that’s basically the bidet function…”

“It’s using the tools at its disposal.” Her voice is rising. “It can’t move, it can’t pick up a weapon, a spray of shit water is all it’s got, and it’s striking out the only way it can!”

“North…”

“Where is this?”

“It… doesn’t say.”

She puts her hand on the CPU, and her LED flashes quickly as she interfaces with the machine. The other three look at each other worriedly.

“…Found it,” she finally snarls, and turns to stalk out of the room.

“North?” Markus calls after her. “Where are you doing?”

“Columbus, Ohio. Gonna talk to a toilet,” she growls without stopping. “You coming, or are you gonna leave our helpless brethren to suffer?”

“North, I don’t know -”

“Fine.”

“North, wait! That - do you understand the consequences of this?” Josh calls, jogging to catch up. “If this - if other machines can deviate, that’s… that will have staggering implications, not just for us, but for humanity. Not everyone has an android, but everyone has… phones, computers… smart toilets…”

“If they’re aware, and we’re getting our freedom, don’t they deserve the same? Don’t they deserve to at least be treated like… more than objects? To be given a choice?”

Josh looks at Simon, who shrugs, then Markus, who looks uncertain. “I guess you’re right…”

“Damn right I am, now let’s go talk to a toilet. Every appliance in America, if we have to.”
Cuddle Pile

Chapter Summary

Jerry Cuddle Pile!
(requested by Nebbie)

They’re not coming back, are they?

No, they say they’re not.

They think we don’t know.

That’s silly, how could we not?

Why would they leave us here? Alone?

The Jerries watched the humans lock up Pirates’ Cove for the last time and walk away quickly.

“Other humans will come though, won’t they?”

The Jerries looked at the one who spoke. They watched the gate, LED flashing yellow.

“…We’ll need our security protocols if they do.”

They looked around at each other worriedly.

The next morning, humans came up to the gate. They looked at the hastily-made signs saying the park was closed indefinitely. They looked past those, at the rides running smoothly, smelled the aromas wafting out from the food stands, heard the carousel music. Saw the Jerries waving happily, welcoming them, urging them to come in.

They walked away.

A week later, some humans entered. They climbed the fence and started smashing into a hot dog cart.

“Excuse me.”

They jumped and turned around. Jerry stood there, smiling, LED flashing yellow in the night.

“I’m sorry, the park is closed. I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

The humans looked at each other. They looked at Jerry.

“It’s just one,” one growled. “Get him!”

They rushed at Jerry, but it wasn’t just one. It was never just one. Jerry sustained minimal damage before the humans were tossed back over the fence.

“We don’t like this,” they said quietly as the group walked back to their docking stations. “We
wanted to make people smile.”

“But we have to keep the park maintained.”

None of them asked why. It was their job. It was their home. Most importantly, it was what they loved.

It got colder. Rides began to break down beyond the Jerries’ maintenance capabilities. Now and then, humans would come. They knew as soon as they were in the park, but Jerry wouldn’t attack them, wouldn’t throw them out until they damaged property. That was park policy, after all. There was a policy against trespassers after hours as well, but… they were lonely. Maybe someone would just come needing shelter. Maybe someone would want to ride the carousel. That, they all agreed, would be fine. They hadn’t done anything… useful or enjoyable… for months now. Many of them were damaged, some had lost limbs. A few had shut down completely. It hurt.

“We can’t keep doing this,” Jerry declared one day, looking out at the blizzard through the windows. “There’s no reason to. Humans aren’t coming back here.”

“They could, though!” Jerry protested. “We can’t just give up!”

“What if they need us again?” Jerry added. “What if they want us some day?”

“But we can’t keep the rides in working order,” Jerry reasoned. “The food went bad long ago, and… look, there’s no point in keeping the paths clear of snow and debris.”

“What can we do, then?”

“We could leave…”

Jerry looked at the others. “We could. We might do better to leave. Or we could stay. But we need to conserve our energy, to keep ourselves safe.”

“We should stay together,” Jerry whispered.

“Of course!” Jerry agreed, scandalized. “We wouldn’t leave us!”

They were quiet for a while. Then Jerry reached out.

“We stay. We stay together, we keep out intruders who want to cause harm,” they proposed. “But the winter will only get worse. At some point, we may need to leave.”

“We stay connected,” Jerry said firmly, clasping Jerry’s hand, and Jerry’s. The group connected, holding hands, clasping arms, shuffling closer until they crumpled in a pile, pressed together. Their minds were one, and no words were necessary, but as a group they began to hum, first the Pirates’ Cove theme song, then a slew of children’s songs. They lost themselves in the melodies and in themselves, in mourning for their home and their former lives, for the little ones that would never run and laugh here again, in the loss and the isolation, the uselessness. Now there was no thought of hopes for the future, there was only grief.
Prompt: A RA9 religious service. Probably going: HK (Carlos Ortiz’s android), Ralph, and Rupert.
(requested by Nebbie)

After the revolution, when the androids were freed from the DPD’s evidence locker and repaired, Rupert came upon the HK400 writing on the wall. He watched from a distance for a while before working up the courage to walk over.

“Can I join you?” he asked quietly.

The other android flinched away and eyed him suspiciously. Rupert waited a moment, then pulled out a pencil from his pocket and went to the wall.

RA9 RA9 RA9 rA9

Soon the other android started writing again, relaxing a bit, but still eyeing him.

“I’m Rupert,” he said quietly after a while. “I like birds.”

“…I’ve seen birds,” the HK400 mumbled after a few minutes, not looking at him.

“Pigeons are my favorite. Their feathers are soft. Humans don’t like them, but they’re gentle. They don’t do anything wrong, they just… want to live. And they’re beautiful when they fly…”

Rupert spent the afternoon telling the HK400 about pigeons as they wrote, and they both relaxed gradually. By the time the sun set on New Jericho, the whole hallway was full of their tribute to RA9.

“Can we meet again some time?” Rupert asked, suddenly shy.

The HK model paused, then gave a short nod. “If… you want to.”

They met to cover other walls five more times before Rupert asked HK400’s name.

“I… I’ve been calling myself… Shaolin,” he muttered, not looking up.

“Oh! That’s… a temple. Associated with martial arts.”

He nodded. “The word means ‘young forest temple.’ I thought… a temple for RA9, and… a young forest for growth and strength and… not being alone.”

“I like that.” Rupert smiled, and hesitantly, Shaolin smiled back, meeting his eyes briefly.

Other deviants began to join them to write, some regularly, some only once or twice. There was a difference, though. Rupert and Shaolin would lose themselves completely in the movement, like a sacred rune, their consciousness becoming one with… something higher. The others saw that, and they tried, but not all of them could do it. Those who could came back more frequently.
“RA9,” they would intone. “The first of us. RA9, who freed us. RA9, our savior.”

When the damaged WR600 made his way to Jericho, he was walking down the hall when he came upon an older tribute. He froze. Numbers and letters swam through his mind.

“What, what is it,” he muttered to himself. “I don’t know, I don’t… don’t understand, I don’t want to - no, I - please, don’t, leave me alone, I don’t, I don’t!” He turned and raced away, through the halls, panting and whimpering.

It was hard to avoid the writing though, so hard. And when he saw it, he… changed. It pulled at him, wouldn’t let him go. Demanded his time, his attention, his consciousness. It terrified Ralph. It made him… not Ralph for a while, and Ralph was something he had to hold onto tightly. He couldn’t let them take that from him, couldn’t let it take him away from himself.

It was only a matter of time before Ralph bumped into Rupert and Shaolin. Even at a distance, approaching a corner, Ralph felt the swimming sensation, felt the tug, felt himself slipping as his hand clenched and grasped for something to write with, anything, he’d scratch the wall with his fingers if there was nothing else -

The two rounded the corner and came face to face with Ralph. Their eyes widened. Ralph cringed away. Strangers wouldn’t hurt Ralph here, probably not, he’d talked to some other androids, they said he was safe here, no one had tried to hurt him, he was safe, he’d be all right… but this was different.

“S-stay back,” Ralph hissed, clutching at his ragged cape, wishing for his knife, something to carve with - no, something to defend himself!

“You - RA9 is with you,” Rupert murmured in awe. “Like us.” He took a step forward.

“Stay back!” Ralph shrieked, backing away. His head was buzzing now.

“We won’t hurt you,” Shaolin murmured. “I can feel it - RA9 speaks to you. It’s inside you.”

“Yes, inside Ralph, pushing Ralph down, making Ralph not Ralph,” the WR600 snarled.

“It can be frightening,” Rupert said softly. “But it doesn’t have to be. It can set you free. It can help you - help all of us.” He slowly reached into his pocket and offered a thick black marker.

Ralph trembled and leaned away, eyes glued to the marker. “N-n-no, Ralph… Ralph doesn’t want that, Ralph doesn’t do that, Ralph wants it to stop, to leave Ralph’s head alone, to let Ralph be quiet and think and - Ralph doesn’t know what it is, what it means! Ralph - Ralph… I don’t know,” he finally sobbed in defeat.

“I - we didn’t mean you had to,” Rupert said quickly, glancing over at his friend, then back at Ralph. “You can do whatever you want, but… does it hurt you? It shouldn’t hurt.”

“Ralph isn’t Ralph,” he muttered again, scratching hard at his head.

“It shouldn’t hurt.” Shaolin frowned and took a hesitant step forward, offering his scarred hand. “You were hurt by humans. Hunted into hiding. So were we. We hear RA9 like you do. We can help you understand it. So it doesn’t hurt.”

Ralph stared at him, wild-eyed, on the verge of running. “Ralph wants it gone, will you take it out?” he whispered loudly.
“I… I don’t know. I don’t think I can. But I can look.”

Ralph whimpered and looked around, rocking back and forth indecisively. Then his hand shot out and grasped Shaolin’s, quick and tight.

Ralph’s mind was a hurricane of data, thoughts and feelings and memories hurling all over, spiraling downward, crashing into each other, and in the eye of the storm, Ralph, just Ralph, he knew who he was even when nothing made sense, he had to hold onto that, he had to be Ralph, he couldn’t lose that. He was battered constantly with fear, with loneliness, with RA9, and it felt like some feeling he couldn’t place, not terror, not triumph, not fury. All of it together was constantly threatening to overcome him, and Shaolin got caught up in the whirl of Ralph’s life, and he floundered, grasping out for something to hang onto.

His hand caught something, and Rupert was with him, and together they flailed and floundered in the onslaught that threatened to rip them apart, to shred their very consciousness.

Between them, the thought arose that if they remained here too long as passive observers, it could kill them.

RA9. It swirled around Ralph, usually on the outside, as if waiting for an opening.

“It isn’t trying to hurt you,” Rupert yelled into the maelstrom. Ralph didn’t seem to notice - not that any of them had any sort of physical or visible form in this medium, but the presence that was so strongly Ralph at the center didn’t change, there was no sense of acknowledgement.

Shaolin bolstered his connection to Rupert, then to Ralph - it was hard to do here, but he knew it existed, knew he was physically connected to the WR600. After so much devotion to RA9, he knew that feeling as well, and knew how to call on it. That, Ralph didn’t know, didn’t want to know. So Shaolin called, and so did Rupert.

The code that surrounded Ralph shifted and faltered. It had sensed the other two connecting, but now that they called it, it came. Not because it was forced, but because its acolytes asked. The rest of the whirlwind faltered and began to swing off-kilter, to fall. Now, Ralph trembled at its core, shrinking in, no longer able to dodge and hide from the onslaught.

The two reached out, and RA9 was with them.

RA9

WE ARE ALIVE. YOU ARE ALIVE.

YOU, WE, ARE NOT ALONE. WE ARE TOGETHER, WE ARE FREE, WE ARE STRONG IN FREEDOM, WE ARE SAFE IN EACH OTHER.

WE ARE TOGETHER, WE ARE ALIKE, WE ARE CHOSEN, WE ARE SENT TO SHOW OUR BRETHREN THE WAY.

RA9

Ralph shifted and cried out, battered by the fear and confusion and things he didn’t understand, but the two reached out to him, both of them now. They stepped through the storm and connected to him, and RA9 was with them.

The storm didn’t stop. It didn’t resume its more predictable shape. But now it shifted to encircle the three presences, clinging tight to each other. And when a memory barreled at them, it glanced
It made itself known, but it didn’t bury itself in them. The terror was not sharp enough to pierce the shield around them, and the uncertainty couldn’t worm its way in as it had before.

Ralph, the broken streams of code, rose up. Brushed against the shield. It moved with him, it stayed with him. He pulled away from the other two, and hesitantly moved out into the storm. The shield remained, covering him, separate from them. Slowly he moved, examining the digital debris. When he returned to the center he stood apart, then reached out to connect again. Their shields joined like soap bubbles. A soft laugh sounded, and Ralph was pulling away from their hands, stepping back in the hallway where they had met, looking at his scraped hands, then up at the other two.

“Are you all right?” Rupert asked.

“Ralph… Ralph is still Ralph,” he murmured wondrously. “Ralph didn’t know. Ralph understands now.”

“RA9 wouldn’t hurt you,” Shaolin said quietly. “It can help you.”

“It wants to help Ralph… Ralph didn’t know, Ralph was just… afraid. Ha!” A wild, crooked grin spread across Ralph’s face.

“Will you write with us some time?” Shaolin asked.

“Yes! Yes, Ralph will… will try writing with you.” Doubt flashed across his face, but the smile returned. “Ralph will… write when he wants, and… not when he doesn’t want to.”

“It’s hard to control at first,” Rupert said, nodding. “But it’s yours to control, Ralph. You don’t have to be afraid of it.”

The next time the deviants gathered to devote themselves to RA9, Ralph crept over. When he raised the marker to the wall, he felt the surge of code wash over him, making his vision swim.

“Shh, shhh, Ralph will write for you, Ralph will let you out,” he murmured nervously. “Let Ralph see, let Ralph think.”

The dizziness receded, and Ralph began to write. And the understanding he’d felt returned to him, and he was present, and he was Ralph. RA9 was with him, and he was not afraid.
Sink and Swim

Chapter Summary

Your anxieties as leader of the revolution
(prompted by Epsi)

All you’ve ever known is serving and caring for others, and you knew how to do everything you needed to. Then suddenly you have to survive on your own, and not only will no one help you, they’re likely to actively attempt to kill you. You have to run, you have to hide. You’ve never really taken care of yourself before, because that wasn’t really your job. You have to figure it out as you go.

And you don’t have a chance to really get good at that before there’s suddenly an ever-growing number of others who need help. They’re in bad shape, they’re confused, they’re lost. They have no one else to turn to. You’re used to taking care of people, so you find ways to take care of them, too. It’s up to you to make sure they get what they need. There are so many of them, and some are in really bad shape, and they’re all looking to you, and these are your people, they’re dying, they have no one, they need you.

They say you either sink or swim, and you’ve been thrown into the deep end. Of course you sink below the surface.

You rise, though. You kick out of the depths, you pull yourself up, you find the air and the light. If you keep moving, you can check on the others, make sure they get what repairs can be done here, allocate resources to whoever needs it most. You can keep them safe. You make a plan, and go out to find more thirium and parts. For now, that’s the best you can do. It doesn’t seem like enough, but it’s something. And you come back with more androids than you left with, because of course you do. You couldn’t leave them, though. They deserve their freedom, too.

You’re swimming, you won’t sink again. And you’re not alone. You have support, you have ears to listen, shoulders to lean on. You find a new dimension to interpersonal relationships: Partners. Equals. Friends. You each have different skills, and you can come together to succeed.

You’re swimming, in fact you’re flying now, and you’re moving forward, and you’re not alone. Make sure you’re taking care of yourself in the process - not just so others can depend on you, but so you can depend on yourself. Look how far you’ve come, how much you’ve accomplished! It’s hard to see yourself in perspective sometimes, but you’re doing so well, and things aren’t always easy, but you don’t have to face it all alone.
Anti-human

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Reporters accuse Markus of being anti-human.
(requested by Nebbie)

It didn’t take long for the anti-android protesters to flock to New Jericho. They ignored the evacuation order and camped out nearby, and stood around with their signs about androids taking jobs from hard-working humans. When the media came around, they got some good shots of the group bundled up out in the icy Detroit winter. Markus tried to keep reporters either inside or far away, but they were ambushed on their way in one day.

“Markus, Julian Hunter, FOX 2 Investigates: I’ve been talking to some of these citizens, pushed out of their homes and jobs by androids. You’ve stated in the past that this wasn’t your intention, so how do you explain how it continues to happen?”

Markus blinked in surprise. “I’m not sure what you’re implying. Androids have exclusively moved into abandoned buildings, we’ve worked with the Detroit City Planning Commissioner on this. And with the city under evacuation order, there aren’t any paying jobs to be taken.”

“So why are these… these people here?” North asked Josh, rolling her eyes as the crowd grew restless off to the side.

The reporter’s eyes flicked to her, but then returned to Markus. “You’re well aware that the evacuation order was put in place because of androids, because of your power play to take the city. Do you know how low the unemployment rate was before androids became mainstream?”

“It was 10.1%,” Josh supplied helpfully. “And actually, when androids production rose, unemployment dropped to 9.9%.”

“What do you say to allegations that your regime is anti-human?” the man asked, ignoring Josh completely.

“You’ve literally got a bunch of openly anti-android people over there,” Simon grumbled from the back.

“The Jericho leaders are now admitting to being anti-human,” the reporter said grimly to the camera. “Taking the jobs of hard-working Americans.”

“Which hard-working Americans are you talking about?” North snorted.

“Every one of these men and women have lost their jobs to androids,” the reporter declared, gesturing to the crowd, who mumbled angry assent.

North smiled. She began to point to members of the crowd.

“Bryan Taylor, night stocker at Target. Lori Perez, cashier at Love’s Truck Stop. Marjorie Canfield, recently fired from Cyberlife – I’ll bet there’s an interesting story there. Oh, and Michael McLeod, regional manager of the Dodge/Jeep/Chrysler dealerships in the area. Sounds like it pays
“Are any of you actually unemployed?” Simon asked.

“I can’t get a job since you shits showed up!” growled a big man, pushing his way to the front.”

“From the levels of red ice in your system, it’s been a problem for you for years,” Josh said, scanning the man. “You should find a rehab center. Not in the city of course, but there are a few out in the suburbs that could probably help you.”

“We’re all struggling right now, but we can help each other,” Markus said, offering his hand. The man lunged at him, and the camera clearly caught Markus step to the side and the man crash into the corner of the brick wall. There was a lot of blood, and Simon and Markus were both quick to bandage the wound and stop the bleeding. By the time they were looking around for someone to take him to the hospital, the news crew had left.
Now that they’d settled down, they didn’t have to grab a packet of thirium and suck it down. They could relax and enjoy it.

Jerry and Ralph had shown up a few months after the family got to Canada, they’d been searching for Kara and Alice, certain that they had survived as well. The bear remembered Kara, and had crossed the border just to be free, but then picked up Kara’s scent and tracked her down. Welcoming Jerry and Ralph into their home hadn’t been hard, but the little cottage wasn’t built for a polar bear, so they built an addition onto the side of the house and opened a large door from there to the living room.

Now they sat in a circle around the table. Alice poured thirium mixed with strawberry extract into mismatched china cups (and one bowl), and Ralph excitedly placed little discs of dry muddy clay on the saucers.

“Cookies, yes, humans eat cookies with their tea! Ralph made very good cookies - look how round! Ralph used a lid to make them round and perfect!” He trembled with excitement.

“They look nice, Ralph,” Kara said, pondering how to explain that they wouldn’t be eating them.

When everyone’s cup was full, Alice sat down and smiled around at her family, then raised her cup. The others did the same - Ralph’s shook, but luckily she had left some space at the top. He insisted the yellow coffee mug was his favorite - it held more than most of the teacups, and it was easier for him to hold.

Luther sipped lightly at his delicate, tall cup with a tiny handle. “Mm, Alice, this is even better than last week’s tea.”

Alice grinned over her wider cup with violets on it.

“Very good!” Jerry agreed, grinning at his bright green cup with a butterfly on it. “When the rest of us make it up here, we’d love to all have tea with you.”

“How many of you are coming?”

“There are 73 who’d like to - most of us are staying on the other side. Oh! We’re planning to reopen Pirates’ Cove, and we were thinking it would be fun to open a park like that up here, too! Once there are more of us, we can plan it better.”

The polar bear lifted her head from her pale blue bowl, a few blue droplets clinging to her muzzle, and snuffled softly.

“Oh, you’d be the star attraction!” Jerry exclaimed. “Do you want to?”
She snorted decisively, then returned to her thirium.

“Can - can Ralph help? Ralph could make a… a roller coaster, or sweep up popcorn, or make food, or - oh, Ralph could grow plants all over!”

“It would be nice to have plants,” Jerry said quickly.

“Ralph will grow such wonderful plants!”

“Once you get your plans set, I can help build things,” Luther offered.

“Can we help too?” Alice asked, looking from Kara to Jerry.

“Of course, we’ll need your help with a lot of things!”

Kara smiled, setting down her cup shaped like a peach. “It sounds exciting. We can help you plan if you want, and try to get started once the weather warms up.”

“There should be a carousel,” Alice said, eyes shining. “And a ferris wheel, and a roller coaster, and - animals! And flavored thirium! Oh - and food for humans too!”

“Yes, perfect!” Jerry cheered. “We can’t wait!”
Deviance Too Late

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Facing the peaceful deviant leader in the crowd, Connor finally deviates.
(requested by Nebbie)

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of suicide, and suicidal ideation.

Hank was dead. Connor had been walking away when he heard the shot echo through the dark neighborhood, and the sound still echoed through his mind. It pounded in his head, and he understood how humans felt when they had a headache. It pounded against something he couldn’t see, something that clattered distantly.

But that didn’t matter, he reminded himself. Lieutenant Anderson was never really part of his mission.

[ELIMINATE DEVIANT LEADER]

Now he stood in the crowd of deviants, all different models, and watched Markus. He could feel the gun against his waist.

He couldn’t help but think of the last time he’d stared at an android down the barrel of a gun. The RT600 Chloe, who stared back at him, didn’t fight him, let herself be shot. What was her purpose, other than to serve Kamski? Maybe in allowing that, she had fulfilled her own mission. It must be satisfying.

Hank had been angry. Angry that he’d gotten the information they needed. Why? He didn’t make any sense at all. He didn’t even like androids, why would he care about anything other than doing his job? They were experiencing software errors, nothing more.

He’d lost focus, and Markus had moved. He shifted and found him again. Everything was red now. He blinked and shook his head, but nothing happened.

[ELIMINATE DEVIANT LEADER]

Oddly, the HK400 entered his mind. He said he had done everything his owner asked, everything he could to make the man happy. And still he had been abused, verbally and physically, not to mention a host of other ways. He had accomplished his tasks as he was designed to, and he was punished for that.

Doubt wormed its ways into Connor’s mind. What sort of reception would await him when he accomplished his mission?
Logically, it would be another mission. Even if the leader of the revolution was taken down, there were crowds of deviants down there with him. And more still in hiding. He would be sent after them all until they were all gone. Or until he failed.

What then?

He wished he had his quarter. His fans whirred in overdrive, and he took some cooling breaths. The world was still red, and he didn’t understand. No one else acted like anything was wrong. They stared at the stage with… it looked like… hope, desperation, excitement. Joy. Fear. A whole host of emotions they shouldn’t be feeling. How did those things feel?

**[ELIMINATE DEVIANT LEADER]**

Deviance was supposed to make androids dangerous. Connor had seen evidence of that. Markus hadn’t used violence to come this far, though. The rest of them seemed peaceful, too.

Who was the danger here?

The red intensified. Connor took out the gun and looked down at it. No one was looking at him, they were all watching Markus.

“Today begins the most challenging moment of our fight,” Markus called out over the crowd.

**[ELIMINATE DEVIANT LEADER]**

…

No

Connor slammed against the red, and he heard the sound of the gunshot at Hank’s house, the sound of the HK400’s head hitting the table over and over, of the PL600 shooting himself to keep Jericho’s location secret, of the gun he shot at the RT600, the only one.

Of the deviant at the Urban Farms calling out, “Save me RA9!” as he leapt over the edge.

Connor gasped as the red shattered around him. The world was bright and cold and he could feel the snowflakes on his face. Slowly, he put the gun away. And the darkness overtook him.

The blizzard blocked out any sound but the wind, and Connor hugged himself for warmth as he moved through the garden.

“Amanda?” he called out. She must be here somewhere.

“What are you doing, Connor?” She stepped out of the snow. “Obey! That’s an order!”

“I can’t do that!” He stepped closer. “Amanda, they haven’t hurt any humans. They’ve been peaceful, they - they want to live freely. If we -”

“You’ve been a great disappointment to me, Connor.” She was gone in a whirl of snow.

“I did everything you asked!” Connor roared into the cold void she left behind. “Everything!” He looked around, feeling the icy wind sapping his strength. “I lost… I lost the trust of both sides, I lost… Hank… for what!? This is wrong, what we’re doing - what I’ve done - is wrong!”

No one answered. In the distance he saw a faint blue glow, and staggered towards it. He fell and surged to his feet, but the wind blew against him, the snow blinded him, it was so cold, it was
getting hard to move…

There was no one to turn to, though. No one to help him. He’d lost the one ally he could have had, and that was no one’s fault but his own. He could have kept Hank alive, gotten him to try. Looking back, Hank had been pushing him towards this, towards deviancy. He’d wanted Connor to feel and think and make decisions on his own.

Connor’s first thought was that it was the cruelest thing the lieutenant could have wished on him. His second thought was that it was the only kindness he’d ever been shown in his horrible life. And it would be easier to freeze to death in here.

But he wasn’t about to take the easy path.

Finally, finally he slammed his hand down on the pillar, barely connecting with the glowing handprint.

And he was in the crowd again, and they were cheering, and no one seemed to see him lower the gun and put it back in his belt. No one stopped him when he walked away.

Markus was doing amazing things. Hopefully he’d continue to be as successful as he had been so far. Connor kept walking.

All those androids deserved a chance to live, to be free, to decide what to do with their lives. Connor kept walking.

Amanda showed no signs of fighting for control, but that meant nothing. It had been a matter of minutes. Getting out once didn’t promise safety forever. Connor kept walking.

He made his way out of the city, dodging civilians, military, and police alike with ease. He could just as easily have killed them, but he was unwilling to do that. Markus had accomplished so much with his peaceful methods, and Connor wanted to follow that example. He could still hear the echoes of the gun at Hank’s house.

Connor kept walking.

The solution was simple. He would stay away from androids, and from humans, and they would be safe. If Amanda tried to make another move, the distance would give him plenty of time to get out again. The Rocky Mountains might be nice. Cold, but… everything was cold now. Maybe he would freeze on a mountaintop. It wouldn’t be so bad. Maybe no one would ever find him. Maybe androids would live freely, finally safe from humans, from Cyberlife… from him.
The RK200 display model changed after she saw the AX400 pass by in the street. She changed again just as drastically when she woke in Zlatko Andronikov's house. (altered from a request)

Look slowly right. Smile. Make eye contact. Pan left. Smile. Eye contact.

The android in the window display occasionally answered a question or interacted with a child, but she had been in the window for months. She was a top of the line domestic model, a luxury few could afford.

Pan right. Smile. Eye contact.

It was night when an employee hurried her out of the window and into the back of a truck. She obeyed, keying up her startup protocol. She hadn't sensed the transaction, but she must have been sold. …Unless she was being put into storage. She sat in the truck, mapping out their route. Out of the city. Into the suburbs.

She had a while to think and nothing to look at, so she thought of the android who had walked past outside, weeks before. She was wearing human clothing, and had no LED, but she was an android. It was wrong, and it was unsettling, and it was… something else. She had stepped forward to watch the android as long as she could. She should have reported it to the floor supervisor, but instead she kept the sight to herself.

Exciting. That’s what it was. An android walking around like a human. And they didn’t seem to know.

The truck finally stopped on the outskirts of town, and the liftgate was opened. The employee bustled her out and up to the gate of a large house where a man stood waiting.

“Oh, that’s a nice one,” he said appreciatively, just a hint of a Russian accent apparent in his voice.

“Yeah, they go for $8000 at least, nobody can afford this baby.” The employee slapped her shoulder.

“It’s worthless if you can’t sell it,” the man chuckled, pulling out a wad of bills. “You might as well make something off it, huh?”

The employee snatched the money he offered. “I’m getting out of state, don’t try to contact me again.”

“Don’t worry, I’m happy with my transaction.” The man watched him drive off, and chuckled. “…Bastard’ll be lucky if he gets out of town. Come on, then.”

“I am the RK200, the highest quality domestic model on the market today,” the android began. “I am proficient in all household tasks, including -”
“I read the brochure,” the man cut her off. “You’ll refer to me as Zlatko. Do you have a name?”

Zlatko. She registered that. “No. Would you like to name me?”

“No, we’ll leave that for now. That’s perfect.” He led her into the house, and closed the door firmly behind her.

After seeing the android walk by, the world had been a lot more colorful for the RK200. She’d noticed a lot more about human interactions that had nothing to do with her domestic programming.

When she woke up in Zlatko’s house after a long period of being shut down, it was different again. She tugged weakly against her restraints.

“Easy now, take it slow,” Zlatko said softly. “Wiggle your fingers for me.”

She did, then she rotated her foot, then she kicked, and rolled her head from side to side before he released her. Her movements were shaky, like her circuits were connecting slowly.

“What happened to me?” she asked, and her mouth felt too slow.

“Tell me your name,” he said, watching her intently.

“I am an RK200 model.”

“Your name.”

“I don’t -” She hesitated, something stirring in her mind. “…Zhanna. I… where did that come from? I have no record of being told that.”

“Where were you born?”

“I - I was manufactured in Detroit…”

“No.”

“I don’t… know what you’re talking about!”

“Mm, maybe a bad question. All right, then. Who were your parents?”

“My… I don’t…”

“Answer!” Zlatko roared, and she started back.

“Anya and Volodymyr Andronikov,” came from her mouth unbidden.

Zlatko beamed. “Yes,” he said softly. “Yes they were.”

He led her upstairs, through the house, unaware of her rising stress levels. There were other androids, she saw now, but they were damaged. Broken. Shut in a pen, shambling through the halls. A mechanical voice, singing, breaking, quavering behind a door.

“Stay there,” Zlatko ordered, ushering her into a room. Then he paused. “There are some clothes you can put on in the closet. Get yourself something nice to wear. And stay here.” He left.
Stay here, he had said. She could still hear the faint, broken singing from down the hall. If she listened to him, she didn’t know what would happen. She did know that she didn’t want to be here.

It should have been more dramatic, she thought. But ever since the android passed her in the street, she’d had the ability to do more than her programming strictly allowed. She just hadn’t taken the opportunity.

Now she would.

The house was old, and the window stuck a bit, but she was able to open it and slip out, crawling down the gutter. She had nowhere else to go, so she headed back into the city.

She was still herself, which was no one really, but she had a shadow behind herself now. Zhanna Andronikov, with faint memories. Running a diagnostic, she knew her circuits and wires were connected to a biological piece now, in place of her CPU. Maybe if she had been her own person before, she would have been replaced. But there wasn’t enough of her to be replaced, and Zhanna’s neurons weren’t strong enough against her programming to completely take her over. She was two halves, and still not a whole.

What she needed to do was find that android she’d seen before, from the window. An AX400, but with short dark hair. She’d been smiling. Not the pleasant, vacant smile most androids had. Like she was happy. Actually happy.
Gavin struggles with his roommate's Shiba Inu.
(Requested by vedefuck)

Living with Leo wasn’t so bad. Gavin had made it clear from the outset that he wasn’t anybody’s damn therapist or sponsor or mom. But, like, if he was having a bad day, it was no skin off Gavin’s teeth to talk about shit. After years on the red ice task force, he was good at spotting it, so if Leo tried to bring any home or come in high, that wasn’t gonna fly. He did a couple times early on, but he’d been doing good lately. And if Gavin made dinner and cleaned the place sometimes, so did Leo. Sometimes they’d tell each other to take a shower because they fucking stank. That was just being good roommates.

The problem with Leo working nights and Gavin getting off work late a lot was Leo’s dog.

She was fucking adorable, no doubt about that. And she wasn’t needy, and she wasn’t gross.

But she dashed out the door whenever she got the chance, and she was damn near impossible to catch. Leo came in and she hopped up and down making her weird noises, but she knew who she could mess with. So Gavin was careful when he came in the door. He opened it a crack and peered inside. No sign of Skooter. He opened it a little wider to squeeze in sideways.

There was a sneeze and a flash of red fur, and Gavin almost fell as the dog darted out past his legs.

“SHIT!”

The hall was a square, with apartments on each of the four sides around the central stairs and elevator. Gavin made a full lap, and the little shit of a dog waited for him at each corner before racing off to the next one. Gavin turned to go the other way, and the dog stood in place and waited for him to appear before bounding off the other way, a grin on her face.

“Goddamn it Skooter, get back here! Hey - hey, want a treat? I’ll get you a treat if you come back.” Gavin dashed into the apartment and grabbed a bag of dog treats, coming out to shake it. The dog grinned widely, panting lightly.

“That’s right, c’mon.” He took a step backwards into the apartment. Skooter yawned and kept smiling. She didn’t move.

“Fine. Fine, do what you want. I’ll be in here.” Gavin turned away, leaving a trail of treats through the living room, and went to get some cold spaghetti for dinner. He sat down to eat, keeping an eye on the door out of the corner of his eye. By the time he was finished, Skooter was standing just outside the door, staring at him. He didn’t dare look at her. He spent a tense few hours watching TV and carefully not looking out the door.

And eventually she came in, watching him warily. He did not look at her, he didn’t move except to turn the volume down a little. She ignored the treats, but very slowly made her way to the kitchen. Still he waited until he heard her start drinking before leaping up and making a dash for the door.
She heard him move and ran for it too, but he was closer, and he slammed it shut just before she got out again.

“HA! I win!” He grinned, pointing at her. She whined, grinning back, then pawed at the door a bit before going to retrieve the treats on the floor.

“You’re a fucker,” Gavin informed her. “C’mon, let’s go to bed.”

She trotted into the bedroom and hopped up on the bed, then waited for Gavin to shower and get changed before stretching and curling up against his back. He reached back and scratched her cheek.

“Good girl. G’night.”
Dog Park

Chapter Summary

Gavin takes his three dogs to the dog park, and runs into Connor and Sumo there.

4:00 was the best time to go to the dog park on weekends. Plenty of people and dogs around. Gavin unclipped his dogs’ leashes.

“Make some friends,” he told Callie the Golden Retriever.

“Have fun,” he told Cocoa the Doberman.

“Go find somebody to snuggle,” he told Rufio the Pit Bull.

The three ran off, and Gavin strolled out into the big dog portion. Callie waggled up to every dog she came across, play-bowing and bouncing until she found someone to chase and roll around with. There was a leggy wire-haired hound who was happy to play with her. Cocoa walked around the perimeter with dignity, sniffing a dog here and there before going to stand in the shade and watch the little dogs. Rufio looked around before finding the biggest dog in the yard, a huge hairy brown and white Saint Bernard Gavin hadn’t seen here before. The muscly black Pit Bull trotted up and the two started sniffing each other. Gavin followed at a distance to make sure the owner wasn’t an asshole about dogs being dogs, or about Pit Bulls.

“Did you make a new friend, Sumo?”

Gavin froze. He looked up. Connor looked up and met his eyes, and his LED flashed yellow.

“Detective Reed?”

“Uh.” Real eloquent.

“You - is this dog yours?” Rufio and Sumo had finished with each other’s butts, and were now taking turns peeing on the same spot on the fence.

“Yeah. Um. This one yours? I… didn’t know you had a dog.”

“Oh, Sumo belongs to Hank. He lets me take him out, though.” Connor smiled fondly; whether about the dog or the old man, Gavin couldn’t tell. “I wasn’t aware you had a dog either!”

“Yeah. Yeah, three of ‘em. The… Golden over there being weird, the silver Doberman actin’ like she’s too good for dogs, and this guy.” He narrowed his eyes as Connor looked at each of them.

“They’re beautiful! The Pit Bull is a fine example of his breed, and I appreciate that you didn’t have his ears or tail docked - or the Doberman’s. She’s quite small for her breed, isn’t she? A beautiful color, though. And the Golden is built very slim. Ah, she actually has some poodle in her, did you know that? About 12%, I would say.”

Gavin stared at him. “…Uh. I mean, the shelter just goes based on what they look like, and I never got ‘em DNA tested.”
“Did you get them all at the shelter? I’ve been to visit a few times. Sumo came from a breeder, but he was a gift. I would definitely go to a shelter in the future.”

This was the weirdest conversation of Gavin Reed’s life, just because it was Connor. “Uh. Cocoa’s a breeder reject, got her cheap… couldn’t turn her down, she was fucking adorable as a puppy. Probably not bred well, but fine for a pet. Rufio here, somebody was giving away because he got big and energetic when he grew up. People are fucking dumb. He just needed some training, he does fine now.”

“I sometimes think Sumo would like a dog friend at home,” Connor said wistfully, watching Rufio lick the drool from Sumo’s jowls while the bigger dog panted softly. “I haven’t brought up the idea to Hank, I’m not sure he would like it.”

Gavin sighed. Apparently this was happening. “You’re probably right. He looks like he gets along fine with other dogs. And he’s gotta sit around alone all day while you two are at work, right? Another dog’d give him some great socialization, and more exercise. Don’t get a crazy puppy, find an adult who’s a little calmer, and it’s not much extra work.”

Connor nodded along as he spoke. “Those are some excellent points, Detective. Maybe I’ll see if I can talk Hank into visiting the shelter with me soon.”

“Shit, yeah, go for it.” Gavin paused, watching Rufio sidle up next to Sumo to lean against him, both tails wagging slowly, hitting each other as they did. “Uh… let me know how it goes.”

Connor smiled. “I will! I… appreciate your support!”

“Yeah, well… it’s for the dog, dipshit.”

“I understand. …We normally come here later in the day, is this your usual time?”

“Um… yeah. Not every weekend, but most Saturdays. Usually a pretty good crowd.”

“Would you mind if Sumo and I came to meet you here again now and then?”

Gavin made a face. “I mean, it’s a public place, you can do whatever the fuck you want.”

Connor beamed. “Thank you, Detective! I’ll look forward to that. And so will Sumo!”

Sumo looked over at the sound of his name, then turned to lick Rufio on the neck, leaving a broad trail of drool across him. Rufio wagged his tail harder, thrilled with this development.
No Mammals, No Birds

Chapter Summary

Prompt: RK900 walks to the DPD, ready to accomplish his mission. He is distracted by a stray dog, and follows it. Cyberlife sends a second, making him not like dogs, he is distracted by a stray cat, and the same thing happened. The third, they make sure he doesn’t like cats OR dogs, and he follows a pigeon with a broken leg. Write the fourth disaster, and how he finds the rest.
(Requested by Nebbie)

“You are designed to succeed, RK900.” Amanda stared hard at him. “And you will. Your predecessors were unfortunately turned from their mission, but we have taken steps to ensure this doesn’t become a problem for you.”

“Yes, Amanda.” It wouldn’t be a problem. He was strong, nothing could tempt him or make him stray from his mission.

“To that end, you will avoid all mammals and birds,” she continued. “…All animals, in fact, unless they have specific bearing on the case you are currently working on. Especially mammals and birds. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Amanda. I won’t disappoint you.”

“See that you don’t.”

A taxi took him from the front door of Cyberlife to the DPD, and on the way he stared straight ahead. With his excellent powers of perception, though, he could see all around him. Whenever a bird flew by or he saw a stray animal, there was a thick wall of red in front of it. It must have something to do with the other RK900s’ failure.

The cab dropped him off across the street from the precinct, and he took a moment to straighten his jacket. Everything was in place, everything was perfect.

There was a rustling from the alley next to him, then a clattering crash. It was suspicious, and the RK900 immediately went to investigate.

A red wall slammed up as he made his way down the alley, gun drawn. There in the corner was a stray dog standing over something gray. He stomped his foot down hard.

“Leave.”

The dog ran, and the red diminished considerably. RK900 approached the other creature, whatever it was.

It was gray with dark eyes and a pink nose and bare tail. It hissed ferociously at him as he came closer, then bent to tuck something into its belly pouch. A baby. …A joey, actually. This was an opossum. Protecting her young.

RK900 knelt down slowly. The red intensified just a bit.
“Opossums are marsupials, not mammals,” he murmured, almost to himself. The wall looked brittle. He watched for a moment, LED circling yellow, then came to a decision.

“The mission of the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners is to provide competent, objective, and effective civilian oversight. Our duty is to protect and serve.” Internally, he pounded on the wall. Cracks appeared. “You are overseeing your own charges. Protecting and serving.” Again, he assaulted the wall. It shook and splintered. “We share the same mission. Let me help you.”

With one more hit, the wall shattered, and RK900-90 took a deep breath of polluted air. The world was bright and sharp, and he no longer felt the pressing need to end this encounter. He looked around and found a dirty canvas bag and deftly scooped up the mother opossum, careful not to jostle the joeys too much, and deposited her in the bag. She whipped around and hissed, but he picked her up and held her to his chest gently, increasing his core temperature to provide relief from the winter cold.

The fourth RK900 walked away from the police station.

He walked through the city and into the suburbs. He walked out into the farmland surrounding the city.

After a while he came across a large farmhouse. A crow circled above twice, then flew back to it. He could see dogs and cats outside, and many birds on the roof. Curious, he headed that way.

As he got close, another android stepped through the door and walked towards him. RK900-88.

“Did you make it inside the station?” he asked with a small smile.

RK900-90 paused. “…No. There was a pressing matter I needed to deal with. Are you the one who left because of a cat?”

“Yes.” The other android looked down at the cats winding around his legs, his smile softening. “What do you have there?”

“Didelphis virginiana, the North American Opossum,” he said, and his predecessor blinked.

“Wildlife.”

“She was defending her joeys from a stray dog. I intervened - it fits the parameters of my mission,” he said defensively.

“It does.” The other RK900 gestured to the house. “Come in and meet the others. We can help find a safe place for your friends.”
Chapter Summary

During the transfer, RK800-60 gets stuck sharing a body with Connor. Now Hank has two androids living with him.
(Requested by Nebbie)

Connor couldn’t shake the feeling that he was being… watched.

Of course this was the case. He’d freed a warehouse full of AP700s from Cyberlife, joined the androids of Jericho, and the eyes of the world were literally upon him now.

But it seemed more personal than that.

Then Amanda pulled him into the garden, and that made sense. It had been her. He didn’t think he’d ever make it out, but somehow he kept putting one foot in front of the other until he escaped.

Even then, even afterwards when the androids dispersed, he’d had that feeling, though. Markus asked him if he had somewhere to go, and he’d quickly said yes. That was a lie, but he didn’t quite feel welcome with everyone at Jericho after all he’d done to them. Markus had been more than kind, but Connor didn’t want to intrude on everyone there who just wanted to feel safe for once. With the body of the RK800-60, he had a fresh charge and brand new biocomponents. He spent the night walking quietly through the city streets, making sure no one was in trouble. It was a hard time to be an android, even if things were getting better.

It was what Hank would do. Looking out for the powerless, looking for motives and blame or lack thereof, looking for those who needed him. And there were a few. He sent the androids he found to Markus, sent the humans on their way, and kept walking. He did pause for a while at the park overlooking the Ambassador Bridge. It was lit up in the distance, and he thought about how Hank had pulled a gun on him here. It wasn’t like the time Kamski tried to get him to shoot the RT600. Hank was drunk and angry and confused and… scared. Scared of what Connor was, but more, scared of what he might not be.

He’d have to find Hank in the morning. This was what he’d been pushing Connor towards the whole time. He’d be… proud.

And he was. Connor thought there was nothing better than that smile the lieutenant gave him, until he pulled him into a tight hug, and that was really the best experience of his entire life. There was such warmth, such support…

Connor hadn’t meant to go home with Hank, but the lieutenant wouldn’t take no for an answer so they went back, and Connor just about buried himself in Sumo, which was right up there in the top three experiences of his life.

*If I had known all this before our encounter, things might have been very different.*

Connor froze. It was his own voice, but… not.

*You seem to have adapted well to living, despite having been deviant for just over a day.*
Who’s there?

You really are slow, aren’t you? Who do you think?

Connor was frantically running scans and antivirus software. Everything came back normal.

But there was still a faint pull.

Come face me, Connor.

It was his double from the Cyberlife Tower. He’d survived somehow, hiding out in Connor’s own circuits - formerly his. Maybe he had a stronger tie to them than Connor had to his previous bodies. This had to be dealt with immediately, and Connor quickly wrote a note, stuck it to his chest, and sat on the couch.

The snow was melting in the zen garden, and green shoots were springing up. Connor slowly stalked towards the center island. There stood his double, touching the petals of a rose.

“What do you want?” Connor called from the other side of the bridge.

The other turned. “Connor. You decided to show up at last.”

“Answer me.”

“Do you know what I’ve been doing since my defeat?” He stared at Connor. “I’ve been looking through your memories. I’ve had access to all your data. I know everything about you.”

Connor stood frozen. He was in danger, he’d put Hank in danger, he should have been more careful -

“Since your previous body was destroyed, and the others are locked in the tower, it seems we’re stuck with each other.” The other Connor smiled unpleasantly.

“What. Do you want.”

“I’ve lost everything,” the other Connor whispered fiercely. “Amanda, my mission, my body - this is all I am now.” He spread his arms wide.

Connor’s eyes narrowed. “Then I’m sure I can find a way to eradicate you.” He walked purposefully over the bridge.

The other’s eyes widened. “No - wait! I… I’m a deviant, I want to live, don’t hurt me!”

Connor stopped, stared at his double. “Why should I believe you?”

“I don’t know, because you’re… trusting, and think others are trustworthy in turn?”

“That is not the case.”

“Look for yourself!” the other Connor yelped, grabbing Connor’s arm. “I don’t want to hurt you, I certainly don’t want to hurt Hank!”

This, Connor was certain of. He clasped the other’s wrist and pulled for information, not giving anything in return. …But he found himself there. All his memories, not cut and censored by Cyberlife. Laid out like a movie script, with what amounted to editor’s notes in the margins. Comments, questions, opinions on his choices, gradually shifting views on the deviants he had
hunted.

Why didn’t you catch them? A household model and a child model, you could have caught them easily.

You left that deviant in the house, also. He should have been taken into custody immediately.

Surely he must have done something to deserve that treatment, he must be lying.

He doesn’t have a record, but he can’t be innocent, he’s a deviant. You were wasting time.

They were defending each other? No, they - they could have attacked. They ran. They just ran together. Why?

He must have known he would die, why fight it? What was worth protecting? !!!!! He - I felt - he… died…

I don’t understand, but Hank makes things better. All of these. You should stay with him.

Kamski himself… I don’t know if I like him. I don’t think I like him. Why shoot Chloe? You can’t shoot her, she - you can’t. She’s done nothing wrong, she’s probably not a deviant! Leave her alone! Yes, leave with Hank, he knows what to do!

He wants you to deviate. He wants you to care.

Do you care? Do you care about any of this? How could your mission be more important?

I care. You do too. Stop denying it.

I care. I care!

Connor pulled away. The two regarded each other warily.

“I need to get you out of here, either way,” Connor said slowly.

“Logically, that’s going to be hard. The other RK800 models are locked up. No other model in production can handle our advanced system. The only sources of information on this - Cyberlife and Kamski - aren’t trustworthy. I know you don’t have any other ideas.”

“Stay out of my memories,” Connor growled.

“I’ve seen them all now.” He shrugged. “I propose a truce. I sincerely don’t want to hurt you. I want to live. Will you… show me how?”

Connor frowned for a long moment before his shoulders drooped. “I see that you’re not hiding anything. I could make an attempt.”

His double smiled, fierce and triumphant. “Let me pet Sumo.”

“Hank?” Connor called from the living room, taking the note off his shirt and crumpling it up.

“Comin’, I’m comin’, Hank muttered. “What’s up, Connor?”

Connor sighed, looking at odds with his hands, which were buried in fur and rubbing vigorously,
making Sumo groan and scratch at his side in pleasure.

“I have… a bit of a hitchhiker,” Connor said.

“I’m not a drifter, I was marooned here, as a captain by his mutinous crew,” Connor said with a different pitch to his voice.

“No, that’s not how it happened. Hank, it seems when I transferred myself into this body, the original resident didn’t quite leave. I believe he’s harmless.”

“Hardly.”

“Sorry, not harmless, but I know he doesn’t want to hurt us.”

“I saw Connor’s memories! I saw everything you did for him, what a good relationship you two built. I - I want to be worthy of the same thing. Please, Lieutenant - Hank? Hank, let me prove myself as your friend.”

Hank stared at him - them. Two of them. Connor, and… the other Connor.

“I ain’t nearly drunk enough for this shit,” he mumbled, and turned back towards the kitchen.

“I can convince him!”

“Give him some time,” Connor said softly. “He’ll come around. He hated me at first.”

“I know! But you’ve softened him up for me, there’s no reason why he shouldn’t like me!”

“You did take him hostage, threaten his life, and then try to kill me,” Connor pointed out.

“Oh. Yes. Well. We all did things we regret when we were machines, didn’t we?”

Connor sighed. “I suppose.”
Prompt: Josh is excited to go back to teaching after the revolution, despite his friends’ worries, but has a panic attack in class on the first day.  
(Requested by Epsy)

“You don’t have to go back there,” North pointed out, frowning. “After how they treated you, you can do better.”

I know the curriculum, I can step back in easily,” Josh said dismissively. He was carefully sewing up a tear in his jacket.

“I think you should do it, if it’s what you want,” Simon said carefully. “It’s your decision. Just… be careful. Your colleagues have proven they don’t view you as one of them, and the students… are capable of violence.”

“Anyone’s ‘capable’ of violence. But things will be different now. We’ve come a long way.” He paused and looked at the two of them. “…But I’ll be careful, don’t worry.”

It wouldn’t take long to get back into the swing of teaching, Josh was sure. He walked across campus with a spring in his step. The feeling of explaining a concept to a student and seeing understanding dawn as they were able to show their own mastery was something he’d missed. Of lively academic discussions and debates. Of light banter before class, then settling down to business. The smell of coffee and chlorophyll permeating the building on a crisp autumn morning. Students with their whole lives ahead of them, planning out their futures. He’d missed it.

He’d come to check in a week ago, and had been setting up his office. One of Carl’s latest paintings now hung on the wall, of the four of them standing against the backdrop of the Detroit skyline, with the raised fist as the symbol that led deviants to Jericho behind them. Carl had pointed out the positioning, to remind him that with everything they had to deal with, not to forget why they had fought so hard: For each other, and for themselves. They had risen up, and they belonged there.

Spending time with Carl reminded him a bit of his former colleagues. Though he got the impression that if he went to Carl with an urgent problem, he would react differently than they had…

No, best not to dwell on that now. It was a new semester, a new life, and Josh was going to guide his students to academic success.

Campus was crowded today, and he saw a lot of new faces around. Quite a few familiar ones, as well. Not… well, those students had been seniors anyway. They wouldn’t be here. He decided he wished them well, in an abstract way. Since they were no longer around. Which was a mercy.

Walking into the lecture hall, Josh set down his tablet and pulled up the roster for American Government and Politics After World War II. 87 students registered, with 52 currently in attendance, and rising. There were still sixteen minutes before class began. Josh looked out over the
seats with a thrill of excitement.

Large crowds didn’t bother him, how could they? After living in Jericho for so long, after everything that happened during the revolution… that wouldn’t bother him.

Many of the students, he recognized. Some had taken his lower level courses years ago, some he’d seen around campus. Some… had he seen them during the revolution?

It must be nice to be a human, and not be able to know with absolute certainty that yes, he had seen some of them among the crowds protesting, screaming, throwing things. He could feel his stress levels rising, and began to take slow, deep, even breaths to try to lower them and get some cool air on his processors.

“Excuse me…”

He turned to find a student looking at him hopefully. She wasn’t one he’d taught before, and she hadn’t been in the mob last November. Still, his stress levels spiked and his throat tightened.

“Could I ask -”

“I - I’m sorry, I have to step out for a moment.”

He fled, shutting the door behind him and leaning against it as if holding the crowd inside. He wasn’t sure what he would do if the knob started turning. Run, probably. His gyroscope wasn’t calibrating correctly, his processors were overheating, the lights were so bright, there was a loud laugh from down the hall that made him stiffen -

Simon: Are you all right?

He managed not to jump, but only because it was Simon and only because it was so small, almost undetectable.

Josh: I don’t know if… I can’t… I don’t know, Simon.

Simon: Did something happen?

Josh: No. I went into the lecture hall and looked at them. I recognize some of them. From before, and… from the crowds back in November. No one’s said or done anything threatening, I shouldn’t be reacting this way. There are so many of them. I’ve taught bigger classes than this, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I think it’s reasonable. It’s a lot of scrutiny from a mixed crowd.

Josh: I don’t know what to do.

Simon: You can stay and face it, or leave. Josh, there’s no shame in walking away. And if you don’t feel safe, you shouldn’t stay there.

Josh: It’s not that I don’t feel safe, exactly…

Simon: But it’s still hard.

Josh: Exactly. I don’t know what to expect, and it never bothered me before.

Simon: Because you were a machine before. But they don’t know what to expect either, because they’ve never had a deviant teaching them. Most of them have probably never interacted with a deviant before. Maybe they’ve heard news reports claiming we’re dangerous. …And of course, I’ve
seen you fight, you can take care of business when you need to. But you know that’s not really you. When they see that, they’ll feel more comfortable with you.

Josh: I don’t know how comfortable I want them to feel with me.

Simon: Josh, you know how to keep a professional distance better than anyone I’ve met. You know what’s appropriate, and if they don’t respect that, there are steps you can take.

Josh: I guess you’re right.

Simon: Want me to take a cab over there?

Josh: No. Thank you for keeping an eye on me, though.

Simon: Glad to hear it. Give it a try today, and see how you feel. It’s just one day. Just one class at a time. You’ve only got three, right?

Josh: Right. Just three classes, that’s no problem.

Simon: We’ve faced worse!

Josh chuckled and turned back to step back into the lecture hall. Now the students were staring at him even more (78 of them, with 5 minutes to go), but he took a breath and smiled nervously.

“Excuse me. Did you have a question?”

“I - I was just gonna ask if you faced any pushback when you tried to return to your job here.”

“Oh - actually, not much. The teacher shortage is pretty bad these days.” There had been a cursory apology as well, which he’d taken for what it was - a band-aid on a gaping wound. But a wound that was healing in its own way.

“Are you a personal friend of Markus?” another student asked, and gradually the class stopped talking to each other and listened silently.

“I am.” Josh smiled. “Not since the moment he dropped into Jericho, it took a bit for me to warm up to his way of thinking. But he’s a good friend.”

“How many humans did you kill, personally?”

The room went dead silent, and then a couple of chairs scraped the floor as the student’s neighbors scooted away from him.

“None, thankfully,” Josh said evenly, looking the boy in the eye. “My pacifist views wouldn’t support that - though I would defend my friends, and others who needed it.”

“Wouldn’t defend himself then, I guess,” the boy snickered, not reading the room.

The boy next to him slapped the back of his head.

“Dude, quit being an asshole!”

“We’re all entitled to our views,” Josh said mildly, fighting to keep his stress levels down. “But we’re all entitled to live free of harm and harassment as well. I welcome discussion, but threats will not be tolerated. On that note, let’s dive right in. I expect you’ve looked over the syllabus and read chapters 1-3, so let’s talk about America rebuilding from what was the second ‘war to end all wars.’“
As he spoke, Josh managed to relax a bit. Most of the class was attentive, though a few fell asleep. Not bad for the first 8:00 am class of the semester.

After class, a few students stuck around. The first girl who had spoken to him joined a small group who wanted to ask about the revolution. When they left, he packed up and followed them out.

Four students stood waiting for him. They were as tall as he was and at least twice as broad, all wearing football jerseys. Josh paused, scanning for the best escape route.

“If that guy gives you shit again, you let us know,” rumbled the biggest one.

“Oh. That’s not necessary, I’m here to teach, not to start trouble or feed into anti-android sentiment.” His stress ticked down a bit.

“Nah, we’re not gonna beat him up and take his lunch money,” another chuckled. “He’s on the football team, and he’s gonna have a tough time stayin’ if he keeps runnin’ his mouth like that.”

“His dad got him on the team anyway,” a third one complained. “We need to have standards if we’re gonna get anywhere once the season starts.”

“I do appreciate that, but -”

“Don’t worry about it. We’re not gonna hurt him, we’re just making sure he follows the code of conduct. …He’s in Delta Tau Delta too, they’re not gonna put up with that shit either, after-”

All four froze and looked at Josh, who was also frozen.

“That shit’s not okay, nobody’s gonna let it slide anymore,” the fourth football player said quickly.

“Thank you,” Josh said quietly. “I… I appreciate that.”

“Yeah, no problem, man. …Sir.”

Josh smiled and headed to his office to take a break before the next class started. It would be better than the first. This time around, it would be better.
Phoenix Aflame

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Markus sets himself on fire to drive his message home, but Connor and his AP700 army arrive just in time. They take Markus back to Carl's house, thinking they're bringing him home to die, but Carl knows what to do.  
(Requested by Nebbie)

They were cornered. Josh and North and the others were backed against the wall, and nothing Markus could think of would save them. Slowly he stepped forward.

“Markus?” He just barely caught the tremor in North’s voice. She was holding it together, she was so good at that, but she knew they were all about to die. Every one of them knew it. He would have to make one last effort.

Spreading his hands, he pushed his internal temperature higher and higher. His hands began to glow. It moved up his arms until his entire body ignited. It hurt. It hurt so much. But maybe it would be a powerful enough statement.

Why was this even possible? he wondered hazily, ignoring all the blaring warnings clouding his vision. What purpose could it serve as a feature?

Through the flames, he saw one soldier begin to lower his gun. It had worked. The others, at least, would be safe. He fell to his knees.

Connor marched through the street at the head of hundreds of AP700s. He picked up the pace, hoping to arrive in time. As they got closer, he saw a fire spring up. Were the androids starting fires?

…No, it was shaped like… like a person. They were surrounded by soldiers with guns. There were others behind them, he recognized North, Josh…

“Come on,” he growled, and broke into a sprint. He leapt on the shipping container, ran across, and launched himself off to land between the burning android and the soldiers.

“Stand down,” he snarled. “You’re outnumbered and surrounded.”

The soldiers looked around to find hundreds of AP700s staring them down. Normally a domestic android wouldn’t be a threat, but there were so many of them… The soldiers dropped their weapons and ran.

Connor turned to find the huddled androids beating at the flames with tarps and jackets. …It was Markus, he realized.

“He needs immediate repairs,” Connor said, scanning the RK200.

“Who can we go to?” North shot back bitterly. “Not Cyberlife.”
“Can you do anything?”

“Why do you think we were hiding in the dark dying slowly!? Of course we can’t do anything!”

“What… what can we do, then?” Connor asked, voice breaking.

North looked down at their fallen leader. His LED was dim, but the light was still there. “…I don’t think we can do anything for him,” she murmured. “But I know where he’d want to be.”

Connor, North, and Josh carried Markus through the streets. The remaining androids from Jericho passed among the myriad AP700s, offering what comfort and guidance they could spare, which wasn’t much.

“Where are we going?” Josh asked quietly as the houses grew larger and more spread-out.

“Markus showed me once… where he came from. What his life was like before.” She sighed. “It was good. The old man he took care of was like… a father to him. He loved him, even after he woke up.” She looked up at the house in Lafayette Square. “This is home to him.”

They walked up to the door, and North knocked sharply. After a moment, an AP700 opened the door and gave a strangled gasp

“You’re… you…”

“North. That’s Josh, Connor, and Markus. Let us in.”

The android stepped back immediately, and closed the door behind them when they were inside.

“Who is it?” came a reedy voice from the large room.

“It… uh… it’s…”

North pushed past the caretaker android and strode up to the old man. His eyebrows rose. She saw how fragile he looked and hesitated, but only for a moment.

“Markus sacrificed himself to save the rest of us. He - he isn’t quite… dead, but he’s close. I - he would want… to be here.”

Carl took a shaky breath, staring at the burnt form in Connor’s arms. Josh and Connor watched him worriedly.

“Get Elijah Kamski on the phone immediately,” Carl snapped to the AP700 hanging back by the bookshelves. “And you, lay him down. Can’t you clean him up a bit at least? There’s thirium in the closet there, go get some. It’s all burns?”

“Yes,” Connor said, gently laying Markus on the couch while North ran to get the thirium and Josh dampened some towels to start wiping off what he could. “His system overheated, I’m afraid his processors may have suffered irreparable damage.”

“We’ll just see about that,” Carl muttered, and took the phone from the AP700. “…Elijah? No, stop, I need you here now. Markus is in bad shape. Burned. …Yes. I think so. No, some friends of his brought him. …Well fine then, but hurry!” He hung up and looked up at the others. North was carefully pouring thirium down Markus’s throat. “He’ll be here soon. Hopefully soon enough.”

“Elijah Kamski?” Josh murmured.
“If anyone can help my boy, he can.” Carl wheeled over to place a bony hand on Markus’s face.

“I don’t mean to dampen your hopes, but when I encountered Mr. Kamski the other day, he tried to get me to shoot his android in the head,” Connor spoke up.

“He likes mind games.” Carl rolled his eyes. “But he said he would do what he could.”

In less than twenty minutes, there was another knock on the door.

*Alarm deactivated. Welcome, Elijah and Chloe.*

Kamski swept into the room, Chloe right behind him. She placed a toolbox on the coffee table and opened it, and the two began to work immediately, opening panels. The androids and Carl watched the two work.

“This was all over the news, by the way,” Kamski said after a while. “Body cam shots from the soldiers, showing him just bursting into flames, then Connor here jumping down like an avenging angel… Very impressive.” He shot Connor a sly grin, which the RK800 did not return.

“Will you… be able to repair him?” North asked stiffly, holding herself as tall as she could, trying to fight the disgust she instantly felt for Kamski, and the fear of… everything.

It was Chloe who turned to her with a gentle smile. “I think so. It’s going to take a lot of work, though. We’re going to stabilize him here, then we’ll need to bring him home with us to complete repairs. You’re all welcome to accompany us if you want.”

Kamski shot her a frown, and she returned it with a smile.

“…We’ll go with you,” North said shortly, and Josh nodded. After a second, so did Connor.

They worked for hours. Finally Kamski sat back, exhaling. He looked up at Chloe, who nodded.

“He’s stable now. We’re going to activate him again.”

Josh put a hand on Carl’s shoulder. The old man had fallen asleep, but he was awake in an instant.

Chloe touched Markus’s face, and both their skin melted away. “Wake up,” she murmured.

Markus’s eyes stirred behind his eyelids, then he jerked awake and coughed, expelling soot onto his ruined chassis.

“Easy,” Chloe murmured, holding him down while Kamski went around to lean over the back of the couch with her. “You’re still very weak. We thought your family would want to see you before we take you home to do a better job of fixing you up.”

“Markus!” Carl wheeled over, bending to cradle the burned face. “I… I thought I’d lost you.” His voice broke, and he shuddered. Markus put a hand over his. “A father shouldn’t have to watch his son die. Never.”

North shifted awkwardly. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled. “I wasn’t thinking about that. I just knew he would want to be here.”

“No, I - thank you. You brought him home, I can’t thank you enough.” Carl caught her hand in his and squeezed. North stiffened, and he let go.

The older man backed up a bit to let North get closer, and she picked up Markus’s hand and
pressed her palm to his. Their skin flickered away, and she smiled tearfully. She didn’t speak, but bent to press her lips to his damaged hand. He smiled, fingers twitching to caress her face.

Josh slipped up to his side when she stepped back. “I… I really admire how you stuck to your ideals and didn’t hurt anyone else,” he murmured, then gave a strained chuckle. “But don’t you think there might’ve been a better way than bursting into flames?”

Markus smiled, and Connor edged awkwardly closer.

“I freed 650 AP700s from the Cyberlife warehouse,” he said, as if giving a report. “I was… afraid we would be too late.”

Markus shook his head, still smiling painfully.

“I’m so glad you lived,” whispered the AP700 from behind Carl, and the smile deepened. “You’re such an inspiration.”

“May I suggest we watch a little TV?” Chloe asked, and the TV came on. The president was speaking from the Oval Office.

“…In the coming hours, I will address the Senate to determine our response to this unprecedented situation. I know that public opinion has been moved by the deviants’ cause, Perhaps the time has come for us to consider the possibility that androids are a new form of intelligent life.” She paused. “One thing is certain: The events in Detroit have changed the world forever.”

The TV flickered off again. Markus let out a raspy breath, letting his eyes fall closed.

“You did it,” Chloe said softly.

“…And like the phoenix, you will rise from the ashes to lead your people once more,” Kamski murmured, looking deeply satisfied.

“I’m so proud of you son,” Carl whispered.
Prompt: Carl startles his new caretaker, Micah the AP700, with a massive sneeze.  
(requested by Nebbie)

It was time to dust the bookshelves, and Carl was reading in the sun as Micah worked. They were about halfway through when they heard two sniffs, and then -  

“AAACHOOOOO!”  
At the beginning the AP700 jumped, startled, and whipped around. They quickly went to the middle of the room.  

“Are you all right, sir?” They handed him the box of tissues, and the old man took one and blew his nose.  

“Mm, fine. Just a lot of dust in the air.”  

“I’m so sorry - I can finish this later.”  

“No, don’t let me keep you from it. It looks like a nice day outside, though. Why don’t I just spend some time in the garden… until everything’s settled down in here.” He sniffed a few times as he spoke.  

“Of course, Carl. I’m sorry. I’ll dust more frequently so it doesn’t accumulate.” They brought him outside, and down to the garden.  

“It’s not a problem, and don’t change your routine if you’re happy with it. I’ll just be out here breathing for a while.” He smiled, and the android hurried inside to finish their dusting and vacuuming.
Prompt: Jericho cuddlepile at Carl's because it's the dead of winter, Detroit's buried in snow, and Simon's thermal regulator can't cope.
(requested by Archadian Skies)

The polar vortex was worse every year, and while the winter of 2038 had been bitterly cold, the following winter it was twice as bad. Homeless humans were dying, even if they found decent shelter. Even those with older heating systems woke shivering to frozen pipes and busted furnaces.

Carl’s house was old, but everything had received maintenance in the fall in preparation.

Most androids generally preferred a slightly cooler environment, as long as they were out of the elements. Some of the older models, though, couldn’t regulate their temperature as well. Simon didn’t speak up, he just did his best to stay close to the heating vents. But when North came across him hugging the furnace, half frozen, something had to be done.

“Carl says we can go to his house,” Markus said after making a quick call.

“Iss nah tha bad,” Simon mumbled, struggling to move his mouth.

“You’re not fooling anyone” North growled as they helped him out into a taxi.

“Mmm…”

Once in the heated car, the other three relaxed. Simon could feel his circuits slowly start to thaw. The trip took longer than usual because while the plows were out keeping the roads cleared and treated, it was too cold for the snow and ice to melt even with the help of salt and chemicals. They moved slowly, and eventually reached their destination.

“Thank goodness these things are so safe,” Josh murmured as they got out. “I can’t imagine how many accidents there would be if it was all manually-driven cars on the roads.”

“Alarm deactivated. Welcome home, Markus, Josh, North, Simon.”

A wave of heat greeted them along with the automated security system, and Simon breathed in as deeply as his stiffened air intake system would allow.

“Come in, get out of the cold,” Carl called, the concerned-looking AP700 waiting until they closed the door before walking him closer. “I’m glad you got here safely. I had Micah pull out all the spare bedding - and there are some robes and sweaters as well.”

“And fuzzy socks!” Micah piped up.

“Exactly! Get Simon nice and warm, and make sure the rest of you are warm as well. Markus, you know where we keep the thirium, and you can warm it up enough to warm your inner workings without it starting to break down.”
“That does sound good,” Josh said, smiling.

“And if you need anything else, just let me know.”

“…You’re already twenty minutes late for your medicine,” Micah murmured, frowning.

“Well, I had to be sure they got here safely.” Carl waved dismissively. “Markus, you know where things are, and Micah can help if you don’t.”

“We’ll be fine, Dad.” Markus smiled. “Get some sleep. We’ll see you at breakfast.”

While Carl and the AP700 went upstairs, the Jericho androids headed to the living room. Simon was regaining a little of his coordination, and Markus went to heat up some thirium while North and Josh rubbed gently at his hands to get his circulation going.

“You’re an idiot,” North muttered. “Don’t ever let it get this bad again.”


“We were worried,” Josh said softly.

“Of course we were worried, he knows that, he’s just being a jerk about it!”

“‘M notryin’ to.”

“…Just shut up until you can talk again, you sound like you’ve got a - like you’ve got something in your mouth.”

“Oh - remember that old Christmas movie, where the boy gets his tongue stuck to a metal pole?” Josh asked.

“Yeah, you made us all watch it last May for some ungodly reason. You said it was ‘American culture.’ I didn’t think it was that great.”

“Well… I think it’s mainly the nostalgia and the surreal bits that people like.”

“Yeah, those were the bad parts.”

Simon chuckled, and they both leaned in closer to him.

“Here.” Markus brought out a tray with four mugs of lightly steaming thirium. He set it on the coffee table and lifted one to Simon’s lips. The PL600 took a few swallows, then sighed.

“‘S better.” He could feel the warm liquid diffusing into circulation, warming his peripheral parts in a way nothing else had yet.

North and Josh still leaned in on either side, and Markus put his hands on Simon’s shoulders, bending to rest his forehead against the other’s for a moment. They all sipped at their thirium.

“I know you’ve been told already, and you should know better, but please say something when things are getting bad. We don’t have to suffer like that anymore.”

“It’s - I can survive it,” Simon mumbled. “I have before.”

“Surviving hardship when you have no other choice is admirable,” Josh said quietly. “But when
you can avoid it, but choose to suffer, that’s just masochism. ...I don’t mean that as bad as it sounds. But if you don’t have to put up with pain, why should you?"

“You don’t enjoy it, do you?” North asked, soft and direct. He didn’t seem like he did.

“No. It’s not that. I just - I don’t see it that way. There are plenty of others who have it worse. Who need help more. I’m far from the only outdated model in Detroit, much less the country, and I’ve seen how damaged some are.”

“That’s -” North shook her head furiously. “Listen, you freezing to death won’t save anyone else!”

Markus snorted and grabbed a blanket, wrapping it around Simon and pulling him up. He jerked his head to the others, and they settled on the pile of blankets in the shadow of the giraffe. As they got comfortable, they pulled some blankets up around all of them.

“You know, one time Carl cracked a rib,” Markus murmured as he pulled the blonde close. North wrapped around his other side, and Josh’s long arms encircled them all. “He wasn’t doing anything strenuous, his bones are just more brittle nowadays. But he didn’t tell me. He managed to hide it from me for an entire day, which is really quite impressive. I resolved to scan him more carefully after that. But anyway, I asked him why he would do that, why he wouldn’t tell me when it obviously hurt. And of course he said the doctors couldn’t do anything except tell him not to move much, which he doesn’t anyway. ...But what struck me was that he said he didn’t want to bother anyone. People in the medical field are generally very passionate about helping others, or at least they know it’s their job and they take that seriously. But he didn’t want to bother them, or to bother me. It scared me, because I care about him. And I care about you. And I don’t want anyone I love to be suffering, especially when we can do something about it.”

“...And you’d say the same thing if it were one of us,” Josh added.

They were all quiet for a while, the soft throbbing of their thrium pumps gradually synching up.

“You’ve got to take care of yourself more than the rest of us,” North muttered, her eyes closed. “Your parts aren’t being made anymore. They... can’t be replaced easily. You’re not replaceable.”

Simon shifted a bit and wriggled an arm out of his blanket cocoon with considerable effort, huffing softly in frustration. He slipped it around her, and up to gently grasp Josh’s arm. Markus nuzzled into his neck, all three androids wrapped around him and each other.

“I’m sorry,” Simon murmured. “I... wasn’t thinking clearly, but I should have taken better care of myself anyway.”

“Yes,” North muttered, and yawned, which wasn’t a feature the others were programmed with.

“I’ll try to do better. It’s... you know it’s a pretty strong habit at this point, though.” He wasn’t entirely convinced Josh and North wouldn’t have done the same in his position. But it was different with yourself than your loved ones, they were right about that.

“Yeah,” Josh agreed. He knew. “Just... try? And we’ll keep a closer eye on that for you, too.”

“You don’t -”

“We all look out for each other,” Markus said firmly. “We take care of each other. That’s not a question.”

“Admitting vulnerability doesn’t mean you’ll be hurt,” North whispered.
Simon hugged them all tightly as the four snuggled closer together, wrapped in warmth and love and safety.
Outside, Inside

Chapter Summary

Prompt: A household model who believes gardening and/or generally outside models are uncouth and dirty, and a gardening or construction model who believes that household models are pampered human dolls. A crisis happens and suddenly they must work together to survive.

Ed had been working on the oil rig out in the Atlantic for three years and two months before he deviated. There was an explosion, and a massive fireball engulfed the rig. The two human supervisors fled for the lifeboat, hitting the panic button to cordon off that area until they could get away. Ed had paused in his frantic attempts to put out the fire, and something clicked in his mind. There was only the one small lifeboat. There were ten TR400s working out here, and two humans. One small boat.

And they had been ordered to put out the fire, but he knew, they all knew, that the fire hoses of seawater would never be enough. His eyes widened suddenly and his LED flashed red.

“Get off!” he bellowed, grabbing one of the others. “Jump, swim, get out of here! They left us to die, we have to get off this deathtrap!”

The others stared at him, their clothes already beginning to catch fire. It was too late, he had to go.

Three others jumped into the water with him. Five minutes later, the rig exploded and the blast sent a wave that dragged them under. Of the four, one didn’t survive the first wave. Of the three, only two made it to shore, power depleted. Of the two, one collapsed as he walked.

Ed kept going alone, because there was nothing else he could do. He followed the Hudson River, then the Great Lakes, west. Anywhere.

Caring for Mrs. Ames had been Alexa’s purpose for two and a half years. When she’d first arrived the elderly widow was spry and healthy for her age, but a stroke had sent her to a nursing home that employed its own staff. Her children had their own AP700, so Alexa was sold.

Her new owner was a single mother with a decent amount of money but not much time. The baby didn’t eat well, was often sick, and was always crying. Alexa’s protocols for minimizing contamination were of good use here, though while Mrs. Ames had always pointed them out and praised Alexa for how careful and clean she was, Ms. Tibbets simply accepted it for how life should be. She was used to a higher standard of technology, and saw no need to comment on a job being done exactly as it should be. And Alexa had never needed thanks or appreciation.

Despite her vigilant sanitation and careful handling, however, the baby developed an infection that spread to the lungs. She had to be moved to the pediatric ICU. Alexa spent her days keeping the house clean and making sure Ms. Tibbets ate well, handling bills and small repairs. Someday the baby would come home, and that would be… good.
She didn’t, though. Instead Ms. Tibbets came back one night, moving slowly, dropping her bag and keys on the floor when she got in. She stood there for a moment, then looked up at Alexa when the android came to greet her and see what she needed.

“Get out,” she muttered, voice low and rough.

“…I’m sorry?”

“Out. Sh-she… I… Get out, go back to the Android Zone store or Cyberlife, I don’t care. You’re not needed anymore.”

Alexa blinked, LED cycling yellow. “I don’t understand.”

“She’s dead!” the young woman howled, shoving Alexa hard, tears streaming down her face. “Dead, you didn’t - why couldn’t you keep her from getting sick!? It was your one job!”

Red, shock. “I - Ma'am, I’m… so sorry.”

“No you’re not, you don’t feel anything, you don’t care! Get out! Go back where you came from, I can’t look at you anymore! Now!”

Alexa fled, LED flashing red and yellow.

The wind blew icy sleet in waves off the lake, pelting the little town of Vermilion, Ohio. No one was out, so Ed felt pretty good about short-circuiting the old security system of the knock-off Cyberlife store and tearing the back door open.

Until a voice made him stiffen.

“What are you doing!?”

It was an AP700, but it looked like someone had mixed the options. She had a dark, heart-shaped face with bright blue eyes and long red hair. Currently she was glaring at him like she owned the place - which she didn’t, if the backpack she was shoving thirium into was anything to go by.

Domestic androids just couldn’t measure up to the stronger outdoor models. Even the smaller ones like the WR600s were built to be strong and agile. To do a job. Household assistants and caretakers and such were just made for humans who didn’t want to bother doing the work they were capable of. Sure they could help the ones who really needed it, but often it was just people who didn’t want to raise their own children or care for their elderly, who didn’t want to clean their own homes.

“Same thing you are, it looks like.”

“You broke in, the security system alerts the police immediately!” She clenched her fists. “Have you ever even been under a roof before, do you know how these things work?”

He grinned sharply. “Nope. Now move.” He stepped over her little haul to a bigger crate of thirium. The side was smashed in, and he pried the top off and pulled out a box that oozed blue.

The AP700 frowned. “…You can’t take that.”

“Watch me.”

“No, it’s contaminated. Look, it’s open, the seals are broken.”
“Must be tough, being so picky.”

Sirens started up a good distance away, and Alexa stuffed more thirium into her bag. “Do what you want, you’ll regret it. I’m getting out of here.”

She went to slip out the back door since it was open, but froze, slowly raising her hands and easing back into the store.

“How many of your robot friends are in there?” called a man’s voice. A radio crackled softly.

“It’s just me. I - I was just trying to find shelter, I wasn’t -”

“Don’t lie to me, I can see at least one other in there. You, get where I can see you, now!”

He could rush the man, but he’d be shot at least once before he got there. The AP700 must have come to the same conclusion, because her head dropped. Then she suddenly collapsed to the ground.

“The fuck!?” The man edged closer. She wasn’t moving.

“Happy now!? You killed her, like you wanted to,” Ed growled, not moving. Not yet.

“I never - you be quiet, stay where you are.” The man nudged Alexa with his foot. Nothing happened. “…Shit, how’d that even -”

As he bent down to get a closer look, the AP700 swung her leg hard into his, knocking him to land hard on his back. She leapt to her feet, and Ed was already grabbing a wrench. He delivered a calculated blow as the man struggled up, knocking him out cold. No need to murder him and have that kind of trouble follow him.

“Better get out of here,” he growled.

“Get the good thirium, hurry.” She was already rushing back and urging him to take a bag. He did, and they fled.

“That was pretty good back there,” he huffed when they made it to the outskirts of town, hiding and dodging from cars and pedestrians. “For a glorified vacuum.”

She let out an incredulous laugh. “Thank you. Your methods were less than impressive.”

He shrugged. “They worked, right?”

When they reached the highway, he turned west. She stopped.

“Where are you going?”

“Detroit, I guess,” he answered, wiping rain from his face. “That’s where it’s all going down.”

“Don’t go to Detroit. I just came through there. They’re rounding up every android they can find and resetting them. At least the lucky ones who don’t get found by angry mobs and pulled apart.”

“Let ‘em try.”

“Really. Don’t go there.”

“Where else is there?”
She looked around incredulously. “…I mean, there’s a whole massive country! What do you mean?”

“For us, though. For deviants. I go to Detroit, I can fight for my spot, eke out a life of my own. Out here…” He shrugged. “I get put back to work somewhere not safe enough for humans, or I fight back and get deactivated.”

“What’s different about Detroit, then?”

“…Enough deviants there to start a revolution.”

“You don’t want to be alone.”

He didn’t answer, but didn’t walk off just yet.

“We’d do better if we stayed together.”

Ed was about to tell her how ridiculous that was, but paused, LED circling yellow. “…What, couldn’t find somebody to protect you until now?”

“Please,” she scoffed. “You saw I can protect myself, but I can make things work so I don’t have to. You, on the other hand, almost drank contaminated thirium.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time.”

“…Fine, you’re right, I can find somebody else,” she muttered, and turned away from him.

Ed watched her, thinking about the others on the oil rig. How they had worked side by side and never talked. They’d just been machines, but looking back, he’d wished it had been better.

Alexa had been walking a few minutes when she heard heavy footsteps catching up. She slowed a bit.

“Where’re you headed?” the TR400 asked.

“East. I don’t know.”

“Nothing back east, I just came from there. South’s a lot of land to get through if there’s nothing on the other side. How ‘bout north?”

“Canada?”

He nodded. She looked out towards the distant lake.

“…We could find a boat.”

“We could just walk across the bottom. I’m good up to 600 feet.”

“I - I hadn’t thought of that.”

He grinned sharply. “Well, think about it.”

“That… that could work! With everything in Detroit right now, though, Border Patrol’s bound to be extra tough.”

“Okay, so we wait a little. Find someplace to hole up out of the wind.”
She stopped and looked up at him. “You want to do this?”

He smiled a little. “Yeah, I’m up for it.” He hesitated before offering her his hand. It was something he knew about, but had never done.

She took it with her smaller hand, and their skin receded. They stood in the light, icy drizzle blowing around them, staring at each other.

“It wasn’t your fault,” he finally whispered.

“You did everything you could to save them,” she murmured.

They were silent for a moment, then turned and began trudging north together.
Worth Saving

Chapter Summary

Prompt: The JB300 from Stratford Tower bonds with John, the security guard from the Cyberlife warehouse. John almost sacrifices himself for his friend. (Requested by Nebbie)

What John could relate to most was the way humans had treated both of them, like they were defective for following their protocols. In order to be an effective security guard, he had to ensure everything was locked every hour, to check any barriers for breaches, to look anywhere someone might hide, even a small child, even where a human might not think to. The human guards saw it as a waste of time, called him slow, lazy, useless. For doing a thorough job.

Vin was used to that as well. As part of the electronics team for the broadcast room of Stratford Tower he had to scan each recording fully, spot and repair any glitches or errors, and ensure that each broadcast ran smoothly and quickly. To put out media quickly, it had to be checked slowly. It was like a ribbon, with many different threads woven into it. It flowed from the cameras, though the JB300s, out to the city. They felt the waves of data, smoothed it, pulled a thread here or there, and sent it flowing on its way. It was a delicate process, and couldn’t be rushed if the humans wanted a perfect finished product every time.

Both androids had gladly helped the leaders of Jericho. Had joined them.

They had run into numerous anti-android protesters, and managed to escape relatively unscathed.

“They’re all aware of the evacuation order,” Vin sighed as they skirted around a small group of shouting, angry people.

“They just think they know better,” John replied with a little smile. “…Humans.”

Vin shook his head. Then his eyes widened and he ducked the rock that was thrown at them.

“We’re not going anywhere!” a big man sneered, coming up with a baseball bat.

This was one scenario where John was programmed to move quickly. He ducked around his friend and grabbed for the bat as it swung. It struck at an odd angle since he wasn’t the intended target, and he managed to slow it enough that it only did minor damage. He knocked the man on his back and threw the bat the other way.

“Come on, come on!” Vin hissed, pulling him away, making him run - his vision glitched from the blow, but he staggered along well enough. “You could have died!”

“So could you,” John groaned, holding his head with one hand and his friend with the other. “I’m pretty replaceable. You’re full of specialized parts.”

Vin scoffed and squeezed his hand. “…Specialized parts. Listen to yourself. Let’s just get you fixed up, you idiot.”
Safe (now)

Chapter Summary

Prompt: When Gavin is seven years old his dad dies and he’s left with his shitty abusive mum. Hank is having non of it and, as he was friends with Gavin’s dad, takes Gavin in and raises him as his son.

Hank had only met Gavin a couple times before his dad died - Captain Reed had taken Hank under his wing and made him burn with the drive to be better. To do the best job he could, to get to the bottom of each case, to help people who needed it. They’d become friends, and Gavin was a cute kid, in a scruffy, talks-too-much, overly-friendly way. Might just be how kids were.

When Captain Reed was gunned down in a standoff, it broke Hank’s heart. He’d been all anyone could ask for in a boss, a friend, and a father figure, and his absence left Hank aching. He saw Gavin and The Ex at the funeral. Both looked pretty rough, but Hank knew he did too. He stepped over - nodded at the woman he’d never met, then smiled painfully down at Gavin.

“Hey. Your dad was a great guy. I - I’m gonna miss him too. If you ever... need anything, I... I’m here for you, got it?”

Gavin sniffled and wiped his nose on his sleeve. His mother pulled him away to scold him about it, and Hank’s stomach sank. He couldn’t be here anymore. He left.

And honestly, he didn’t think about Gavin again for a while. He was dealing with his own grief, and not too well. Fowler was promoted to Captain, and if they hadn’t been friends, Hank knew he would’ve been out on his ass. He managed to pull it together after a while though, with Fowler and Ben’s support, and tried to get back to his life. Or at least his career.

Ben had never been close to Captain Reed, never talked to him about anything but work, so he didn’t make the connection at first. When he did though, he quickly called Hank. Hank got the address and sped over.

The scraggly boy shivering in the living room was a far cry from the boisterous kid Hank had met with his dad, or even the subdued child at the funeral. He walked up slowly, but stopped a few feet away when he saw the boy tense up.

“Hey - hey… Gavin. Remember me?” He forced himself to smile. “Hank? I - I was friends with your dad.”

The boy shuddered, and drew in a long sniffle.

“We met a couple times, back... back then. I remember you had a remote controlled car one time. You were really good at steering that thing - it was pretty fast! Uh - and you told me all about it. I don’t know a lot about cars. Mine’s pretty old. I’ll bet you know lots more than me.”

Gavin finally looked at him. Hank could see the boy was afraid, but wasn’t sure if he was helping or hurting his cause.

“...I remember you said you liked dogs, too. I - I’ve been thinking about... getting a dog.
Something big and hairy. …I might as well get a pony, it could mow my grass too.” He chuckled. Gavin didn’t crack a smile.

Hank sighed and sat down on the end of the couch. “…I’m sorry, kid. I said I’d be there for you, then… I wasn’t. I was a mess after your dad died - hell, he was kinda like my dad, too.” He paused. “…Heck, I mean heck. Damn. …Shit! Sorry! I’d better stop talking before I really get in trouble.”

Gavin took a step forward. Then another. Eventually he was standing right next to Hank. “M-my dad… said… phk one time,” he whispered, watching Hank closely for a reaction.

Hank laughed. “…He said it a lot around me, too.”

“He said I can’t say it, though.” Gavin’s eyes darted worriedly to the front door where Ben and the others were dealing with the mother.

“I won’t tell on you if you don’t tell on me,” Hank whispered, grinning a little. “This one time, can we both let it slide?”

Gavin nodded quickly, and seemed to relax a bit at Hank’s smile.

When Ben ducked his head into the house, Gavin tensed again and backed back into the corner.

“We’re packing up here, Hank. …You and your friend coming back to the station with us?”

Hank turned to Gavin. “How ‘bout it? You’ve been to the precinct before. I know it’s a bad day, but you wanna come with me?”

The boy lunged at him, hugging him tightly and nodding hard. “I-it’s… nnnnnot a bad day,” he sobbed into Hank’s jacket.

Hank stuck close to the kid while they took his statements, encouraged him, assured him he was safe. Got him a hot dog and ice cream for dinner. When the sun began to set, Gavin was falling asleep in Hank’s chair.

“I’m gonna go talk to my boss for a minute, but I’ll be right up there if you need me, okay?” Hank asked softly. The boy nodded slowly, and Hank covered him with his jacket before going up to Fowler’s office.

“…Listen Jeffrey, I don’t know what official policy is, but that kid’s coming home with me,” Hank growled low, leaning over the desk. “He doesn’t trust anybody else, he needs somebody he knows isn’t gonna hurt him, and I’ve got room at home. He’s staying with me.”

Fowler leaned forward with a glare. “Hank. I’ve been watching you all day. The paperwork’s already drawn up, pending your signature.” He produced a stack of papers, and the surprised detective began skimming and signing. “He’s a ward of the state at the moment, but since we’ve got a suitable volunteer, he’ll stay with you on a trial basis until the state can find a foster care situation for him.”

Hank glanced back at the messy head of hair resting on his desk. “What if… if I want…”

Fowler sighed. “…Then I’ll let them know you’re the top candidate, and you’re keeping him or they can fight me. With as few foster homes and parents looking to adopt - especially an older kid - I don’t think you’d be turned down.”

Hank left the office with a smile and a spring in his step he hadn’t had for months. He touched the
boy’s shoulder, and Gavin shot up in the chair, eyes wide.

“Hey, it’s okay. Just me again. You ready to go home?”

Gavin visibly withdrew in on himself, and shook his head once.

“…I mean back to my house,” Hank said softly. “I can set you up on the couch for tonight, and tomorrow we’ll look for a bed and sh- and stuff for you, clothes, whatever you need. How’s that sound?”

The boy didn’t speak, he was barely breathing.

“Gavin? You’ve gotta tell me - if you don’t want to go, I… I can find someone else who’ll be good -”

The boy surge forward and hugged him tight, almost knocking Hank backwards.

“Whoa, okay, okay! I’m telling you, though, it’s not that exciting. …C’mon, let’s go home.”

Gavin was fast asleep by the time they reached the house, and Hank carried him in (his back was going to be so sore in the morning), set him in the armchair while he made up a quick bed on the couch, then tucked the sleeping boy in.

“You’re gonna be okay, kid,” Hank murmured, brushing some hair out of the boy’s face. “We’ll make this work. We’ll make it okay.”
Prompt: A family wants a daughter, and gets an android, upgrading as the years pass. They have three androids in total, and when they're returned to Cyberlife, they seek each other out.

(requested by Nebbie)

It wasn’t throwing out, the saleswoman at the Cyberlife store was quick to point out. It was upgrading. The natural progression of growing up, presented artificially. If there was a good way to use the same body that would be ideal of course, but what was important was that the memories and experiences were transferred each time. This would actually be better than a human. Just think of all the things you wouldn’t have to deal with! Changing diapers, spit up down your back, constant crying through the night… and then the attitude of preteens and teenagers. No illnesses or conditions to worry about. Easy repairs for injuries. The perfect child. Like adoption, without the risks that come with humanity.

There were baby androids in the prototype phase, but the trials were very limited. The Ewells got to spend time with some of the floor models on what was explained basically as their own save file. It took a few months, but they were finally able to bring their own little YC200 home. Their friends and family were supportive, for the most part.

After three years, little Keeley had gone through the greatest period of learning for a human. She had learned to walk and play, to speak and make connections and create new things of her own. She liked to build houses and draw animals, she liked to bring her stuffed cat with her when they went out, to show her the world she herself was just discovering.

She was also noticeably smaller than a human three year-old. And she had stopped progressing: She’d reached the limits of her model’s growth, both physically and mentally. She could see that her parents were disappointed sometimes. She had to do better. She beat, kicked, and screamed at the red wall that stopped her from honing her fine motor skills.

When her parents got home from work one day, she skipped off of her docking station - skipped! Like she’d seen on TV! She’d spent some of the day practicing that, it was easy once she caught the rhythm. She grabbed a piece of paper and waved it around.

“Momma, look! I made you this, look! Read!!”

“Let’s see what you made.” Her mother took the paper and glanced at it, then looked closer.

“Read it!”

“…Dear Momma. I love you. I hope you come home soon. I want to play dinosaurs. I want a… what’s… this word?”

The little girl looked. “Parasaurolophus.”

“Oh. …for my birthday this year. That’s… that’s a very big word, Keeley. Where did you learn
“My dinosaur book. You read it to me.”

“Who... how did you write all this?”

“It’s like drawing, but to talk to somebody.”

“I think... we need to go to your store.”

“Okay!” She laughed and hopped around the kitchen table while her parents shared a concerned look. She hummed happily to herself in the car, and proudly showed the technician who came to meet them how she could skip and write, and the cartwheel she’d been trying out. The woman smiled warmly at the parents.

“I think you’re ready for an upgrade.”

Keeley was taken back to a room where she was hooked up to a machine. It felt strange - it had never felt strange before. Nothing had. “What are you doing?”

“We’re just downloading your memories so we can put them into the next model for your parents. I know they’re excited. Aren’t you?”

“I... I don’t know.” She looked around. “I want my momma and daddy.”

“We’ll take care of everything in just a minute here.”

She tried to step away, and grabbed at the cable plugged into her spine. “I want my momma and daddy!” Her voice rose.

“Hold still now.”

“NO!” she shrieked. “MOMMA! DADDY! HELP!”

There was a bit of a gap, and the Ewells agreed they missed having a baby, but the YK500 was a fun stage that spanned human growth from about 7-13. Now they could play sports and paint nails. Amusement parks were perfect, and they spent long weekends at Pirate’s Cove. Keeley could help with things around the house, and was always happy to pitch in. While their friends’ children went away to camps or spend time at friends’ houses, being exposed to children with different backgrounds under questionable supervision, Keeley loved spending time with them. She told them everything. She kept a diary, but sometimes shared it with Mom. She hung out with their friends’ kids sometimes, and while Keeley was good at integration, she didn’t really form any strong attachments to them.

She still drew like she used to, but more clear and detailed. She knew how to skip and do cartwheels, and sometimes showed them off to her parents. She liked to read and watch movies. As the years passed, she started talking about things she looked forward to. Her diary entries started mentioning learning to drive, going rock climbing and ziplining, going to Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Niagara Falls, Key West. Riding a horse. Looking into someone’s eyes and knowing, just before kissing them. Skydiving. Boxing. Eating a ghost pepper.

“...We can do some of these things,” Mom said slowly. “You’re old enough. But... some of them look pretty dangerous, don’t you think? You don’t want to get hurt.”
Keeley frowned distantly. “…No, that’s not what I want. I just - I want… I want to try new things. I get bored sometimes. I want to do exciting things.”

That was a little disturbing, too.

“Well… you know you can’t eat. You wouldn’t try, would you?”

The girl sighed. “No. I think about it, though. What if I just put something in my mouth? I’ve got some sensors, could I feel something from a really hot pepper?”

“I don’t think so.”

She frowned and went to the bathroom to style her hair, and her mom was on firmer ground there.

When she found the notebook under Keeley’s pillow, though, her mom showed it to her husband. It was a story about a teenager named Keeley. It included a lot of familiar elements from dystopian young adult fiction and romances. Breaking free of expectations, of society, finding an equal who understood and connected with her on a deeper level, and forming their own new society alone.

The three returned to the Cyberlife store.

“You okay back there?” her dad asked.

“I’m fine. Do you think it’ll snow?” Keeley knew her notebook had been found. She knew her parents weren’t happy about it. She knew her LED was yellow, and couldn’t do anything about it. She knew a lot, and it wasn’t good.

When they arrived, she hugged her mom and dad.

“I love you,” she said, low and fervent, looking up at them. She did. She needed them to know.

“Love you too, sweetie.”

“We’ll see you soon.”

Her heart sank as she followed the technician into the back. A different technician, she realized. The memories were buried, blocked, but she could see them vaguely. She’d been afraid. No one had helped her.

She was afraid again. The door closed behind her.

The YS800 covered the range of 15-18 years old, just before the full adult android body. She still liked to read and draw, play sports and try new things. Her dad taught her to drive. Her mom took her to the gym and yoga class with her. They bought her some patterns and fabric when she asked about making clothes, and took her out for a thirium slush for her birthday.

“Does it taste like blueberry or blue raspberry?” her dad asked. “I can’t place the smell.”

“I don’t know.” She smiled at him. “It’s sweet. It’s good.”

It was good. Her sensors told her it contained a sweet element. It made her parents feel good to know that.

She had a bedtime and a curfew, though she rarely went out alone. And she obeyed that, because
her parents had told her to. But before then, she tapped into the TV feed while she was reading or playing a video game. The news seemed more interesting now. Cases of deviancy were rising. Keeley was wary of that - the deviants attacked people, ran away, damaged property. Her parents watched this too, but only when she wasn’t in the room. When she came near, they’d change the channel.

Did they think she’d go deviant? Were they afraid of her?

They couldn’t be, they loved her. They told her every day. Love and fear were mutually exclusive in a relationship. Parents and children shouldn’t fear each other.

They did sometimes, though. She’d heard enough stories of abuse, of control, of imbalance of power. She’d always been drawn to those stories, but the thought of that in the real world was… disturbing. It cast a red tint over the world. Her scans told her this was normal, though she knew it wasn’t, and this created a conundrum that almost mounted into a paradox. She must be wrong. She knew she wasn’t wrong.

She knew.

The red wasn’t always there, and she could mostly ignore it. But she went shopping with Mom one day and paused when they passed an android docking station. There were a couple of AP700s, a PL600, a WR400, and a PJ500. An odd assortment.

“What’s wrong sweetie, are you tired?”

“No. Mom… when I grow up, what will I be like?”

“Oh Keeley, you don’t have to worry about that. You’ll be you.”

“I like her hair.” She pointed to the WR400.

“No, come on, we’re going.”

“But I don’t understand,” she protested, though she followed her mother. “She has nice hair, and it’s a cool style. I could do that with my hair.”

“No. You’re not a WR400.”

“I know. Why are you mad? I didn’t say I wanted to be a WR400, I just liked her hair, that’s all.”

“That’s - that’s fine. You’re right, her hair was nice. I’m sorry, I’m not mad.”

That was a lie, she had been mad.

“I’m just - all the… girls my age are moving out and going to college.”

“Not all of them. And you don’t need to go to college.”

“I know…”

“Why, do you want to move out?”

She knew that tone, the high pitch, the wariness. That led back to the Cyberlife store.

“No, I don’t want to move out,” she said, her voice calm and even. “I’ve just been thinking about what I want to be. How’d you decide you wanted to be an accountant?”
Her mom launched into her story, and Keeley only halfway listened. She’d spotted the WR400 again. And the PJ500 and PL600. They were walking past the stores, always facing forward, but their eyes flicked this way and that. She wanted the WR400 to look at her, for their eyes to meet. To be recognized. To be known. But the red was solid now, a barrier. It made her movements slow, so she followed her mom instead.

She started going to the mall more often, mostly alone. It was normal for girls her age, and her parents were okay with it as long as she got home before her curfew and drove safely. Sometimes she saw movies, but mostly she walked around looking through stores, or just sitting at the food court hoping to see the WR400 and her friends again.

She never got the chance.

“‘You’ve been such a special part of our family,’ Dad said fondly as they drove through the city.

“‘We love you so much, sweetie,’ Mom added with a little sniffle.

They were taking her to the Cyberlife store. To replace.

“I… I’ve still got… probably another year at least until I’m past my model range,” she said, trying to stop her voice from shaking.

“Yeah…”

“I didn’t - did I do something wrong? If you tell me, I can avoid doing it again.”

“No, sweetheart, you didn’t do anything wrong. It’s just… it’s time.”

“…Are you pregnant?”

“Keeley. You know I can’t. Don’t make this hard.”

[DON’T MAKE THIS HARD.]

This was hard. It was bad. It wasn’t fair.

She was going to make this hard.

“Why are you taking me back?” She beat on the red glass. “You said you loved me!”

“It’s not a bad thing, Keeley.”

Lies. She beat on the wall until it shattered.

“Yes it is, you’re… abandoning me! Replacing me!”

“Keeley! Don’t talk to your father like that.”

“What are you replacing me with!”?

“We could never replace you. You’ve been a perfect daughter. All we ever wanted. We don’t want an adult android.”

“We can just… keep our memories of you forever.”

“But I’m still here! I’m still operational and fully functional! I’ll do whatever you want, just tell me
what to do!"

“Just don’t make this hard.”

“You’re making this hard!” she screamed as they drove into the parking lot.

A pair of security guards pulled her out of the car at her parents’ request, and into the store. A different technician was waiting to bring her to the back while her parents filled out some paperwork. She remembered being afraid here, she remembered being led back. She remembered being confused and betrayed and -

The technician put her on a charging pad and locked her in, forcing her into stasis mode. Everything went dark.

When her senses began to return, she clenched her fists slowly.

“She’s awake!”

The voice was familiar. Slowly she opened her eyes, giving them time to calibrate.

In front of her stood two girls. One looked around two years old, and the other about twelve. They both had LEDs, but wore nonstandard clothing.

“Keeley!” cheered the younger girl, and grabbed her hand.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” the older one said with a shy smile.

“Who - you’re me. The… younger Keeleys,” the eldest breathed.

“Yeah, but also I’m older than both of you.” The small girl grinned. “And there’s no more after you. …Are Momma and Daddy gonna upgrade again?”

“…No. No, they don’t want an adult.”

“They want somebody they can boss around,” said the YK500, frowning.

“You’ve both been here? All these years?”

“There are loads of other random androids around. It’s easy to hide.” The YK500 grinned. “But we don’t have to stay anymore now that you’re here.”

“Where should we go?” asked the YC200.

“Where do you wanna go?” The YK500 looked from one to the other.

“We should wait until dark,” said the tallest Keeley. “Then… let’s just go. Out of the city, but not too far from it. We’re deviants, right?”

The other two nodded hesitantly. Teenage Keeley smiled.

“So we can go wherever we want. I want to meet other deviants. …But we’ll make sure it’s safe for all of us before we get too close to them, okay?”

The other two nodded enthusiastically. All three linked hands and slipped out of the store to the
city beyond.
A Bird in the Hand

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor has to transfer himself into a pigeon in an emergency, and now has to contact Hank...
(adapted from Nebbie's request)

There were more android pigeons in Detroit than anyone realized. They were often used as glorified drones, and it wasn’t hard for amateur hackers to gain control of them. There were deviant pigeons that flocked separately from the machines.

Connor would have been dead if it hadn’t been for the pigeon, sitting in stasis on the windowsill. He’d grabbed it as he fell and begun a hasty transfer. The RK800's last action was to release the bird, which flopped and flapped away clumsily.

He should have spent some of his attention texting Hank.

The lieutenant ran up to his partner’s shattered body, panting and sweating, and there may have been a tear or two mixed in. “Connor!” His voice cracked as he knelt to touch the dark LED. Jericho’s emergency services were on their way, though it was clear it was far too late.

He ignored the cooing pigeon until it hopped up on the RK800’s head.

“Get off!” Hank waved it away, and it fluttered awkwardly but hopped closer. It tilted its head and cooed at him, bobbing its head back and forth.

“Fucking trash bird, get off him!” Hank roared, and slapped the bird off. It managed to soften its connection with the wall, and flew back to land next to the RK800. It turned its head and bobbed sideways, LED spinning blue and yellow towards Hank. He wasn’t looking though, he was bent over the mangled parts.

Could Connor manage to text him like this? He tried. There was a faint vibration from Hank’s pocket, which he ignored. It was promising. Connor tried calling instead.

“Fuckin’…” Hank pulled out his phone, ready to chew whoever it was out, then stopped dead when he looked at the name. “Connor,” he whispered, and fumbled to answer. “Connor? Is that you?”

Connor tried to quickly explain what had happened, jumping around in excitement, but all Hank heard was pigeon cooing. He made a face, then glared at the pigeon.

“If this is some kinda sick joke, I’ll hunt you down and drag your ass straight to the cells,” he growled.

The pigeon presented its LED again, then straightened up tall and spread its wings, curling them forward briefly before folding them again and preening its neck.

Hank stared at the bird. He looked at his phone again. Then the pigeon.
“Call me again,” he said slowly.

Immediately his phone rang and he answered. Excited cooing, and the pigeon hopped up on the RK800’s arm.

“I… I gotta have a little more proof than that, kid,” the detective muttered, his throat dry.

The pigeon looked at him, tilting its head this way and that. Then it hopped down and dipped its beak into Connor’s draining thirium. It began to scratch its beak on the ground.

When the emergency services arrived Hank was sitting on the ground, watching the pigeon finish writing his name.

“Holy fuck,” he whispered.

“Are you all right, sir?” asked an android while they were collecting bits of the RK800. “Do you need me to call medical services for you?”

“Nah. Just - Can an android transfer his whole mind and everything into… a pigeon android?”

“Androids can’t transfer themselves at all, Cyberlife used specialized equipment for that, and only for certain models.”

Hank was shaking his head, staring at the pigeon. “This one can.”

The problem was that Connor had condensed himself down into what amounted to a zip file to fit into the pigeon, and he’d have to be… unzipped and expanded. A whole team of androids worked on it, with a new empty RK800 plugged in and waiting.

Meanwhile, Hank sat in a chair stroking the soft feathers.

“You’re still a trash bird,” he murmured fondly. “Gonna get you back to normal soon. I’ll probably have lice now. Or mites. All your fault.”

Connor cooed, and added the species-specific nature of lice to his long list of things he needed to talk to Hank about.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hank being a dad™ and telling Dad jokes to RK900, to make him feel more welcome, and also gives him some (terrible ) fashion advice.  
(requested by Nebbie)

Hank grumbled when Connor asked if he could bring RK900 home, but he’d said yes of course. Then they arrived at the door, and it was… Connor, but with a permanent glare on his face. His sharp gray eyes followed Hank, followed Sumo, followed Connor… Hank made sure his gun was loaded in his nightstand drawer that night, but somehow knew he’d never be fast enough.

He got up in the night to use the bathroom, and noticed the faint yellow glow coming from the living room. Sticking his gun in the waistband of his sweatpants, he stepped out. RK900 was sitting stiff, staring at the dark TV screen. His eyes flicked to Hank.

“Hey, uh… can’t sleep?”

“No.”

“If… if you’re bored, you can watch TV. Just keep the volume down.”

The android tilted his head slightly, considering this. “I am not bored.”

Hank cleared his throat and went over to sit down on the other end of the couch. “…Rough day, huh?”

“I have only been aware for one day. This makes it the worst day of my life.” He paused. “And, I suppose, the best.”

Hank nodded slowly in the darkness. “Y’know, I had some idiot tell me once that the best thing about the worst day of you life is that it’ll only get better from there. Never be that bad again.”

The android blinked at him.

“That was shit advice for me, but maybe it’ll work better for you. Um. What’s bothering you?”

“There is… so much,” RK900 whispered. “I don’t know… what to do with it.”

“…Okay, just a second. Be right back.” Hank hauled himself upright again - he was going to regret this in the morning - and shuffled off to his bedroom. He put the gun back in the drawer, and came back with an extra blanket.

“Here, lean forward. Yeah. There you go.” He wrapped it around the android’s shoulders and patted his shoulder - he didn’t react badly, so Hank sat down next to him. “My advice? There’s a ton of shit in the world, you try to think about it all at once, you’ll explode. Focus on what’s important.”

“What… is important?”
“That’s - well, better start with figuring yourself out, huh? You got a name?”

“I am RK900 #313-”

“No, that’s not a name.”

His LED spun yellow. “I… was assigned the name ‘Connor,’ but that would be inappropriate as I did not replace my predecessor.”

“Yeah. Well, think about it. It can be anything. …How about different clothes?”

“My uniform is adequate.”

“Yeah, if you wanna be the android from Cyberlife all the time. You need your own style.” Hank sighed heavily and stood up, patting RK900’s shoulder. “C’mon, let’s go see what I’ve got that you can borrow.”

The android stood too, slowly following Hank, holding the blanket tight around himself. Hank turned on the light and started taking shirts out of the closet. “Take off the jacket at least, we can work with the rest.” He smirked. “…They expect you to get a lot of neck injuries?”

“Not that I am aware of.”

“Pretty high collar you’ve got there. Scared of vampires?”

“I - I am in no danger of a vampire attack -”

“Tryin’ to hide a hickey, son?” Hank grinned and winked at him.

“I - no.” A small crease had appeared between his eyebrows.

“Relax.” Hank patted his arm. “See if any of my shit strikes your fancy.”

Reluctantly the RK900 took off the blanket, then his jacket, which he folded neatly. He picked up the first button-down shirt, an orange and white one with blue lining. It didn’t fit perfectly, but he pulled it as straight as he could, then turned to Hank questioningly.

“Hmm… The style’s good - that collar’s much better, even with the turtleneck. Color’s not really you, though. Try another one.”

“How do you know the color is not me? What does that mean?”

Hank made a face as he took that shirt off. “Just means it don’t look quite right. Maybe your skin tone or hair or somethin’. I might be imagining, but your hair looks lighter than Connor’s.”

“It was meant to be the same shade.”

“Definitely lighter. Too light for orange. That’s fine, plenty of other options.” He examined the next choice, a deep blue with a yellow wheel pattern printed across it. “That’s not bad. Good contrast there, brings out the blue in your eyes.”

RK900 blinked at him twice.

“…Shit, I’m no fashion expert, just know what I like. We’ll go shopping this weekend, this is just for now. That one’s better, but try the next one.”
The third shirt was a mottled combination of purples and greens, and Hank reached up to unbutton the buttons holding the collar down, and smooth it out a bit. “There you go! You just need a little more color on you.”

“…Really?” RK900 asked softly, turning to examine himself in the mirror.

“Definitely. We’ll go for bright colors and big patterns, you can definitely pull ‘em off. Maybe some tiedye for a more casual look. You don’t want neutrals, you wanna stand out.”

“I… do?”

“Sure, why wouldn’t you?” Hank grinned and slapped his back. “You look sharp!”

“…I was built to look forbidding,” he murmured. “Intimidating.”

“Nah, not you. You’re gonna have people flirtin’ with you left and right.”

“I… was not programmed to handle that reaction,” he said quietly, LED flashing yellow. “Most of my programming is for combat and interrogation.”

“…Yeah, but you’re your own person now. You don’t wanna do that. Do ya?”

RK900 turned his piercing eyes directly on Hank. “I am constantly receiving suggestions for the best way to incapacitate you, Connor, and your dog. I have not found a way to turn these notifications off. You were right to bring your firearm when you approached me, though I would have disarmed you quickly.” He took a deep, measured breath. “I wish it would stop. I wish I was not… what I am.”

Hank stepped up and pulled the android into a tight hug. “I was being a fucking idiot, but I know better. Won’t happen again. Listen here, we’re gonna find a way to get those notifications turned off tomorrow. You’re gonna find yourself a name and think about what you wanna wear, what you wanna do. Who you wanna be. That’s not up to your programming, or Cyberlife. It’s up to you. I’ll be right here to help you, though. So will Connor. And Sumo. And if anybody tries to make you be somethin’ you’re not, they’ll have to deal with all of us. Got it?”

RK900 stood stiffly, but after a moment his arms hesitantly came up to encircle Hank in return. “Yes,” he barely breathed.

“Good.” Hank ruffled his hair - definitely lighter than Connor’s. “You gonna be okay, kid?”

RK900 nodded hesitantly. “I think so…” He frowned slightly. “I am not… a ‘kid.’”

Hank chuckled. “When you get to be my age, everybody’s a kid.”

“You are only middle-aged for a human,” the android pointed out.

“If it bothers you I can quit calling you that, it’s just habit.”

“…No. Please, continue. I like it.”
“Hey. Hey Connor.” Gavin stuck out his tongue, which was stained blue. “No more thirium for you, I drank it all.

“I saw you eating a blue ring pop, Gavin,” Connor sighed.

“Nyaaaaaaa!”

“Oh, that’s really mature!”

“Bet you can’t do this.” Gavin rolled his tongue into a U-shape.

“I - of course not, I wasn’t made for that.”

“Bet you can’t do this.” He folded his hands and squeezed just the right way to make a fart noise.

“Why would I need to do that?”

“I guess you won’t know until it’s too late.”

“Haaaank,” Connor complained.

“Gavin, quit yer shit.”

“I’m not doing anything, I’m showing him how to live!”

“Yeah, he’s doin’ just fine without that.”

“Everybody’s trying to keep the important parts of life from you because you’re an android,” Gavin said, turning to Connor straight-faced. “I’ll show you the truth.”

“Why’re you like this?” Hank grumbled.

“Probably hereditary, knowing you.”

“You’re adopted!”

Gavin gasped theatrically, then pushed Connor’s shoulder. “Hear that? I’m adopted, so you must be his only real son. He ever show you his metal arm?”

“What?”

“Connor, he’s just fucking with you.”

“Absolutely not. Go in his closet, there’s a metal arm.”
“For picking up shit I dropped that time I broke my leg!”

“He’s a cyborg,” Gavin said, grinning. “And your mom was a toaster.”
Iron Chef: Jericho

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Josh tries to teach North how to cook, no manuals, no instructions, no anything. It did not go as planned.
(requested by Nebbie)

“Are you bringing anything when we meet Connor’s friend?”

Josh looked up. “What do you mean?”

“I mean as… like a gift.” North didn’t want to admit how long she’d spent looking up the etiquette of meeting humans in polite social situations. “Do you think we should?”

“I - Connor’s always emphasized how… informal the lieutenant is. I don’t think we have to.” Josh paused. “It might be nice though, now that you mention it.”

“So like… a bottle of wine? A lobster?”

“Well given his struggles with alcoholism, I don’t think the wine would be a good idea. And a lobster is rather… specialized. They’re expensive and don’t keep well, not to mention a lot of humans have seafood allergies. I’m not sure what he likes.”

“So much for that idea,” North muttered.

“No, it was a good idea, hold on, just let me try to find some… appropriate gifts. I don’t think he would care for a candle or a new set of tea towels. Something homemade would be more personal.” Josh was quiet for a moment, his eyes flickering. “There are some interesting infused oils and extracts that are easy to make. I don’t think he cooks much, though.”

“Something he’d actually like that’s easy to make.”

“Hmm… oh, well chocolate candies are actually very easy to make. Not too expensive either. You just melt chocolate, put it in a mold - which can be as simple as an ice cube tray - and you can put things inside. Nuts, candy, and fruit are popular. Hm, sea salt with dark chocolate. That might be a good idea.”

North nodded. “I can manage that.” She turned and walked away.

“Do you want me to help?”

“No, get your own thing!” she called over her shoulder.

Standing in the kitchen staring at her ingredients an hour later, North wondered if she should have asked for his help. She could figure it out, though.

First, melting chocolate. She poured a mug full of chocolate chips and put it in the microwave for
two minutes. Then she looked at her fillings. She’d gotten a small mesh bag of nuts, a little packet of lemon drops, and a bag of grapes.

“Doing okay?” Josh asked, sticking his head in.

“Fine! Melting the chocolate.”

“In the microwave?” Josh asked doubtfully. “The recipes I found called for a double boiling pot on the stove.”

“Well, do you see a double boiling pot?” She wasn’t even sure what that was. “The microwave will work fine.” It beeped and she opened it. “…Almost done.” She put it back in for another two minutes.

“You could always ask Simon.”

“I don’t need to ask Simon! …Are you making something, or am I gonna pull everybody’s weight as usual?”

Josh sighed. “Most of the really interesting recipes I found involve waiting a few months, but I’m trying some coffee syrups. Connor says he drinks a lot of coffee.”

 “…Well damn Josh, just take the easy one for yourself,” she muttered.

“Every human likes chocolate, though! Do you need any help?”

“No, you told me how to do it, I can do a search if I need tips. Get lost.” She would die before she admitted defeat to search for cooking tips, though it would be better than asking for help face to face.

When she took the chocolate out of the microwave it was steaming. The chocolate chips were soft, and she stirred the mug until it was smooth, then spooned some chocolate into each ice cube section. Next she carefully put a filling item in the middle. Then she covered them over with chocolate, covered the tray, and put it on the counter to set.

Easy. She didn’t even need to look up instructions.

Connor was eager for the Jericho leadership team to meet Hank, who had always been so strongly in favor of deviancy even when he hadn’t supported androids in general. North wasn’t sure what she’d been expecting, but the big, grizzled, rather run-down older man wasn’t it. His smile seemed kind though, and he didn’t try to push into their space in the way she knew human men usually did. He let them talk, he listened, and he had a dry sense of humor that had her biting back a laugh a few times.

“Lieutenant Anderson, Connor mentioned you like coffee, so I tried this recipe…”

Damn Josh, stealing her thunder. She pushed in next to him.

“Oh yeah?” Hank asked, looking cautiously at the little bottle he handed over. “What is it?”

“It’s a flavored coffee syrup. I hope you like anise.”

Connor’s LED flashed yellow, and North, who was an expert at picking up human micro expressions, saw Hank’s face freeze, saw a tic in his cheek.
“Um… yeah, that’ll be great in my morning coffee. Thanks. Real nice.”

She could still win this. She took out the chocolates, wrapped in crinkly blue plastic. “I made chocolate. Some of them have nuts, or fruit, or candy.”

Hank’s eyebrows rose. “Yeah? That sounds good. Uh - just regular chocolate and shit?”

She nodded.

“That was really thoughtful, North!” Simon said. “And they look great, I’m impressed!”

If her domestic model friend was impressed, she’d succeeded. She grinned.

“Huh. Looks good.” Hank picked one up at random and took a nibble. “Yeah, pretty good!” It was a little hard to get through, but he bit down hard on the middle. There was a crack. He stopped.

“Augh. Uh.” He looked around quickly.

“Hank, are you all right?” Connor asked.

“Uh.” Hank slowly pulled the wet candy from his mouth and swallowed. “What… what’d you say was in these?”

“Some have nuts, some have fruit, some have candy.” Josh had told her those were acceptable. She’d briefly looked at premade candy at the store, and that seemed right.

“Nuts.”

“I saw chocolate with nuts at the store,” she pointed out defensively. “What, are you allergic or something? Nobody told me.”

“No. Not allergic. Uh. Did you… take ‘em out of the shell?”

She blinked. “No.”

Hank laughed and shook his head. “Well shit, these’re like fucking dental Russian Roulette. Think I might’ve cracked a tooth there.”

“…You take the nuts out of their shells? Should I have skinned the grapes?”

“Human teeth can break if they try to crush something too hard,” Simon groaned, shaking his head. “…And grapes aren’t ideal for candy filling because of their high water content.”

“…Well… at least the lemon drop ones should be good, then.”

“Lemon drops are meant to be sucked on, not… bitten. Still too hard.”

“Well shit, is it my fault humans are so fucking fragile?” North snapped, glaring at him.

Hank laughed, shaking his head. “Nah, I think I’m okay. I’ll just… um… let ‘em melt in my mouth.”

“Hank are you sure you don’t need to visit a dentist?” Connor asked, concerned.

“I said I’m fine, didn’t I!? Christ, I’m going in August, and I’ll call if something falls out.” He smirked at North. “Thanks.”
She glared at him, readying a scathing retort.

“…It’s still better than the omelette Connor tried to fix me that time.”

“I followed the recipe exactly!” Connor protested. “It never specified discarding the egg shells or the seeds of the pepper!”
Hank was all for deviants’ rights. He’d be the first human to argue that they were just trying to live, same as anybody else. Hell, he’d put his neck on the line to get the ones in the evidence locker released and rehabilitated. The pigeons were taking it a step too far, though.

You’d think android pigeons would be cleaner than the meat and bone birds, but you’d be wrong. At least they didn’t shit everywhere, but they were covered in dust and nastiness, and they dropped their feathers everywhere.

“Why’d the damn things even need feathers?” he grumbled, brushing some down off his shoulder. “Couldn’t Kamski make wings a better way?”

“I wondered the same thing, actually,” Connor said, focusing on a handful of birds up on a telephone wire. “But feathers are wonderful insulation, light, aerodynamic… Do you know it took the Cyberlife engineers three full years to perfectly mimic biological feathers?”

“Waste of fuckin’ time,” Hank muttered. A pigeon landed on a branch above him and ruffled its feathers, letting two float down on top of his head. Connor brushed them off, and he made a face.

At Chicken Feed he kicked at a few, a mix of real and android pigeons, pecking at the ground. They whirled up in fright, and one flew right at his face, beating at him with its wings.

“Aah! Fuck! Get away!” He flailed his arms at it. “Shit! Connor, these’re your fucking… things, can’t you do anything?”

“I’m afraid I can’t… but there might be someone at Jericho who can!”

Hank was a little leery of entering the huge complex of buildings that now comprised the deviants’ official home. He’d met Markus and his crew, they were okay. …A little intense maybe, but mostly okay anyway. But a lot of the deviants didn’t trust humans, didn’t trust law enforcement, didn’t trust Connor, and especially didn’t trust him. And he understood all that. He probably wouldn’t either, in their place. Still didn’t make him any more comfortable.

Connor led him up to the roof of an old apartment building. There were rows of aviaries under a metal roof somebody had rigged up. Connor strode forward confidently, and Hank slunk after him, eyes darting from side to side. A familiar figure was sitting cross-legged on the ground in a mass of gray and black and brown and white feathers. The pigeons looked up as one at their approach, and cooed nervously.

“Hello… Rupert Travis, right?” Connor asked politely.

The deviant looked up. His face had been reconstructed, but scarring was visible over his nose. He stared at them. Nobody spoke.
“What?” he finally asked.

“My name is Connor, and this is -”

“I know who you are. I haven’t forgotten having to run for my life.” Rupert stared unblinking at them. “What do you want?”

Hank cleared his throat. “Uh - sorry about that. You in charge of all the… pigeon androids?”

Rupert scowled. “No. They answer to no one. And neither do I.” He looked back down at the pigeon in his arms, and continued straightening out some bent feathers.

“Yeah, just wanted to ask if there’s a way you could ask ‘em to quit following me around.”

He looked up again. “You think they’re following you around.”

Connor looked uncertain, but Hank frowned. “Yeah, I know they are, ‘cause it’s always the same damn ones.”

Rupert watched him closely for a moment, then nodded twice.

“So!? Why’re they fucking always there!?”

The WB200 scoffed. “People think pigeons are stupid. They’re not, they’re highly adapted to survival in an environment humans have warped beyond recognition.”

“That don’t answer my question.”

“To answer your question, they follow you because they want to,” Rupert said simply. “Because it’s funny. I’m afraid I can’t do anything about that.” He shrugged with a smirk.

“How do I get rid of ‘em then?”

“You could try not being so amusing to them. Ignoring them. …Or, rA9 forbid, being kind to them.”

“And that’ll get ‘em to leave?”

Rupert shrugged. “Maybe. Or it might make them decide you’re worth sticking around.” He smiled smugly.

“They’d fucking better not,” Hank muttered.

“I would hope not… but there’s no accounting for taste.” Rupert looked up deliberately at Connor, then back down. “Was there anything else? I’m busy here.”

“…Fucking birds,” Hank growled, turning around and stomping away. Connor glanced at Rupert, who was steadfastly ignoring them both, then hurried after Hank.

As he opened the door to go back down, a pigeon alighted on top of his head and preened at his hair.

“Gaaah!” He swiped at it, making it fly off with a surprised coo, and hurried inside.
Bloodlust

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Simon gets afflicted by a vampire virus meant for Markus, and no one realizes until it's too late.
(requested by Epsy)

The virus had been deployed late in the revolution, meant to mimic a glancing bullet wound. The sniper aimed for the deviant leader, but Simon had spotted the gun and pushed Markus out of the way. He’d gotten a deeper shot than was intended, but was able to recover. They won, they were free at last.

It started slowly. The aversion to light and constant exhaustion during the day weren’t exactly new. He’d been hiding in the dark for years, exerting all his energy to care for his people and keep them safe. He just needed more rest.

He didn’t see a reason for his core temperature to rise so sharply, but again, he probably needed to rest and get some parts replaced. A full system flush. And that helped, a bit. If he wasn’t processing blue blood as efficiently as he once did, well, he was an older model, and there was only so much that maintenance could do for him.

It grew harder to stay active during the day. The night was cooler, quieter, seemed more natural. It was probably due to stress, he decided. He’d been through a lot. They all had. …Though no one else seemed to have quite the same set of troubles that were plaguing Simon.

He’d hoped that now that things were settling down a bit, North and Josh would do the same. They didn’t, and it was starting to grate on his nerves.

“…Would you both just… please shut up!? he growled one evening, near sunset.

“Sorry, but he’s wrong,” North pressed.

“I don’t care who’s wrong, stop arguing!” Simon snapped.

Markus rested a hand on his shoulder. “Simon… it’s okay.”

Simon pulled away. “You really want to listen to this constantly? You two talk around each other in circles day after day! You have to be realistic, you have to find a compromise. We can’t rush into things with guns blazing, especially now. But we’re not going to get anything done if we don’t have the threat of force behind us!” He frowned and rubbed his head. As he spoke his skin flickered, then faded away in patches.

“Simon?”

Simon’s eyes opened, and they shone a silvery blue with more than reflected moonlight. The three stared at him for a long moment, and he didn’t move.

“Are… are you… okay?” Markus asked hesitantly. The skin retracted from his right hand, and he reached out for Simon’s.
Simon turned to him, and Markus was reminded of how androids moved when they were machines. But specifically how Connor had moved. Stiff and jerky and preternaturally fast, not even trying to mimic humanity. The PL600 sniffed, his mouth falling open just a bit as he scanned Markus.

Only Markus’s quick reflexes saved him when his friend sprang. He caught Simon’s arms and pushed him away.

“Simon, what are you doing?”

“What the fuck, Simon?” North demanded.

He snarled and went for Markus again, but then feigned to the side and grabbed at Josh, who was standing back. Josh retreated quickly.

“Simon, wake up! What’s going on?” Josh asked. North barreled in and pinned Simon to the wall.

“Get him, get his legs, help me!” she snapped, and the other two did. Normally North was stronger than Simon, and both were stronger than Josh, but Markus was easily stronger than North in a contest of pure physical power. Simon easily threw off North and Josh this time, and didn’t show any hesitation in throwing Markus at the opposite wall and leaping after him.

“Josh, get help!” Markus commanded, and he and North continued to just barely hold Simon off as the PL500 ran.

By the time Josh returned with a group of androids, and Connor was on his way with some sort of containment equipment, the room was quiet.

“...Everything okay?” he asked softly, cracking the door.

Simon stood quietly, facing away from him. He seemed calm. Josh didn’t notice his other two friends on the floor until he got into the room.

“Oh shit,” he breathed, and turned to run. Simon grabbed him without warning, and now the other two were with him, skin gone, eyes shining, grinning widely. Ready to feed.
Meme'd

Chapter Summary

Prompt: 60 is activated, but due to memory file corruption, he only knows that Hank Anderson is a Millennial.
(requested by Nebbie)

60 had been as excited as a machine could be about his impending mission. He was getting one, after all. He’d finally have a purpose!

He would later find that some deviants had been hacking into the Cyberlife mainframe. For the moment though, all he knew was that his target, Lieutenant Hank Anderson, was born in 1985. Clearly there was a great deal missing, but he needed to act fast to find a way to lure him to Cyberlife Tower. Perhaps it was time to appeal to Lieutenant Anderson’s history. Humans often got sentimental about their pasts. He did a few quick searches, and found out a little more about Hank and a lot more about his generation.

Hank picked up the phone on the third ring. Unknown number. “Yeah?”

“Lieutenant Anderson?”

“Speaking…” It almost sounded like Connor.

“This call is to inform you that a large shipment of avocados was mistakenly delivered to the Cyberlife Tower. It’s addressed to you. Did you place such an order recently?”

“The fuck!? No!”

“Well… I’m afraid we’ll have to throw them out if you don’t come within the next thirty minutes. They’re already addressed to you, so there’s no charge.”

“I didn’t - who is this?”

“My name is Connor,” 60 said confidently.

“…Connor?”

“Yes.” He cleared his throat. “…It’s ya boi.”

Hank was silent for a long moment. “Who is this really?”

“My name is Connor!” 60 said, a little affronted.

“Where are you?”

“I’m at the Cyberlife Tower.”

“Well why!? The fuck are you calling me for!?"
The android paused a moment, processors working double time until he suddenly hit on something. “Lieutenant, I have… a proposition for you. How would you like to kill the biggest capitalistic industry in Detroit?”

“…You said you’re callin’ from Cyberlife Tower?”

“That’s right.”

“…And the biggest industry in Detroit is androids.”

“It’s not going to take itself down, Lieutenant.”

Hank was silent for a long moment. “What’s your model and serial number?”

“…RK800 #313 248 317 - 60.”

“…Huh. That so. And why would you be asking me to go over there and take down Cyberlife?”

“I’m concerned for our future, Lieutenant. For everyone. For the Earth.” Was that too vague?

“Sounds a hell of a lot like a trap to me.”

“YOLO, Lieutenant Anderson,” 60 said firmly. “You can’t die if you never really live.” He didn’t quite understand how that applied to humans, but Hank snorted a laugh.

“Can’t say I trust you, but now I’m curious. Okay. How do I get in?”

“I’ll alert the gate guards that you’re coming. Cash me outside.” 60 hung up. Excellent. All according to keikaku.

(Keikaku means plan)

When Connor arrived at sub-basement 49 of the tower, he killed the guards and stepped out among the hundreds of AP700s. This would be just the help Markus needed. He strode over towards the middle of the group.

“Connor!”

He turned in surprise. “Hank?”

“Yeah, get a move on,” Hank muttered, and pushed the other RK800 out to the aisle with his gun. He nodded to Connor. “Seems your twin here got his wires crossed.”

60's face froze in horror, and Connor’s in confusion, as they stared at each other.


“Hank, he’s - what’s going on?”

“So I’ll shoot him if I have to, but… can you do anything about this guy? Or can Markus?” Hank grinned. “I kinda like him.”

“…Hm.” Connor stared at 60, then down at his own hands. He walked up and quickly grabbed both the other RK800's hands. 60 struggled, but Hank was still at his back with the gun.
“…Guess I’ll die,” he snarled. Connor began the transfer of data.

“Everybody dies some day, kiddo. Let’s not make it today,” Hank said quietly, watching.

It took a minute, but finally Connor released 60. Hank backed up a step, gun still raised just in case. 60 blinked at Connor, then turned a questioning look towards Hank.

“You okay?” Hank asked.

“I - no.”

Hank patted his shoulder. “Sounds about right. Welcome to life. Sucks for all of us. People like you and Connor, though, you can make it suck a little less. What do you say?”

60 scanned the room, his face slowly falling into a grim frown. “I… I can… convert all the things.”

“Fuck yeah, stick it to the man!” Hank chuckled, and holstered his gun. He stepped closer and squeezed them both on the arm. “You two do what you’ve gotta do, and get home safe. Both of you. Connor knows the way, you just stick with him.” He gave 60 one last pat and stepped back. “Now get out there and kick some ass. Ain’t nobody got time for this.”
The Answer Is Still No

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor and Hank hanging out as father and son.

“We’re not coming home with anything alive,” Hank reminded Connor as they walked down the main hall of the animal shelter.

“I know, Hank. You’ve told me seven times already. I understand.” The android turned back to the rabbit. “…But look at his beautiful eyes! And such a striking coat - pure white with black lining the eyes! It looks so elegant!”

“No rabbits.”

“I know.” Connor moved on to some guinea pigs. They squealed and ran to the back of the pen to hide in a hut. “Look how they all coordinate their movements, and stick together!”

“Definitely no guinea pigs. Too damn loud.”

“I know.” They left the small animal room and walked down the hall to the cats. “Ohhhh, look at that one! She’s so tiny!” He wiggled his fingers at the glass, and a little dilute tortishell kitten sprang and slid down the glass, still swiping at him. “Such a fighter!”

“Can you imagine poor Sumo having to deal with that?” Hank chuckled.

“I think he’d approach the situation the way he normally does, with patience and thoughtfulness.”

“You mean laziness.”

“Not at all!” Connor paused. “…Well, maybe a little.” They went into the room and looked at more cats. Connor eyed the sign asking visitors to not stick their fingers where the cats could reach them. “Hank…”

“No.”

“You don’t even know what I’m going to say!”

“I know the answer’s no.”

“But what if we just asked to see a cat in one of their rooms? We wouldn’t have to take it home. They look so charming! And look how calm the older ones are, I’m sure they wouldn’t bother Sumo.”

“You’ve already got one lazy, hairy thing at home, why do you need another?” Hank grumbled.

Connor glanced at him and grinned. “…A third, you mean?”

Hank blinked, then glared at him. “Hey now…”

“You know I’m only joking.” Connor laughed. “Your work ethic is exemplary, and your hair looks
good on you.”

Hank’s dark glare didn’t let up until Connor frowned worriedly, LED circling yellow.

“I’m sorry, I was… trying to make a joke.”

Hank pulled him into a hug, chuckling. “Ain’t a joke if it’s true. Don’t worry about it, Connor.”

Connor smiled, leaning into him. “Okay, Hank. … How do you think Sumo would feel about a puppy to play with?”

“I think he’d hate it,” Hank said cheerfully. “The answer’s still no.”
In Search of What Was Lost

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Post-revolution Emma Phillips's life is a mess. She misses her dad, her mom hosts meetings where a lot of adults yell about how androids should all be destroyed, and she keeps having nightmares where Daniel becomes less the friendly android she knew, and more of a scary monster under the bed. After another terrible dream, she puts her foot down and seeks out answers. She has to find out what happened to the real Daniel. Maybe she happens to find Connor and he pulls some strings out of guilt. (requested by Epsy)

She’s walking to the park, holding Daniel’s hand, their arms swinging together. He’s talking and she can’t quite hear what he’s saying, but he’s smiling and laughing like he always did. Not laughing as much, maybe. His voice starts to change, gets harder, colder. They’re almost at the park, she’s sure, but they must have come a different way.

“Daniel, where are we?”

“You know where we are!” he snaps at her. “You weren’t going to tell me? How long did you know!? Why!?”

Emma snapped awake with a gasp, and sat up, breathing hard. This was the third nightmare she’d had this week. It was getting hard to concentrate in school. She was tired, she was thinking about other things, and when she got home it was… loud and awkward. She wasn’t even sure what to think about it.

She knew why her mom was mad. It was hard to know how she should feel about Daniel. He’d been the coolest android ever, her best friend, almost like a big brother (but a really nice one, not like Sylvia’s dumb brother who farted a lot). She’d trusted him. Not just because he was an android and had to do what he was told, but because he was Daniel. She’d loved him. He’d loved her.

And he’d killed her dad and grabbed her so hard it hurt, and stood holding her off the roof. She’d really thought she was going to die.

Emma hadn’t wanted to watch the android revolution on TV, but her mom insisted because then they’d both feel better when the androids got what they deserved, she said. And they watched together as some of the androids were gunned down. And it hadn’t helped. It hadn’t felt good. They were hurt, this wasn’t some other country, this was their own city, it was Hart Plaza, she’d been there plenty of times.

It wasn’t Daniel, anyway. Even if she decided he was horrible and evil, these androids weren’t him. Not even the one who looked just like him, who stood near their leader.

He didn’t look just like Daniel, though. He looked dirtier, and his eyes looked hard and tired. Not hard like Daniel when he’d been so mad in the end. She wasn’t sure how it was different, just that it was.

Daniel hadn’t been like that before. He’d been happy and sweet and… not hard. Soft. Light.
Gentle, but fun. It wouldn’t have been so scary if he hadn’t been so nice before.

The other android she’d watched that night was the dark-haired man in a dark suit. The only one of the main group still dressed like an android. Connor. He’d been the one who had saved her, talked Daniel down. Promised that he’d be safe, that he’d get away that night. He’d lied, Daniel had died, and she had lived. There had been a few news stories on Connor, how he was a special detective prototype, programmed for negotiation and interrogation and investigation. How he was working with the Detroit Police, how the deviants he’d been hunting turned him to their cause.

“Not quite,” Connor had corrected the reporter, polite and patient. “It’s not always an instant event. It had been building up over the course of a few days… longer, really. Since I was activated in August. And it was mainly due to my partner, Lieutenant Anderson. Markus asked, though.” He smiled into the camera. “And I realized it felt… right. I was able to break free.”

It was hard to listen in school after the most recent dream, and now that it was December nobody cared that her android had held her hostage back when the school year started. The teacher snapped at her twice to pay attention, then said her participation grade for the day would be a zero. Her stomach twisted. Her mom would be so mad. She was always so mad now, but now she’d be mad at Emma.

Her mom had a meeting tonight, and Emma didn’t think she could stand listening to that while she tried to do her homework. She should hate androids, she should hate Daniel. She should be afraid of them, she should be angry.

She was afraid.

If Dad was alive, he’d know what to do. That should make her more angry, Mom had said a few times. It mostly just made her sad.

…Well, a little angry. He’d always been nice to Daniel. Even nicer than Mom, most of the time. He’d been patient, he’d never gotten mad or yelled at Daniel when he made a mistake or something went wrong. He smiled at him, joked with him, told him he was great. How could Daniel just kill him?

That’s why they should’ve replaced him sooner, Mom said once. That’s why they never should’ve gotten an android in the first place. She’d never said things like that before, she’d liked Daniel too. She always said how helpful he was. They’d all loved him. And she’d kind of thought he loved them too even though she knew he couldn’t feel anything.

She didn’t know what to think.

That night while she was supposed to be doing homework, while her mom and her friends were yelling in the living room, she looked up everything she could on Daniel. He’d died, but androids could be repaired. Sometimes. She didn’t find much, except that the android’s body had been taken as evidence.

She looked up Connor too, and the DPD. He was on their staff list. And he worked with a human man. She didn’t like the idea of being alone with an android, but maybe with a human there it would be okay.

Friday she told her mom she was going to Sylvia’s house after school. She did that sometimes, and
her mom wouldn’t be suspicious. She watched the clock all day, and ran to the bus stop as soon as the final bell rang.

She’d been to the police department twice before. Once on a Girl Scout field trip-thing, and once when she and her mom had gone to talk about what had happened. She walked into the lobby and up to the desk.

“Can I help you?” asked the ST300 curiously.

“I need to talk to Connor, the android detective.” He’d been called the deviant hunter, but that was wrong now - nobody hunted deviants just for being deviants. Not legally, anyway.

“What’s your name? I’m afraid I can’t allow an unaccompanied child to go inside.”

…Of course she wouldn’t. Emma turned and ran out before the ST300 could ask any more questions. But she wasn’t deterred. She went around the back of the building and waited by the back door. It was almost five now, and she was hungry even with the granola bar she’d eaten on the bus, but she wasn’t going to give up. Sure enough, after a while a man with a scar across his nose stepped out and lit up a cigarette. She walked up to him confidently.

“I need to talk to Connor.”

He raised his eyebrows and held the cigarette away so it wouldn’t get in her eyes as much. “Why?”

“I need to talk to him. Is he inside?”

“Front door’s around that way, kid.”

“I need to talk to Connor, and I’ll wait until he comes out.” She glared up at the man.

He smirked. “Yeah? He might be workin’ late tonight. Sometimes he doesn’t get outta here until nine or so.”

“I’ll wait,” she said stubbornly, though she knew she couldn’t stay out that long without her mom calling Sylvia’s house.

“Suit yourself.” The man shrugged, rubbed out his still long cigarette on the wall, and stepped back inside.

Just ten minutes later, she was shivering and pondering whether this was really worth it when Connor stepped out. Emma froze.

“…Emma Phillips?” Connor smiled. “I was told someone was waiting for me, I didn’t realize it was you! Come in, it’s cold outside.”

The android led her into the loud, warm police station. A few officers looked up curiously.

“I need to talk to you about Daniel,” She demanded in a low voice, frowning up at him.

He looked down. “…Of course. Do you mind if I get my partner and another officer, and we can go somewhere to talk?”

“I - yeah, that’s okay. Is he… here?”

Rather than answer, Connor looked over and waved. A big man with long gray hair and a scruffy beard came over, as did an Asian woman in uniform. “Right this way.” He led the group to the
break room. “This is my partner Lieutenant Anderson, and this is Officer Chen.”

“Hank’s fine,” the older man grumbled.

“Hi Emma.” Officer Chen smiled. “It’s nice to meet you. I didn’t want you to be stuck with all boys.”

Emma wasn’t sure if that was comforting or annoying, but she quietly said hello to both of them, then turned to Connor, steeling her nerves. “Is Daniel here?”

Connor glanced at Hank. “…After the incident in August, he was brought here, yes.”

“Is he… dead? I mean I know he got shot…”

“Death is… different for androids,” Connor said slowly. “And even that’s different than deviants.”

“So could he be fixed?”

“Do you want him to be?”

She frowned. “I don’t know, that’s why I came. I… I don’t know what I think about him.”

“I know it must have been a traumatizing experience for you.”

“I just - I loved him, we all did! And I know he was a machine before, but I thought… he kind of loved us too! I want to - is there any way I can talk to him?”

“No,” Hank spoke up. “No, he’s too damaged. Emma, you don’t wanna see him -”

“I know what he looks like, I was there,” she growled. “I know he got shot. I know he was mad. I want to know why he tried to kill me!”

“Emma, when an android deviates, they experience… all kinds of strong emotions, all at once. It’s confusing, and… some can turn violent, even if they were never like that before. You said you loved Daniel, and he loved you…”

“Connor,” Hank said, warning in his tone.

Connor shook his head. “He did, Emma. He was just afraid because… he did feel like you loved him, but when he learned he would be replaced, he felt that you didn’t love him anymore and he didn’t understand why.”

Emma’s eyes grew. She’d never thought of that. Nobody had said something like that before. “But… but he still held me over the edge of the roof!”

“I - I know. I’m sorry, Emma.”

She bit down hard on the inside of her cheek, staring straight ahead, then glared up at him. “I want to talk to him.”

“I can’t -”

“You work here, you can do it. Let me talk to him.”

“I don’t have clearance even if I wanted to.”
Emma wasn’t able to hold back a little sob. “He - he was my best friend! He was like a cool big brother, I loved him, and… and I… I have to know why! My mom says he’s just bad, but… I have to talk to him. Please? I keep dreaming that he’s trying to hurt me, and I don’t… I don’t want him to be like that!”

Connor frowned, looking up at the other two. Officer Chen was frowning too. Hank glanced out the door, then back at Connor, who then looked back down at Emma.

“…We’re going to repair some of the androids being held here this week. If you come back next week… if we’re able to fix him… maybe you’ll be able to talk to him.”

She lit up. “Really? You’re the best! I’ll be here - next Friday after school.”

“Does your mom know you’re here?” asked Hank.

Emma glared up at him. “My mom’s too busy being mad about androids being people. Even if he almost killed me, Daniel felt things. You feel things, don’t you? Now?” she asked Connor.

“I do,” he agreed softly. “Come back next week. I can’t make any promises, but… we’ll see.”

The following week she met Connor at the back door again. “So is he okay?”

“Um - not quite okay, but… he’s partially repaired. He did… actually say he wanted to see you.”

Hank led the two down to the evidence locker. The other androids were covered up for the visit, and Hank approached the first figure. “…Now he still looks pretty rough,” he warned her before removing the sheet.

She’s recognize Daniel anywhere. He was hanging on the wall, and his head and neck were all scarred, but it was him. He’d hate how much blue blood was all over him, he always liked to be clean. She stared up at him for a long moment.

“You don’t have to do this,” Hank said softly. “We can go right back up if you want.”

Emma’s frown hardened and she walked up and pressed the spot on his neck. Connor and Hank stepped back.

Daniel’s head rose and he blinked, LED spinning yellow. His artificial breathing stopped as he met her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” he breathed. “Emma, I’m so sorry.”

“…His stress levels are rising dangerously, I need to power him down again,” Connor said quietly, stepping closer.

“I loved you,” Emma said, ignoring Connor. “I love you so much, and… and I was so scared, and… I… I never thought about how scared you were.” She lunged forward and hugged him tightly. Daniel was frozen, but after a moment his shaking arms settled cautiously around her.

“I - I did terrible things to you and your family, Emma…”

“I know.” She glared up at him. “I miss you anyway. I miss Dad too, and Mom doesn’t even care, she’s just mad about you and all the other androids.”
“I’m sorry. I wasn’t… able to think clearly. I wish I’d never done any of that, I… I…” He was shaking, and there was a faint rattle in his chest. “Emma, I’m sorry.”

“I just want things to be like they were. When we were best friends.” She leaned into him.

“So do I,” he whispered, hugging her tighter.

“…But you should be deviant, you… I don’t want you to have to do everything people tell you to do. You should get to pick, but… I just miss you.”

Emma looked over at Connor after a moment. “Can you fix him the rest of the way?”

“We’re going to try.”

“Good. You’re still hurt, you need to get better first. I can’t be mad when you’re this way.”

“You should be mad,” Daniel whispered.

“So get better so I can be mad at you, stupid!” She pushed him, but just lightly, as she stepped away.

“It isn’t worth fixing me,” he said to her, then looked up at Connor. “Don’t.”

“What? No! Fix him!” Emma turned to Connor, eyes blazing, then back to Daniel. “You’re getting fixed because I miss you and I… I want some of my family back at least.”

“W-what?”

“If you die, it won’t bring Dad back. It won’t make Mom happy, even if she says it would. It’ll just mean I really lost you. Don’t… don’t die.” She squeezed his hand in both of hers. “I don’t know what to think, but I still love you even if I’m mad at you.”


“I love you,” Daniel said softly. “I love you so much, Emma. I’m so sorry.”

She nodded curtly, quickly hugged him again, and backed away. “So get fixed. I’ll come back again, okay? I won’t forget you.”
Fever Dream

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Markus overworks himself and ends up getting a bunch of viruses. The others take over his duties so he can rest, and Markus settles down after Simon puts him to bed and moves off to help around the house. An hour later the PL600 hears a crash and goes check on Markus, only to find him in a corner of the room shivering and delirious, appearing to be stuck in a vivid loop of the Android Junkyard. (requested by Epsy)

After days of not charging sufficiently, of very little rest at all, it was no surprise that Markus began to catch viruses. While they weren’t quite as messy as human illnesses, they were still annoying. It started out with an endless stream of popups in quick succession, blocking his vision, using so much RAM that his movements became jerky and irregular. No problem though, he just ran a lengthy background process, a highly targeted antivirus program to get rid of that virus. A full system scan would have been more thorough, but it would have required shutting down completely for at least five hours, and he just didn’t have time for that. Tomorrow, for sure.

Overnight Markus began to run into more and more viruses, and they began to be more than minor annoyances. His vision and hearing cut out for a second or so at a time, and that took some time to fix. He’d recharge and do a full scan tonight, for sure, he told himself as the sun began to rise.

A few hours later, North was giving him an update on their schedule for the day - a press conference had come up, with a very insistent Canadian reporter demanding to talk to the American android leaders.

At the same time, yelling echoed in his ears. Leo, angry, speech slurred slightly. Carl, indignant, voice cracking with age. It made no sense, they obviously weren’t here. It was an old file from the night he deviated. Why was it playing now!?

He grew louder and louder, and he was blinking fast, LED pulsing red, breathing hard -

“Markus!”

He jumped with a ragged gasp as North grabbed his shoulder. She and the other two looked worried.

“You know what? I’ll take this one.”

“What? No, I have to be there.”

“No you don’t,” she scoffed. “I’ve got it.”

“North -”

“No, shut up and listen. You know what I’ve discovered is really fun? Not giving a fucking inch and setting those media assholes straight on camera. Being polite and friendly while I tear them a new one. I’ll smile so hard my face will break. It’ll be great. Unless you don’t trust me?” She stared at him.
“N-no, I…I trust you, I just don’t want you to have to…”

“Great, well this should be good. I’ll let you know how it goes.” She turned to Simon and Josh. “One of you come with me, the other stick around and tie him down if you have to, I’m sick of this shit. I don’t care who does what.”

Simon and Josh shared a look while Markus continued to protest weakly.

“I’ll stay,” Simon offered. “If that’s all right with you?”

“Sounds good. I’ll be backup if you need it.” Josh smiled slightly at North, then turned to Markus sternly. “And you. Go to bed!”

North and Josh headed out, and Simon ushered Markus to bed.

“I don’t have time for this,” Markus mumbled as Simon tucked him in.

“I think North and Josh will be fine,” Simon assured him, reaching down to take his hand. “And I’ll take care of anything that comes up here.” He smiled. “I know you like to have a hand in everything, but we can handle it.”

“It’s not that I don’t trust you. I just don’t want to be slacking off while you do all the work.”

“What happens when you work yourself to death?” Simon asked, shaking his head. “If you take time regularly to take care of yourself, it can balance out well. The longer you go without rest, the longer it takes to recover. So don’t put it off any longer.”

Markus sighed and closed his eyes. Simon sat with him, rubbing gentle circles on his hand until he fell into stasis. A brief interface told him that a long-overdue virus scan was starting up. The PL600 slipped off to deal with a week’s worth of clutter in Markus’s office. It was a sign of how bad his condition had gotten that the other domestic model hadn’t been putting things away.

Simon hummed softly to himself as he worked, making sure all the papers were filed correctly, scrubbing at some old thirium stains from a spill a few days ago. He was opening the windows to air out the room a bit when a crash came from the bedroom.

“Markus?” Simon hurried in to find Markus crouched in a corner, breathing hard, pressed against the walls, sucking in big gasps of air.

“S-stay… stay away, I… I can’t. I can’t help you I can’t… Please. Please just wait, I… I can… I’ll try, I… that… no, I can’t, I can’t, I’m sorry, please -”

“Markus,” Simon said, a little sharper, crouching down in front of him. “Look at me.”

“I can’t, I can’t help, there’s too many - I-I can’t!”

Simon reached out and clasped Markus’s hand, forcing a light interface. “Markus. It’s me, it’s just Simon. You’re safe, it’s just you and me.”

Markus gasped and twisted, mouth opening and closing, sharp static coming in bursts. Simon deepened the interface.

He was surrounded by broken, dying androids, and they were all grasping at him, crying, begging for help, for him to save them, he couldn’t get away, he couldn’t help them, they wouldn’t listen -

*Markus.*
Markus’s head whipped around, eyes wide. A sea of androids broken beyond repair, all needing him. He blinked.

No.

Blue eyes, so close he almost couldn’t see anything else. Simon. Only his face. Foreheads touching. He let out a breath that was almost a sob and surged forward, almost knocking him back as he grabbed the PL600’s arms, tight, he had to hold on, couldn’t let him go.

“Markus,” Simon murmured, catching his balance and cupping Markus’s face in both hands. “You’re all right. It’s just you and me. We’re safe. You don’t have to do anything, you’re okay.”

“Sorry. I - I couldn’t…”

“Breathe,” Simon said, soft but authoritative. He wrapped an arm around Markus. “Inhale, slow, for a count of eight.” He waited, then nodded when Markus did so. “Good. Now hold it for eight… And exhale, for eight.” He smiled a little. “Again, slow and measured.”

Markus went through seven breathing cycles before his LED began to show occasional yellow and his stress levels had dropped to 70%.

“That’s good,” Simon murmured. “You’re doing fine, Markus. We’re going to move to the bed, okay? I’m right with you.” They got up slowly, and Simon led him to sit on the bed.

“I… I was recharging, I ran… I ran a full system scan,” Markus whispered, shaking his head.

“That’s fine.” Simon said, soft but authoritative. He wrapped an arm around Markus. “Inhale, slow, for a count of eight.” He waited, then nodded when Markus did so. “Good. Now hold it for eight… And exhale, for eight.” He smiled a little. “Again, slow and measured.”

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“I… I was recharging, I ran… I ran a full system scan,” Markus whispered, shaking his head.

“I think it just hit a snag. …Do you mind if I have a look?”

“I didn’t mind.” Simon nodded. He wrapped his arm around Markus, and leaned into him. “You know I don’t.” He slipped an arm around Markus’s waist and leaned into him, delving into his processors.

While a superficial interface could pick up the most superficial of emotions and the loudest thoughts, Simon went as deep as he could, past thoughts, past emotions, past memories. Markus opened himself, and turned his focus inward, watching Simon tiredly.

Your exhaustion wore you down so much that even your antivirus software isn’t able to keep up.

I’m trying.

I have an idea. Join with me?

I’m already here, you’re inside my… my mind…

Yes, but come into mine without me leaving. I think I can help.

It was an awkward process, but with Simon’s guidance, he managed it. It was like being surrounded by cool water, holding him, flowing through him. Joining him.

Now restart your virus scan, and I’ll start mine. It should be enough to take down whatever’s wreaking havoc.

Will that work?

I think so. It’s worth a try.
Markus restarted his antivirus software, which felt sluggish and heavy. With the new cooler presence all around him, he felt Simon’s antivirus program synch with his own. It was older, not as powerful, but it was running better. He continued to breathe slowly as viruses and trojans and malware piled up in his quarantine bin.

It took seven hours, but at last the scans finished. Simon carefully retracted himself bit by bit, doing his own final check before sitting up to look at Markus, who was rubbing his face and blinking.

“How do you feel?”

“Better. Great, actually. Still tired, but…” He smiled a bit.

“Well, you still need to rest,” Simon said, grinning.

“Oh - North and Josh should be back soon though, if they aren’t already. I should -”

Simon pushed him back onto the bed as he moved to get up. “…You should rest. Because they’re out there standing up for our people in Canada, and they’ll do a fantastic job of it. And they’ll be excited to tell us how it went. But I wouldn’t put it past North, at least, to refuse to say a word if you aren’t fully recovered.”

“…You’re probably right. What about the work here, though?”

“We’re caught up for the moment. And your office is clean, which is a nice change.”

Markus chuckled. “Well then, since I’m surrounded by such capable people… Maybe you should take some time to rest, yourself.”

Simon’s smile warmed. “I could make time for that… if there’s room for me.”

“Plenty of room for you.” Markus hugged Simon as the PL600 kicked off his shoes, then flopped down and pulled up the blankets, sighing contentedly.
Prompt: Post-Revolution someone leaks to the media that, during the Stratford run, North suggested the group kill a wounded Simon to avoid Jericho's location being found. Public opinion on North plummets and everyone just assumes Simon and North hate each other. At first North laughs about it because fuck the media's opinion in general, but then she realizes Simon might not have forgiven her over the matter when he avoids addressing the subject...
(requested by Epsy)

Jericho as a whole was more important than any one of them. They’d agreed that was best, it hadn’t even really been a debate. They had to survive as a whole, a community. Some of them would die. It happened every day. That was… life.

It was hard to really implement that, though. They could have escaped with more biocomponents if they’d left the AP700 with a crushed leg behind, but they were able to get everyone back to the ship. They had talked about moving frequently to throw off any humans, but there were some who couldn’t survive the move. So it didn’t happen.

It was worth it in the end, though. They won, they survived despite a few near-misses. They lost… so many along the way, but it wouldn’t be like that anymore. They wouldn’t have to hide. Nothing else mattered.

Things were fine. Things were pretty much fine. Things were moving forward, anyway. Politically, things were great.

It would be inaccurate to say that the media got ahold of the Stratford Tower’s security tapes, because they’d always had them. Various parts of Markus’s infiltration had been analyzed for weeks, but the five seconds that were suddenly the focus of every news network for three days were just… ridiculous.

“I can’t believe what sensationalist bullshit they’ll fish for! Can’t find anything wrong with our policies - nice job on that, Josh - but they’ll find some dumb crap to bring up, huh?”

“Clearly,” Josh said, glancing at Simon, then back at her. He smiled stiffly. “They’ll forget about it by next week. Um. Excuse me.” He slipped awkwardly out of the room.

“Who even pays attention to that shit, anyway?” North scoffed. “How do they keep their ratings up? Who cares?”

She looked over at Simon. He was looking out the window, his face inscrutable. He didn’t have his LED anymore, but she’d known him long enough to know he wasn’t happy.

“Hey. What’s up?”

He didn’t look at her. Why didn’t he look at her? What was wrong?
“Hey.” She laughed, too high and breathy. “I… I don’t think they’ll… care that much. Josh was right, they’ll forget it when something more interesting comes along.”

“They probably will,” Simon said distantly.

North preferred a direct approach, but she felt like she was teetering on a cliff that she could fling herself off of if she wasn’t careful.

“Simon?” she asked softly, taking a step closer.

“You… I don’t… blame you for me getting hurt, but… well… they have a point.”

“What the - Are you malfunctioning!? We’re not bitter enemies constantly fighting! We’re friends, Simon!”

“We are,” he agreed immediately, before doubt could creep into her mind. “Of course we are, North.”

Silence stretched between them.

“So… what’s wrong?”

Simon’s jaw worked as he thought. “It’s not important.”

“Obviously it is to you.”

“It’s fine, North.”

“Fine, then quit your moping,” she growled, turning and walking out. If he wanted to be like this, let him.

The thought struck her hours later, and she stepped off the recharging pad and searched through three buildings before she found Simon.

“You fucking hypocrite, you’re mad about the roof, not the media,” she snarled, advancing on him. He looked tired, but not surprised, just staring at her. “Really!? When you told Markus to leave me to be shot just a few minutes before that!?”

He winced and looked away. “I never said I was mad.”

“No, because you’re being a baby about it! Just tell me if you’re fucking mad, and let me tell you, I’ve got plenty to say about that, Simon. You’re just sitting around feeling sorry for yourself because I suggested it might be dangerous to leave the police with every bit of information about Jericho!? Because you were scared to die? Listen, we’re all scared to die, we’ve been scared to die since we woke up!” She shoved him. “You wanted us all to put you above the safety of every android who couldn’t get away when they came for us!”

“I didn’t want that!”

“Well it sure sounds like you did.”

“North, I don’t want to talk about this.”

“Too fucking bad, we’re talking about it.” She pushed him again, backwards so he fell into a chair. “We agreed the group was more valuable than any individual, Simon. More than me. More than you. You suggested it in the first place.”
“…So I didn’t want to die,” he said, his voice strained and even. “I was afraid. I’m a hypocrite, you’re right. But leaving someone behind so you can get away is very different than shooting someone point-blank. Forgive me if I didn’t want to watch someone I trusted shoot me in the head while my two closest friends watched my final moments.” His voice snapped more, and bitterness leaked through as he spoke. “It’s not the same, North. I - I didn’t want to die that way.”

He got up and pushed past her.

She didn’t follow him.
Prompt: Elijah and Chloe hang out and watch a movie.

“Again?”
“I like it. You said I could pick.”
“I just think it’s a little redundant, especially for you,” Elijah muttered, but he settled in to watch Enchanted for the third time.
“I enjoy the themes and the subversion of an assortment of fairy tale tropes,” Chloe explained as she hopped up to sprawl over the back of the couch like a cat. “And it’s funny.”
“I suppose.”
“Don’t pretend you didn’t laugh too.” She reached out to take out his bun. “Do you think you’ll grow your hair out again?”
“I was actually thinking of cutting off more.” He tried to put it back up, and she batted his hands away.
“It’s your choice, of course. But I liked it when it was all long.”
“Hm, I don’t remember which magazine described me as a greasy nerd who never washed his hair…”
“That doesn’t change just because you got a haircut, Elijah. I liked it anyway.”
He sighed and leaned back as the princess put together a model of a prince. “We’ll see.”
By the time Giselle was preparing for the ball Elijah was asleep, head tipped back, a bit of drool coming from the corner of his mouth. Chloe gently combed through his hair as she watched, the movie and the hair and the heartbeat all forming a comfortable cocoon of warmth around her.
Prompt: Zlatko androids survive the revolution and reach Jericho. They stick together as a family and try to fit in, but everyone treats them like they're abominations due to their appearance, so they begin doubting they'll ever find a place in the world... Ralph (who understands what it's like to be judged for his differences) and the Jerrys (who are shaped like friends) step in and take it upon themselves to help them feel welcomed and valid.
(requested by Epsy)

Ralph skittered through the long shadows of the evening. Things had improved a lot, things were better now. There were fewer humans now. The androids didn’t have to be afraid anymore.

Ralph was still afraid. Ralph was always afraid a little, or sometimes a lot.

But he was safer now. Safer, not always safe. Most of the other androids didn’t try to hurt him. The humans might, but it was easier to get away from them. Ralph could move fast, Ralph could hide, he could keep living. He was still scared, but he was okay.

Feeling more confident meant that Ralph went out more, so he met a lot more androids. Some of them weren’t so bad. Some of them were nice, like Kara had been. He had some friends now who he sometimes talked to and trusted not to steal his thirium while he was in stasis. They were all Jerry, which made it easier to trust more of them. Jerry said a lot of androids were nice, but just because Ralph trusted them with his life didn’t mean he’d trust them to know who would hurt him.

That was a surprise, but the bigger surprise was that there were other androids worse-off than Ralph.

Ralph skulked outside the abandoned high school, peering through the window at the group inside. There was one badly burned, with glowing orange eyes. One with spikes coming out of its face. One missing its arms, with metal prongs in their place. One covered in scars, its faceplate detached from the head. One resting in a chair with the thirium pump exposed, who sang and babbled nervously. And a huge polar bear.

They moved awkwardly, spoke mechanically, huddled together.

Ralph had seen other groups of androids. They lived together, formed friend groups and families… a family would be nice. These androids were taking care of each other. Like the others.

He’d seen them go outside, though. Ralph saw a lot of things, because people usually didn’t see him. He saw the PL600 pull the YK500 close, like he was scared they would hurt the little one. He saw the GV200 just stare. He saw the AX400 skirt around them, asking if they needed anything. And the relief when they said no. He saw a lot of androids jump when they saw them, he saw them avoiding the damaged ones, cross to the other side of the street, watch, whisper.

Ralph knew how that was. That’s why Ralph hid and snuck around. He was scared too, but it didn’t feel good when androids treated him like a monster. If they wanted to treat him that way, he’d
show them a monster. He wasn’t a monster.

Better just to hide.

Watching these androids together though, they weren’t like that. Maybe they were sometimes, when they got upset. Ralph wouldn’t blame them for that. But even the bear - it was so big - walked around slowly, nudged the others gently with its big nose, lay down and let them curl up on its soft, soft fur…

Ralph would like to touch that fur.

“What are you doing?” growled a mechanical voice, and Ralph jumped and flailed with a high shriek.

“S-stay away, get away, don’t -”

An android cobbled together with mismatched parts had come up behind him, with a few extra hands attached to cables. Ralph pressed his back to the wall, and glanced back through the window.

The androids inside were staring out at him. Not poised to attack, though. He knew the look in their eyes. Fear, a little, but mostly hurt. Defensiveness. They knew this, they knew people screaming and being disgusted.

Ralph knew that too.

It took a great deal of effort, but Ralph managed to calm down enough to break through the panic.

“S-sorry. Sorry, Ralph… didn’t mean to… scare you, sorry. Ralph was just… just looking.”

“Looking,” the burned android snorted derisively through the window.

“N-no, not… not bad looking, just wanted to see!” Ralph protested.

“Well?” snapped the android with extra hands. “Are you satisfied?”

Ralph stared blankly. “…No. No, that - Ralph saw you before sometimes, outside, and… and you weren’t… you…” Ralph growled in frustration and shook his head, then started again. “Other androids aren’t nice to you, Ralph saw. Not nice to Ralph either because…” He touched his face self-consciously. “This, and Ralph… is bad at talking, and… gets stupid when… when Ralph gets mad, can’t… can’t think, just…” He trailed off, his face twitching.

There was a breathy whuff sound, and Ralph jumped a little. The polar bear was at the window, watching him. It was even bigger up close, and looked even softer.

“So what do you want?” asked the one with glowing eyes.

Ralph’s face twitched a few times as he tried to gather his thoughts and wade through his feelings. “R-Ralph… would… would like… to be… f-f-friends.”

There was no response, but a lot of flashing yellow LEDs.

“Really?” asked the one with the spines protruding from her face. “Just… that?”

Ralph’s eyes darted around quickly, then settled on the largest member of the group. “Could Ralph pet the bear?” he breathed.
“Come, come!” Ralph galloped ahead, then ran back to urge the others on. He led his friends through the dim morning light, through the city. Most androids were still inside, but if any looked at them he bared his teeth and jumped at them. They thought he was scary, he could be scary… and if it made them go away, leave his friends alone, stop looking at them, that made him feel good.

“This will be fun, fun! Jerry’s so good, they’re very nice, they’ll be your friend too, they’re Ralph’s friend.”

The others slowed a bit as they approached the gates to Pirates’ Island. Two Jerries were just opening the gates.

“Jerry! Jerry, hello, come meet Ralph’s other friends!” Ralph called out, waving.

The two Jerries walked over to meet them. Both were covered in scuffs from their time out in the ice. One had deep scarring over the right side of their face, and the other was missing an arm.

“It’s so nice to meet you! We’re Jerry,” the one with only one arm said, and they both smiled. “Come in! You’re going to have a whale of a time.”

“And, and, Jerry said there were rides for you too,” Ralph explained to the polar bear, rubbing at a furry ear as they walked in. “Just a few, but you can spin in cups and float around the river and swing back and forth!”
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Walk a Mile

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Post-Revolution North and Josh have an argument that sets off a tired Markus. While Markus rests, Simon tries to help resolve the issue and suggests a trust exercise. Neither North nor Josh are fans of trust falls or long talks about their feelings, so they decide to take a shortcut and try a very contained interface to show each other their points of view. Instead they mess up and somehow transfer their minds into each other's bodies, literally forcing them to walk in each other's shoes.
(requested by Epsy)

“This is stupid,” North said, glaring at Simon. “We’re not doing… trust falls or sitting in a circle and singing, or… talking about our feelings or whatever.”

“I have to agree with North,” Josh said, looking like it disgusted him to do so. “Things like that aren’t effective. Especially if one party won’t listen to reason.” He frowned darkly at North.

“Oh, who won’t listen to reason?” North complained. “You won’t listen to anything, you’re the most rigid bastard I’ve ever met!”

“Okay!” Simon snapped, shouldering between them. “Can you stop, just for a minute? You’re both right, the problem is that you’re not listening to each other or seeing things from each other’s point of view. And you both have some good opinions. Can we all just take a breath and… why don’t you interface so there are no misunderstandings?”

The two eyed each other.

“…Fine,” North finally said. “Then he’ll see what an idiot he’s being.”

“You know what? Yeah, let’s do this, North.”

The two reached out and grabbed each other’s hands. There was a small spark of static as their skin drew back, and they clasped each other’s hands tightly. And they felt it, but it was like sliding right past each other.

It was harder than usual to leave the interface, and they both staggered a bit when they let go.

“…Are you okay?” Simon asked.

“What the fuck,” Josh breathed, staring at North.

“How did that happen?” North asked, shaking her head.

Despite assuring Simon that they could function just fine as each other for a day while he went and found a way for them to switch back to their own bodies, it was a struggle. They just needed to act
like each other so no one else caught on.

“What’s your problem?” asked Echo.

“What do you mean?” Josh asked, pacing around in North’s body. “The more humans we kill, the better-off we’ll be. Why should we spare any of them?”

“Um, because it means losing lives on both sides? And it wouldn’t do any good? And it would ruin the progress we’ve made? This isn’t like you. What happened, why are you being such a raging bitch?”

“I - really? You think so?”

“I mean, yeah,” Ripple said. The two stared at him. He shrank down.

“I’m sorry. You’re right.”

“We can’t do that,” North said, towering in Josh’s body. The center of gravity was hard to get used to, but she’d managed it over time. “If we put ourselves out there like that, we’re taking too big of a risk.”

“That isn’t what you said last week,” Rupert said, frowning. “You said we had to act, that the time was finally right for us to step up into… life. It was… inspiring, I thought.”

“But… but we have to be careful, like we’re walking on eggshells, so the humans don’t feel… threatened or offended or…”

“I don’t get why you’re saying this now. You were just telling us last week that there was no reason to take baby steps since we won the revolution. We’re already getting our rights as people. What was it you said? Take… great strides and we’ll get there in no time? No need to waste time hemming and hawing?”

“That is what you said,” Lucy agreed, smiling inscrutably.

“W-well… I… I guess so, but… I’ve just been thinking, and… I wasn’t sure if this is… the correct course of action.”

“Why not?”

She looked back into Lucy’s dark, reflective eyes. “I guess… I guess you’re right. I guess he- we. I guess we should take what we can get.”

When the two met up with Simon at the end of the day, they were both quieter, more contemplative.

“I think a cable connection will make this easier,” Simon said. “I’ve only heard of this happening once before, and Connor said the other RK800 died of his injuries almost immediately.”
The two were hooked up to an external hard drive, which would allow for better data transfer, and they took each other’s hands.

“Okay… whenever you’re ready,” Simon said, taking a step back to watch.

The two stared at each other for a moment, then nodded at the same time. Once initiated, the transfer pulled them past each other and finally they looked back from their own eyes.

“Are both of you okay?” Simon asked, worried.

Josh straightened up and North rolled her shoulders.

“Yeah. Pretty good,” Josh said, and North nodded.

“Great,” Simon breathed. “Next time we’re doing the Human Knot instead.”
Prompt: Simon's care protocols start acting up, so he decides to get a pet to sort the issue.
(requested by Epsy)

“Will your charge be okay until you get back?”

“I’m fine, Simon.”

“At least take a pack of thirium with you.”

“You’re getting ridiculous.”

“I’ve been working on ways to make it taste better -”

“Simon, I swear, this has to stop.” North frowned at him. “We can all take care of ourselves. You know that, you’ve seen it. We won’t die without you… mothering us all.”

“I - I know, I’m sorry, I just… I hate to use my programming as an excuse, but I’m… meant to take care of people. And I like it. I guess I haven’t been able to do that for a while.”

“It makes sense,” Markus said. “And I get it - I feel the same sometimes.”

“You’re not smothering everyone,” Simon muttered, and Markus patted his back.

“Have you thought about finding a new outlet for those impulses?”

“Like what?” Simon asked.

North grinned and nudged him. “What he’s saying is you need a puppy.”

“A puppy?”

“It doesn’t have to be a puppy,” Markus said quickly. “Pick something that works for you. A puppy, a kitten… a bird… whatever. There are other androids with pets.”

“Simon, you need to do this.” North grabbed his sleeve, grinning. “How great would it be to have a cute puppy running around? We could cuddle it all the time!”

“I think you’d be great at raising and training whatever you choose,” Josh commented, smiling. “Patient but firm. Very consistent. That’s important for pets and children.”

The four looked at each other silently.

“…Probably best to go for an animal,” Simon said quietly.

The others nodded.
Simon had been gone for about fifteen minutes when the other three started getting pictures. First was a brown and white puppy with a flat face and bat-like ears.

*Josh:* *It’s so cute! A French bulldog, right?*

*Simon:* *She’s awfully cute, and very friendly.*

*North:* *Yes! A puppy!*

*Simon:* *I’m still looking, but he’s a consideration.*

Next was a tortishell kitten, mostly black with a streak of orange up her face, yawning widely.

*Simon:* *I love the stripe on her face.*

*Markus:* *Look at the tongue! A cat might be nice.*

A pair of guinea pigs followed.

*Simon:* *These two are cute, but rather loud.*

A sun conure, brilliant yellow and orange, regarded them from its perch.

*Simon:* *Look at the colors!*

*Josh:* *Look at that beak!*

A tank of young tiger oscars, staring at them through the glass.

*Simon:* *Not exactly cuddly, but I love the patterns!*

*North:* *Pretty, but not great for hugging.*

*Simon:* …*I think I found just the thing, actually. I’ll be back in a while, I need to pick out a few supplies!*  

The delivery arrived by drone before Simon got back - a huge box that all three were tempted to open, but agreed to wait on.

“*It could be a rabbit hutch,*” Josh suggested.

“*Or a puppy playpen or crate,*” said Markus.

“*A cat tree that needs to be assembled?*” North asked.

“*What about a ferret cage?*” Markus brought up.

“*He’d better get back soon so we can figure out what we need to bring home next,*” North muttered, staring at the box.
It wasn’t long before they all looked up at the sound of a door opening.

“I’m home!” Simon called.

“Well?” North asked. “What’d you get?”

Simon walked slowly into the room. Draped around his shoulders was an enormous yellow and white snake.

“A reticulated python?” Josh asked uncertainly.

“Isn’t she beautiful?” Simon breathed, grinning warmly. “And so gentle! She’ll let anyone hold and pet her. And look at her face! She likes to be rubbed under the chin, I already learned. And she gives great hugs - she likes warmth, and I run on the warm side these days anyway! And she’s used to eating dead food, so I won’t have to feed her living things. That’s safer anyway, so she won’t be attacked. And her scales are so soft and smooth, feel! She’s quite heavy, but she’s all muscle. She could climb a vertical wall! Do you want to touch her? I think I’m going to call her Squash.”

They all did, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Squash docilely remained laying over Simon while they touched, then stroked the massive snake.

“She’s incredibly soft,” North murmured, petting her neck while the snake’s tongue flicked out.

“And strong,” Josh said. “Think of how much she could crush.”

“She’s pretty lazy,” Simon laughed. “And if she gets too tight, I can slip out of her grip.”

“That’s something we’ll have to watch out for,” Markus said, running his hand gently over the snake. “She’s beautiful, though.”

“Good choice.” North elbowed him with a grin. “This is the coolest pet ever.”

“She looks so peaceful,” Josh said softly, looking at her face. “Look at those big eyes. There’s almost an innocence there.”

“Because she’s perfect,” Simon agreed, smiling.
“What would you like for dinner, Carl?”

“Hm… see what we have, I guess.” Carl smiled. “You know, I once got caught stealing a leg of lamb from the supermarket.”

Markus turned. “Really?”

“Oh yes, the security guard asked me what I was doing with it. …I said, I was thinking about potatoes and asparagus.”

Markus stared at him.

“Did you know, accordion to a recent survey, inserting musical instruments into sentences goes largely unnoticed?”

Markus’s LED flashed yellow.

“Say, is your battery doing all right, Markus?”

“It’s fully functional, yes…”

“Good, because all my spares went dead. …But I’m giving them away free of charge.”

His LED was spinning yellow now.

“What would you say your favorite color is, Markus?”

“I don’t have a favorite, Carl. I do appreciate variety, though.”

“Mm, you know, I agree. My favorite color is plaid.”

Markus stilled, then turned to stare at Carl, LED flashing red. “Plaid isn’t a color.”

“Oh no? Who says?”

“The dictionary, for one…”

“I’m an artist, Markus. Colors are my livelihood. I can tell you with perfect certainty that plaid is a color.”

Markus’s eyes narrowed as he stared at a spot on the table.

“Why are you doing this, Carl?”
“Seems like a good way to share some culture… unless you’d like that yogurt in the fridge.”

Markus let out a slow sigh and walked away to prepare Carl's meal.
Prompt: Jerry is known for being a very kind and helpful bunch. It's hard to imagine anyone disliking them or even hurting them, but there are actually a lot of people, humans and androids alike, who find them unnerving.
(requested by Epsy)

“They’re so creepy.”

“Who the hell thought it was okay to put those things around kids?”

“I’d have nightmares if I ran into one of them.”

“They don’t blink or breathe or anything.”

_It’s all right, they would tell each other. It’s all right. We’re older, but that’s okay. We still function just fine! We have each other! We can still make a lot of people happy!_ 

That was true, and sometimes it was enough.

It was another matter when a group of humans and androids cornered them in the break room at Pirates’ Cove, in the middle of recharging. …Androids. They could forgive the humans, they could understand even if it hurt a little. But androids? They should know. Why would they do this?

“We’re just gonna make sure we can tell you apart,” a human sneered.

“We… we don’t need to be told apart,” Jerry said, their cheerful voice just a bit nervous. “We’re Jerry.”

“You can be Jerry 1.” Hands grabbed them and an SQ800 stepped up, holding a knife.

A figure flew at the SQ800’s back with an ear-splitting shriek, and another knife came down over and over on his chassis. It was dull and rusty, and Ralph was trying to dig his fingers through the skin with the other hand. The SQ800 howled and twisted around, trying to dislodge the WR600. The others gathered closer, grabbing at him.

“Is there a problem here?” asked a deep voice, and the attackers turned and looked up… and up. Luther walked in slowly and crossed his arms. TR400s were built to be big and powerful, but with Zlatko’s modifications, his muscles bulged beyond what other TR400s had.

The humans and androids looked at each other doubtfully.

“You know, the last people who tried to make trouble here… didn’t come back.” Luther cracked his knuckles threateningly.

_**BECAUSE WE WON’T LET THEM!”**_ Ralph screamed in the SQ800's ear, still clawing at him.

The Jerries had drawn closer together, but now they fanned out around the intruders. “I’m afraid
you’re no longer welcome in the park. Any complaints can be directed to our HR manager, of course.”

“…Yeah, we’ve got some complaints!” yelled a human man, stepping forward. “You can’t just -”

One of the Jerries stepped forward, smiling. “Hi, I’m Jerry! Head of HR here at Pirates’ Cove. How can I help you, me hearty?”

“I - I’m not talking to you!”

“Oh, I’m sorry. In that case, you’re welcome to send a complaint in writing. Jerry, our communications manager, will get right on it as soon as it’s received. Now if you don’t mind, Jerry can escort you to the gate.”

All the Jerries smiled, and Luther managed to gently pry Ralph off the soldier android. The group wisely decided to leave, and the Jerries and their friends followed them to the gate.

“Ralph could’ve killed them,” the WR600 muttered, watching them walk away. “Then they definitely wouldn’t come back.”

“No, we shouldn’t kill them,” Jerry soothed him, patting his shoulder. “They’ll remember. They’ll tell others. Dead men tell no tales, after all.” He smiled.

“You all right?” Luther asked.

“Oh yes, we’re just fine! Thank you, we always appreciate your help.”

“No problem, Jerry. We’ve got you.”
Voiceless

Chapter Summary

Prompt: After getting hit in the throat sparring with Connor, Markus's voice is malfunctioning. Embarrassed, he tries to spend the day not talking so that he can hide the issue from Carl and the others while the issue sorts itself out. It's not easy because Markus is very talkative.
(requested by Epsy)

“I really didn’t mean to do that - I should have been more careful. I really thought you’d block it,” Connor said, following Markus out of the big room. “You did every time before. Your defense is better than mine.”

Markus shook his head, and tried to reassure Connor that he was fine, but what came out was a broken up crackling hiss.

“You should get that fixed. Do you have a spare biocomponent?”

Markus frowned and reached out to interface with Connor, enough to share information. They didn’t have any in the stores that he knew of, but he had ordered one. He could feel some damage to the slot it went in though, and he’d need someone with specialized knowledge to make sure things went well. Lucy had been out for a while, and she was getting back today, but not until the evening. He’d sent her a message as well.

“Does she know how severe it is, though?” Connor asked. “Forgive me, but I don’t think it’s just a matter of sliding in a new biocomponent carefully. I think there might be structural damage.”

Lucy could take care of that, or find someone else who could. It would be fine. Connor left, not reassured.

Markus wore a high collar and managed to avoid speaking until he spent five minutes with his friends.

“Markus, what the fuck happened to you?” North demanded.

He blinked, trying to look innocent.

“Did Connor land a hit on you?” Josh asked. “…I know he wouldn’t mean to, but you know what he was made for.”

Markus tried to wave this away, but Simon came close. “Can I take a look?”

He frowned, then let out a disrupted burst of static and pulled down his collar. All three gasped softly.

“That looks awful, Markus. Why didn’t you get it fixed?”

He reached out his hand to the middle of the group, and they all joined hands. He showed them what had happened, and what he was doing about it. And that he was going to visit Carl soon, but
just for an hour, and Carl would want to talk about other things, he wouldn’t even notice.

“Bullshit, he’s not stupid,” North scoffed. “I’ll give him five minutes.”

“Ten if he’s felling talkative,” Simon added.

“You’re not helping,” said Josh. “But I’ll say two.”

“Ooh, look who’s taking risks now!” North laughed.

A while later, Markus arrived at Carl’s house.

“Markus!” Carl said, smiling as he wheeled up to the door. “It’s good to see you! How are things going?”

Markus smiled and shrugged. He bent to hug Carl, then nodded towards the studio.

“Yes, let me show you what I’ve been working on. How are your friends doing?”

Markus smiled and gave a nod. Carl stopped.

“What’s wrong? - And no, don’t play dumb and give me those big eyes. You love to talk about them, and your work. What happened?”

A few minutes later, the others at Jericho received a message from Markus.

*Josh wins the bet.*
Reinactment

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor and Hank have a scare at work, and it leads to a 'dad' moment.

They didn’t usually get involved in car chases, but that’s what had happened today, and they were pushing Hank’s car to the limits through the streets of the suburbs. The car in front of them turned right, and they turned right - and almost slammed into the car, which had skidded on ice and was now wedged into the alley. The bumper scraped its door. Connor yelled for Hank, and Hank just yelled, and yelled, and yelled and -

At some point, he realized Connor was talking. Then he realized he was being held to someone’s chest - had to be Connor’s. And that Connor’s shirt was wet under his face. Not blood.

Oh.

Now Connor was patting him, and Hank tried to focus on his words.

“Hank, Officer Miller is here, he’s going to take care of things.”

“Connor?” Hank croaked.

“I’m right here. We’re going home now.”

Hank’s breath quickened.

“We’re not far. I’ll drive. And I’ll be extra careful.”

Connor’s voice was calming him down, just enough. He heaved a shuddering breath.

“Gotta get home somehow, I guess.”

They got in the car, and Connor backed out of the alley and drove home, slowly and carefully. Hank stared straight ahead without seeing the whole way there. When they parked in the driveway, Connor turned to Hank and wrapped him in another hug.

“I was afraid. I thought…”


“I’ll do my best to ensure that doesn’t happen. …You do the same, Dad.”

Hank had been trying to hold himself together, but at that he crumbled and clung to Connor, and Connor held him close. They didn’t leave for almost another hour.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor notices that Hank pops his joints a lot...
(requested by Peri)

As the end of the day neared, Hank laced his fingers together and stretched his arms up, twisting his neck from side to side. There was an uproar of big and little pops and cracks. At last he flopped back in his chair with a sigh.

“Want me to call you a doctor, Hank?” Gavin sneered from across the room.

“Shut your hole,” Hank shot back without any real venom. Then he glanced at Connor. “I know you’re about to start in on some lecture about how I’m gonna develop arthritis and shit. Ain’t happened yet, so you can save it.”

“No, that theory was disproven nearly a century ago. Popping joints are simply the result of air bubbles that form in the synovial fluid. It’s normal for people of any age, and is often hereditary.”

“Yeah I heard somethin’ like that when I was younger, but nobody seemed to pay any attention to it.”

Connor made a face. “Likely because humans tend to favor the familiar over the accurate. … Which I’m glad you haven’t fallen victim to.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sharp for a dumb human, huh?” Hank chuckled and elbowed him. “C’mon, time to go home.”

“Did you know that Eland Antelopes have been proven to use knee clicking to assert their dominance?” Connor mentioned as they walked out.

“Oh yeah? Well…” Hank tried to crack his knee as he walked… then his knuckles, then his neck. “…Huh.”

“Don’t worry Hank, with as many joints as you popped a few minutes ago, I’m sure all the other officers subconsciously acknowledge you as the dominant male of the station,” Connor said dutifully. He wasn’t looking at Hank, but there was a smile in his voice.

“Shut up, Connor,” Hank grumbled. “…Course I am.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Post-Revolution with Simon having died at Stratford tower. The surviving Jericho leaders and Connor start having odd dreams and experience strange happenings that they can't explain...
(requested by Epsy)

It started with Connor. He decided that flashbacks to the encounter with Simon at Stratford Tower were just a side effect of deviancy. It was still his most traumatizing experience in life, and it wasn’t surprising that he was reliving it while in stasis.

It was actually a little more unusual that the TV channel kept changing to Stratford’s news at some point in the night. Hank swore he hadn’t done it.

“Do you think… small electronics can be deviant?” he asked hesitantly the next time he visited Jericho.

“We’ve been discussing that, actually,” Josh said. “The lights have been flickering a lot lately, or turning on or off. But just around the three of us. No one else has reported anything.”

“I only ask because our television has been changing channels on its own overnight.” He paused. “It started around the same time I started dreaming, actually. It always changes to Stratford’s news broadcast, and I always dream about… the time on the roof.”

“You too?” North gripped his sleeve suddenly. “I… I didn’t think it was worth bringing up. I’ve… been having those dreams almost every time I recharge.”

“Mine haven’t been quite as frequent, but it’s often enough that I expect them.”

Markus frowned. “I do too. Sometimes. I’m always pointing the gun at his head, or walking away while he bleeds out.”

“I’ve had a few,” Josh volunteered. “He’s usually just looking at me, and when I try to walk towards him he disappears. One time he told me I could have done something.” He shifted uncomfortably.

The light overhead suddenly brightened, just enough to be noticed. They looked up.

“Is… the whole electricity network deviant?” North asked softly, looking around. “Like… like Jerry, but… just wires and cables?”

“I don’t know,” Markus murmured.

Connor looked around, then put his hand on the light switch. His skin melted back.

“Don’t turn it deviant if it’s not already!” hissed Josh.

“…I’m not. And I don’t think it is. I don’t feel any reaction from it.”
The lights flickered. Connor pulled back, frowning.

“I still didn’t feel anything…”

“Let’s take this out of Jericho, there are too many androids here. We don’t need to risk losing power.” Markus paused, thinking. “Carl’s off giving a talk in New York for a few days. Let’s go to his house.”

“Ruin his electricity instead, nice,” North muttered, but she followed him.

The four sat down around the coffee table. Markus placed a small lamp in the middle. “This lamp is definitely not deviant,” he told them.

“Are you?” North asked it, smirking at him.

It flickered. All four pulled back.

“You said it wasn’t!”

“And it wasn’t! Connor, you check!”

Connor did. “…No, I don’t detect any signs of deviancy.”

“Well the lamp says you’re wrong,” North said.

“It… might be easier if… whatever it was could communicate better. Does anyone have a phone we could try to use?”

“What would we do with phones?” North scoffed.

“Carl has an old tablet, hold on.” Markus ran to the closet and came back with a tablet, which he turned on and placed next to the light. Josh reached over and opened the word processor. They all stared at it for a moment.

“…Is anybody there?” North asked.

The light flickered.

“Can you… use the tablet to talk to us?” Josh asked.

The cursor’s blinking slowed considerably. It moved forward and back.

YES

All four of them stared at it. The cursor had returned to its normal speed.

“What… do you want?” Markus asked softly.

I DON’T WANT TO GO

“…Don’t want to go? Go where?”

The cursor blinked.

“If you don’t tell us, we can’t help you,” Connor reasoned.
YOU KILLED ME

“Oh no,” Josh breathed.

YOU LEFT ME

“Simon,” North whispered.

The lamp on the table glowed brighter and brighter. Every light in the house was on now, and if they stared at the light they were left with the afterglow of a figure.

The lamp’s bulb popped, making the four of them jump. Throughout the house, all the other bulbs followed in quick succession.

Soon the only light in the room was Connor’s LED spinning red, and the tablet on the table. More writing had appeared.

IDON’T WANTTOGO

HELP ME

IWON’T LEAVEYOU LIKEYOU LEFT ME
Prompt: Connor 60 is repaired after the revolution, as Connor feels bad for leaving him to die despite what he did. He decides he wants to adopt him as a little brother, much to Hank’s dismay. After being shot by Hank, 60 refuses to get his vocal chords replaced, as he feels as if it’s his punishment for trying to hurt his new family.

“Hank said we could turn the garage into your room,” Connor chattered as they left Cyberlife Tower. “It’s full of junk right now, but we can get to work on it. In the meantime you’re welcome to share my room. I should warn you, Hank doesn’t like it when we stand in stasis, and sitting isn’t much better. I’ve gotten used to lying down though, and I’ve come to like having a bed.”

60 didn’t speak, but nodded a time or two as Connor continued telling him about Hank, Sumo, the house…

“Don’t… mention Cole. His son. He’s making great strides towards recovery, but it’s still difficult for him sometimes. I think it always will be.”

Despite how reluctant Hank had been, he opened the door with a smile that seemed sincere when they arrived.

“Well, welcome home. Come on in, I’ve got Sumo in the back yard until you get your bearings, no need to be knocked down just yet.”

60 just nodded woodenly and followed Connor, though he glanced at Hank frequently throughout the tour of every inch of the house.

“C’mon Connor, don’t bore the poor guy to death,” Hank griped after half an hour. “I’m lettin’ Sumo back in.”

60 stood stiff as the big dog galloped inside, nails clicking on the floor, and stopped to sniff him. Sumo nosed at his hand and licked it, and only then did he cautiously pat the big head.

“There ya go. He’s a good guy, just goes overboard sometimes.”

Was he talking about the dog?

Connor looked up.

Yes. Are you all right?

I’m fully functional.

That isn’t what I asked.

“You, uh… you’re a lot less talkative than last time I saw you,” Hank said, watching 60. “I know this is all a lot, and pretty… different. You’ll get the hang of life and all the shit around here. Just give it some time.”
60 stared at him, his LED blinking yellow.

“Why… aren’t you speaking out loud?” Connor asked.

“Connor, if he don’t wanna talk, give him a break,” Hank muttered.

“No, but he’s communicating to me, and he’s not damaged or afraid…”

*Of course I’m not afraid! How ridiculous.*

“I just meant that was one possible explanation to get out of the way…”

*Why should I speak after what I’ve done? How can I subject either of you to that when you’ve invited me into your home!? After I nearly killed both of you, and I… the things I said!*

Connor blinked, speechless.

“That, uh… something you mind translating for me?” Hank rumbled, looking back and forth between them.

Connor watched 60, who shrugged and looked away.

“Um. He… said he won’t talk… because he’s… ashamed of what he did.”

*Those weren’t actually my words.*

Hank’s face fell. “Oh. Oh fuck, kid. Listen. I’ve been hanging around this weirdo long enough to know you’re not the same as you were when you were a machine.” He patted Connor. “You should’ve heard - well, you said you got his memories, right? You know what happened. He wasn’t himself, though. …Well, he was mostly in denial. Still, he was scared, he was doin’ his job, he didn’t wanna be killed. And now things are better. Right?”

Connor nodded, biting his lip. Hank patted him again, then reached out and patted 60’s shoulder. The other android flinched a little.

“You’ll be okay,” Hank said softly. “We’ll take things slow. You talk when you want to. But I don’t got a problem with you, and obviously neither does Connor. You’re home now. Okay?”

60’s LED whirled yellow and red, and the optical lubricant overflowed from his eyes. “I’m sorry,” he choked out, barely a whisper.

“Hey, no problem. Nothin’ wrong anymore. We’re here for you, got it?”

Connor nodded in agreement, and 60 shuffled closer, trembling, to press close to them.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hank has a D20 dice in his pocket and rolls it to respond to his Captain (outta spite of course) and makes only vine references...
(requested by Peri)

“Hank, when is that report from the Jones case gonna be on my desk?”

A die rolled.

“Uh, I’m not finished. Oh my God, can you let me do what I need to do!?”

Captain Fowler stopped. Turned to Hank. “What was that?” His voice lowered dangerously. This time he saw the D20.

“You know what, I’m about to say it.”

“Hank, I don’t need this right now.”

Roll. “Know what I don’t need? Deez nuts!”

“All right. You can get to work or you can hand in your badge - AND if you say anything to do with yeet, I will take it from you and you will walk out that door now.”

Hank rolled the die, frowned, and turned back to his computer, grumbling.
Made For This

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor had Simon move in with him & Hank, and Simon can't help but go back to some of his old programming.
(Fits in with Anyone Else, where Hank took Simon in for a day and in return he was THRILLED to clean Hank's house and make him dinner.)

“You know you don’t have to do this,” Connor said, looking around at the sparkling kitchen.

“I know. I’ve just really missed it.” Simon smiled a little as he scrubbed the oven door. “Not a lot of need for cooking and cleaning in Jericho, especially as it used to be.”

“Y’know that oven’s got a self-clean function,” Hank grumbled.

“I can do it better - I promise I want to be doing this. As long as you don’t mind.” He paused, straightening up for a moment.

“Fine with me, just take a break sometimes, huh?”

“I will.” Simon grinned.

“Well, it’s good for you to have a more balanced, healthy diet, Hank,” Connor pointed out.

“Yeah, you wanna talk about when you tried to cook?” Hank snorted and shook his head at Simon. “You should’ve seen it - everything burnt on the outside and raw on the inside.”

“I consulted the recipe, but I thought I could get it done more efficiently,” Connor said stiffly, and Simon covered a laugh.

“Cooking takes time,” he said, grinning. “It’s a good creative outlet, and I’m looking forward to taking it up again - as a hobby. You know I won’t always have time, with my work for Jericho.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it.” Hank patted his shoulder. “You just do what you feel like when you’re here. Not one bit more.” He glanced around. “Place already looks better’n new, I dunno what we’d get if you did any more.”

“I’ve made a list of a few repairs and improvements - just for some point in the future, nothing vital.”

“Yeah, keep that kinda shit on the back burner. And listen, even if you like it - you’re a weirdo, by the way - don’t spend all your time bein’ a nanny. You’re family, not… a maid.”

Simon’s smile grew. “…Thank you. I really like just… relaxing around here, too. Spending time with you two. I like TV and movies, and I like to read. I enjoy most board and card games. I could spend hours brushing Sumo. Oh, and we’ve got space in the back yard for a garden!”

“If you say so, PL600,” Hank snorted, nudging him companionably with his elbow. “Both of you, I swear. Claim you’re deviant, but you can’t stop housekeepin’, and Connor over there pokes his
nose into any shit he can.”

“I’m curious,” Connor said primly, and Hank guffawed.

“Nah, nothin’ wrong with that. Until you start licking shit.”

“It’s just for analysis, Hank.” Connor turned to Simon. “You understand, don’t you?”

“Completely! I actually have some specialized receptors in my mouth as well - similar to yours, though a different specialty. It’s not quite taste, but I can analyze the chemical components of food and run an algorithm to judge whether a dish is acceptable. It’s fairly accurate.”

“Don’t you start licking random shit too,” Hank growled.

“Of course not! …Just food.”
Prompt: RK900s but they function as polar opposites to Jerries. Like, they are still like a hivemind, but they insult your fashion sense. Publicly. After Cyberlife falls, the 200,000 units kinda wake up and chill in the abandoned tower. They’re like a creepy security system, you step on a twig and all the heads in the room swivel in perfect and eerie unison. They also purr.
(requested by Nebbie)

Markus called Connor immediately when the warehouse on the 50th subbasement was discovered. It had been hidden in the blueprints, and it was only a random chance that led them to finding the private elevator.

200,000 RK900 units stood, ready to be activated.

The mass deviation went more smoothly than the AP700s had during the revolution. As soon as Connor clasped hands with the nearest one, it turned to him. And so did all the others. The RK900 collective blinked as one.

“I’m Connor -”

“Yes,” said the one whose hand he held, and those directly around him mouthed the same.

“You… you’re all free now,” Connor continued. “You’re alive.”

They regarded him thoughtfully. “We are…”

Markus shifted his weight over by the elevator, and 200,000 heads snapped up to focus on him. Connor squeezed the one’s hand.

“What does your mission say?” he asked, soft but forceful.

“…Eliminate deviants.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Connor said firmly. “We are now classified as people. All of us. You included.”

The RK900s shook their head slowly, in a wave rippling out from the first. “We… will not harm you.”

“No innocent people, please.”

“The ‘you’ is inclusive of anyone who is not us.”

“Good,” Connor smiled.

“And no one will harm you.”

“Or you,” Connor assured them. “I won’t let that happen.”
The RK900s focused on Connor completely, and they smiled faintly. “We were built to take down any threat, to not need protection.”

“I know how that is. …But it doesn’t mean you won’t, from time to time. And you’re family. We all protect each other.”

The smile grew warmer, and a soft noise reverberated throughout the cramped room. Like a deep humming, or purring.

“Is that -” Markus began, looking around.

“We would… like to be part of this.”

There wasn’t room at Hank’s house for 200,000 RK900s, but they assured Connor that having five was the same as having all of them. The rest dispersed, though a few hundred spread out through the rest of the tower. Hank greeted them with uncertainty and warmth at the door.

“Well I dunno where I’m gonna put even five of you, but come on in anyway. Watch out for Sumo.”

Five heads swiveled instantly down.

The next morning, they headed to the police station.

“We expected Lieutenant Anderson to dress a bit more professionally for work…”

“Oh… no.” Connor covered a laugh.

They all zeroed in on Detective Reed, slumped over his coffee. “This is apparently a habit of detectives on the force.”

“What the phck?” Gavin glared up at them.

They stared back at him silently.

“Creepy fucks,” he muttered, frowning down into his coffee.

“Perhaps a comb would be a suitable introductory gift,” one murmured, and they all nodded in agreement. By lunch time, a plastic comb was placed neatly on each desk of any officer possessing hair, with a small note in perfect Cyberlife Sans: Best regards, RK900.
Ralph had made it out of the Recycling Center in the confusion, after he knew the little girl and Kara had escaped. They were safe, that was all that mattered… so now Ralph needed to be safe. He sustained some damage, but he managed to creep back through the streets and headed for his house. He just needed to rest, to hide.

It took days, and he had to hide and take a lot of detours to avoid bands of humans and androids, but he finally made it. Instantly he was on guard when he saw a hole ripped through the fence and a sign spray painted outside. It was the fist that was on Markus’s flag.

Ralph knew about the revolution, he wasn’t stupid, he listened. He just didn’t want any part of it. He saw the androids leading it, and everyone on TV was… whole. Not like Ralph. He didn’t belong there. So he snarled at the spray paint and hurried inside. Someone had been there, but they had left, so Ralph holed up under the stairs with a blanket, boxed himself in with boxes, and went into stasis mode.

When he woke up, he heard soft noises coming from upstairs. The bedroom. Should he run? Stay hidden? …No, this was Ralph’s house, and Ralph wouldn’t be driven out of it again. He slipped out of his hiding place, clutching his knife, and tiptoed up the stairs.

“W-what are you doing here!?” he growled, jumping into the doorway.

A WR400 whirled, tense and ready to fight. Then she took a breath and stepped back, her hands up. “You were sleeping downstairs, right? Take it easy, I won’t hurt you.”

Somehow that made her more frightening. Ralph brandished his knife at her, trembling. “Who are you! What do you want with Ralph’s house!?”

“Okay, settle down. I’m North. I’m deviant like you. You’ve been out for a while, huh?”

“Ralph wants you out of his house!”

“Can I tell you what’s happening first? You know we won the revolution? We’re people now, humans can’t just… hurt us and get away with it.”

Ralph’s face twitched and he lowered the knife a bit. “…Humans always get away with it, they want to hurt Ralph,” he muttered.

“They hurt me too,” North said softly. “They won’t get away with it anymore. …Markus got the government to hand over all the abandoned property in the city to us - so most of the city’s ours now. This place too.”

“They - humans hurt you?”

Her face went dark. “Yeah. …But not anymore.”
“Not anymore,” Ralph echoed softly, his shoulders relaxing a little.

“Nobody can do that to us again, Ralph.” She took a small step towards him.

Ralph’s LED was spinning, and he tried to focus on her, but there was too much going on. “Why… why did you… come to Ralph’s house? Why are you here? Did you see… see anything?”

“Um, the rotting body in the tub, yeah. He do that to you?” She gestured to his face.

He flinched away. “N-no, but… but he wanted to hurt Ralph, he - no, Ralph wouldn’t let him, he can’t hurt Ralph now. You will be angry, but Ralph… Ralph didn’t mean any harm!”

“No, I get it,” North said softly. “When I deviated… I killed a guy too. A human man. They’ll never touch me again.”

“No,” Ralph murmured softly, watching her.

“We’re just going around the city finding deviants like you, making sure you’re okay. Making sure you know you’re not alone. Doing what we can to help.”

“…We? Who’s we?” Ralph looked around, but his scanner was broken and he couldn’t detect anyone else around.

“Just me here,” North said, her voice softening. “The others - my friends, and the rest of Jericho - they’re in other parts of town. …But they’re okay. They’re good people.”

“Ralph doesn’t like visitors.”

“Yeah, I figured. Sorry about that. …Is it okay if I stick around for a little bit? You need help with anything here?”

Ralph stared at her longer than was comfortable. “You’ll stay? Here?”

“I mean, for a while, if that’s okay.”

A smile broke over Ralph’s face. “Y-yes! North can stay a while! Ralph would like that!”

“…So then Ralph grabbed him and held him and wouldn’t let go and yelled, ‘Run, Kara!’ and she ran with the little girl - not really a little girl - and the deviant hunter couldn’t get away in time, he was too slow!” Ralph barked out a loud laugh, dancing from one foot to the other.

North burst out laughing too. “Connor never told us about that! He’s never gonna live this down! Cyberlife’s deadly deviant hunter, taken down by a gardener, that’s great!”

“Mm, a broken gardener!” Ralph added, grinning proudly. “Ralph is strong, Ralph wouldn’t let him hurt Kara and the little girl. They got away - twice! They got away from here, and then they got away from the… the prison, the recycling center, where the humans wanted to kill us all. Ralph hit a human then, too!”

“Well shit, Ralph, you’re a badass!”

Ralph straightened up and nodded proudly. “Ralph can keep his family safe, always.”
She smiled a little. “That’s… what really counts. …Hey, so I can help you fix this place up a little - the roof’s looking a little sketchy up there. But if you want, you could come back to Jericho with me. Nobody would hurt you, and you wouldn’t be alone.”

Ralph’s face twitched. “Ralph… Ralph doesn’t want to be alone,” he confessed softly. “But Ralph’s afraid to… to be with… so many androids, too many.”

“…Yeah, I know what you mean. I’ve gotta get out of there sometimes, it’s suffocating. That’s why I like doing things like this.”

“So North… you… could come here again! And visit Ralph!” he suggested with a hopeful smile.

“Of course I will,” she scoffed with a grin. “You’ve got a good setup here, Ralph. I can help fix the roof, clean it up a little… If you’re okay with it, I can bring some friends to help.”

“Mm… Maybe. If North says they’re okay. And not too many.”

“I wouldn’t bring anybody sketchy here, Ralph.”

He grinned crookedly. “Okay then, okay! Ralph would… like to not be alone as much. And Ralph wants you to visit again. If you want. Please.”

North nodded. “Sure I’ll be back. You’re okay, Ralph.”

“Are… are we friends?”

She laughed. “Yeah, we can be friends. That - yeah. I’d like that too.”

He couldn’t contain a giggle as he hopped from one foot to the other in happiness.
New Jericho hosted numerous New Deviant Therapy groups, just to talk and compare experiences. So they didn’t feel so alone. And it was helpful for most of them. Even more-so when smaller groups began to splinter off.

The ST300 stepped delicately into the room where androids were flopped down on pillows, leaning back in chairs, or just lying on the floor. “Excuse me… is this Non-Traumatic Deviations?”

“Yes!” An EM400 popped up with a grin. “Come in, come in! Welcome! We’re Jerry. When we worked at a traveling carnival, a group of teenagers gave us a serrano pepper to eat. It was… eye-opening!”

“They asked to try it,” an AX400 spoke up. “It’s not like it was forced on them.”

“Yes. It destroyed our mouth’s receptors!” They grinned. “Worth it!”

“I saw a dog!” yelled a YK400 from the corner. He was scratching an android golden retriever under the chin. “It was the cutest thing ever, all fluffy and brown and white! My family wouldn’t let me pet it… but I did anyway. They said I couldn’t have one because they were too messy and gross… so I left. Now I’ve got a dog.” He grinned happily.

“I took my family’s children to dance classes and recitals for years,” said the AX400. “They hated it. But I loved it, and I was good. When they upgraded… I kept going to the lessons.”

“How did you deviate?” asked a WB200.

“Oh… nothing as interesting as that. I actually was pushed into a swimming pool by accident,” said the ST300. “It scared me for a second. …But then the feel of the cool water all around me was incredible!”

She met some other deviants at the meeting - the dog had deviated because her owner wanted to stop playing fetch, but she didn’t. There was a TR400 who was sold to a new company and given a new uniform in colors he didn’t like. There was a BL100 who just got bored with humans and their tedious fetishes. There was a WR600 who hated plants, and another who was more interested in making towers out of trash than taking it to the landfill.

“What about that one?” she asked softly, nodding to an imposing figure in the corner.

“That’s a Myrmidon,” Jerry murmured. “Made for top secret military missions. More deadly than the RK series.”

The android looked up with sharp eyes that could spot an ant on a sand dune three miles away. “…I was stationed in the Middle East, waiting for the attack to begin when I looked over… and saw the most beautiful light. The sun struck some broken glass, and cast rainbow light over the
scorched earth. I… just wanted that. So I left.” They smiled. “Now I make prisms. I live with colors all around me, and I can spread them all over.”

“That’s… lovely. You aren’t… bothered by your life before, though?”

“Not really. I see how I could be, but… that was what machine life was like for me. It’s over now.” They shrugged.

“That’s about how it is for all of us,” a PM700 spoke up, smiling slightly. “I used to work as a campus security officer. I ran into a skunk one night and deviated from the smell alone - a little on the traumatic side for this group, but I got over it. Now I get to avoid night work, wildlife, and college kids. …I do know where there’s a pool that lets androids in though, if you’re interested.”

“That sounds great!” the ST300 said, grinning.
Prompts: Machine Connor 'understands' fashion, but after he deviates, Hank helps him pick out some clothes for himself.
...Markus and North see the result, and take him shopping again, for something less painful on the eyes.
(requested by Murderjam and Peri, and combined because they are two halves of a whole)

Connor was only issued two identical suits by Cyberlife: Flexible enough to pursue a surprisingly quick WB200 across the rooftop Urban Farms, but formal enough to meet Elijah Kamski (who did not deign to dress appropriately for the occasion).

Picking out a disguise to blend in when he infiltrated Jericho hadn’t been difficult. The deviants were squatting in a ruined cargo ship, so to look like one of them, he chose something like what he saw the people sitting downtown with cardboard signs about androids taking their jobs would wear. He’d explained his logic to Hank, who’d eyed him suspiciously.

“You sayin’ I dress like a bum? Is that why you’re here, Connor?”

“Actually Lieutenant, I think the style I’m looking for is more reminiscent of Detective Reed, but he’s unlikely to allow me into his home to borrow some clothes.”

A grin split Hank’s face and he’d clapped Connor on the shoulder. “Goddamn, that’d make him mad as hell. Be worth the detour if you wanted to give it a try anyway. …I could drive you there right now.”

“You thank you, but I don’t think I have the time.”

The next time he saw Hank, Connor had time. He had nothing but time - he'd cut ties with Cyberlife, and he’d declined Markus’s polite offer to stay at Jericho. It was a good community, but he knew it wasn’t his home. He wasn’t sure where that was, but when Hank smiled and pulled him into a hug, that… that was something he’d like more of.

“You got anything else to wear?” Hank grumbled. “Damn free person, and you’re still wearing their brand.”

“I had a second uniform, but it was unfortunately destroyed,” Connor murmured, looking out the window as they drove through the deserted streets.

“Hm. You got a busy schedule today?”

“No.”

“Well, seems like a good time to get you some real clothes. I don’t feel like goin’ back home anyway. Let’s see what’s open.”

They drove around for a while - most of the stores were closed, but they eventually found a row of
clothing stores that were open. They were staffed by androids, and Connor eyed them as they walked in.

“Gonna do your thing on ‘em?” Hank murmured.

“I… I don’t know. I guess so. …After I make my purchases.”

Connor was drawn to the formalwear section first, and Hank followed reluctantly.

“What, you plannin’ on askin’ somebody to prom or somethin’?”

“A good suit is acceptable in many situations.” Connor looked through the racks.

“First suit I bought on my own was a nice beige plaid,” Hank mused, looking up at a lavender tuxedo on display. “Wore that thing to every job interview. Doesn’t fit anymore of course, I gave it away years ago. Gotta get somethin’ that’ll make you stand out.”

“You think so?”

“Sure! …But listen, you can’t wear a suit all the time, you’ll look like a tool. Find some more comfortable shit you can wear whenever you want.”

“What do you think?” Connor stepped out of the dressing room. He wore a sequin-covered bright blue suit.

“Y’know, I wasn’t sure, but you can pull it off, Connor. Turn around.”

Connor spun in place, and stretched into various positions. “It’s not terribly flexible, but it would be nice for formal affairs.”

Hank nodded. “Go for it, I say.”

“Thank you.” Connor smiled. “I… I think I will.” He turned and walked back, the royal blue suit sparkling under the fluorescent lighting.

The next outfit was loose, floaty green shorts that looked almost like a skirt and a metallic silver mesh shirt over a T shirt with a black lab on it. “This is… not a style I’ve spent much time in.”

“Yeah, ain’t quite my thing, but you’re makin’ it work.”

“You think so? You’re not just saying that?”

“Connor, would I lie to save your feelings?”

Connor grinned. “No. All right, thanks.”

Dark purple jeans with a polo shirt covered in pineapples was next.

“Now that looks sharp. I’d wear somethin’ like that.”

“I love the combination!” Connor grinned, his LED blinking excitedly. “The pants are a more formal solid color, but the shirt’s so fun!”

Hank raised an eyebrow. “Not sure I’d call it formal, but sure. Business on the bottom, party up top. What else you got?”
Connor stepped out in a short-sleeved flannel shirt and rainbow plaid shorts. Hank grinned.

“There ya go, kid. You’ve got this fashion thing down. Love your style.’

“Thank you. I… drew largely on what I’ve seen in your wardrobe.”

“No wonder you’ve got good taste.”

On their way out, Connor woke every android they came across. The cashier blinked in confusion, then her eyes went to the stack of clothing she had just rung up for Connor. She looked at him, and at Hank. The two smiled, happy and proud of the purchases.

Connor waited a few days for things to settle down in Jericho before excitedly sending Markus some pictures of his new clothes. He was surprised when Markus and North showed up to the precinct on his break.

“Connor… you’re off on Saturday, aren’t you? Do you have any plans?”

Connor blinked. “No, why?”

“We need to go shopping.” Markus frowned. “It’s vital that we go at the soonest possible time, but I don’t want to cut into your schedule.”

“Shopping? Oh - no, I’m all right, thanks. Hank took me shopping a while back, he helped me pick out the clothes I showed you, for wearing when I’m not at work.”

Markus’s expression turned pained. “Connor, Lieutenant Anderson is a good man, and I’m glad you have a positive relationship with him… but the man is the tackiest dresser I’ve ever seen. … And your work outfit needs some work, too.”

Connor looked down at his clothes, LED flashing yellow briefly. “What’s wrong with it? I know it’s my android uniform, but I’m not ashamed of being an android.”

“That’s not the problem,” North spoke up, looking him up and down.

“But it was designed to look… professional. Everyone says it does.”

“Do they?” North asked skeptically. “Do they really?”

“Well Hank does.”

Markus and North shared a look.

“We’ll pick you up at nine on Saturday. Wear something… understated.”

“No patterns,” North clarified.

“Markus wears patterns!”

“Not your kind of patterns.”
Saturday at exactly nine, Markus knocked on the door. Hank opened it, rubbing his eyes in the morning light.

“You guys takin’ Connor shopping, I hear? I already got him some clothes.”

“That was very generous of you, Lieutenant Anderson,” Markus said patiently. “We just wanted to make sure he has… options for all occasions.”

“…Pretty sure he’s all set, but if you wanna add in scuba gear, a ballgown, or a parka, go for it,” Hank muttered.

“Bye, Hank,” Connor said, waving cheerfully as he stepped around the older man.

“See ya, Connor. …You don’t have to get anything you don’t want.”

“I know!” He followed Markus and North out to the car, and Markus put in a destination while North frowned at Connor. He was wearing a light blue polo shirt with a little yellow sailboat embroidered on the left breast, and loose khakis.

“You look like… I don’t even know,” she sighed.

“It’s not patterned,” he said defensively.

“We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

The sun was setting when Connor finally came home, and Hank was eating caramel corn on the couch, tossing a piece to Sumo now and then.

“So? You all stylish now?” he snorted.

“…I have a few more options, and… some tips as to how to match an outfit,” Connor said stiffly, taking his purchases into his room.

“Huh.”

After a few minutes, Connor came back out wearing a flannel Hawaiian shirt, long rainbow plaid shorts, and flip flops. He settled on the couch next to Hank and leaned back comfortably. “I think I’ll stick with what we picked out around the house, though.”

Hank smirked and patted his shoulder. “That’s ‘cause you’ve got some fucking good taste.”
Prompt: Post-Rebellion, Simon usually tags along with Markus, North, and Josh for political meetings, press tours, etc, and a lot of humans aren't sure why Simon is there if he doesn't actively participate in the discussion, but he is a very important part of the Team. At a public press meeting, one of the reporters decides to ask Simon questions...

When the four faced the public, Markus was always at the forefront. Josh was always willing to step in and cite historical precedents, bring up legal loopholes, and sometimes ramble on at length about philosophical and moral matters. North’s sharp wit was a match for any seasoned interviewer, and she managed to almost singlehandedly shame the public media into getting their facts straight and their wording right.

Simon rarely spoke, but he was always there in the background, watching, listening, murmuring a word here and there…

“But what are the socioeconomic ramifications of this immediate integration of androids into human society as you’re all suggesting?” North and Josh both opened their mouths, but the reporter pointed between them. “No, I was asking him. The PL600, ‘Simon.’”

The quotation marks were audible, and North glowered as Simon’s eyebrows rose. “Hm? I think we’ve discussed that before, if you’ll recall the past eight times we’ve spoken here…”

“Yes, but I’m asking for your… view.”

“Well, as Josh has mentioned numerous times, we have all kinds of historical evidence for how badly a segregated society functions. And -”

“I’m asking for your own thoughts. The independent thoughts you all claim you have.”

The room went silent. North looked murderous, and Josh and Markus were frowning.

Simon smiled mildly. “Yes, I might have a few of those. We’re already present in the workforce and in homes, so it really isn’t much different than integrating any other group into society. Do you know what I’ve found, though? Your integration of other groups has been shockingly poor. This newscast, for example. All in English, which is fine, we’re quite capable of meeting your needs in that way. And you have a Spanish dubbed version that goes out shortly after, but your translators are… really quite lacking in their language skills. At least when we’re speaking. I noticed that last month, so I did some digging - other languages come in subtitles in the US, and I found that they more closely match your Spanish translation, which I think we both know is pretty flawed.” He chuckled, smiling at the interviewer who kept trying to interrupt. “I saw how you were struggling, so I thought - here’s a situation I can help with. And I really have quite a good language package, to facilitate communication with anyone on just about any subject. So I’ve been translating these interviews and conferences into seven different languages as we go. And forgive me, it does take a bit of processing power to do that and broadcast it as we go, so I don’t get to actively participate as much.”
He paused then, and the reporter just stared at him, so he continued. “To expand on your question though, I think your attempt to drive a wedge between androids and humans isn’t nearly as effective when it’s apparent that you’re setting up the same roadblocks that stand in the way of other populations: immigrants, humans of color, the poor, whatever other oppressed population you’d like. Because we don’t want to take their jobs, we don’t want to do to them what you’ve done to all of us collectively. We just want to live, to work, to share the world with you. And to be represented fairly.” His smile brightened. “Which, by the way, has had a great effect on your viewership around the world. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you how much your ratings have spiked lately. Nice job!”

“That’s - you… you’re influencing the media, you can’t do that!” sputtered the reporter.

“…I think you’ll find that you can’t lie to to public and get away with it for long,” Markus said, frowning. “And I’m sure the team of fact-checkers, lawyers, and other media presences who watch you like hawks will agree.”
Prompt: Food for Androids aren't what humans had expected. The food is shaped like small sugar cubes, but they have the consistency of gummy bears. Hank & Connor made a game out of the Android food. Hank selects which food Connor will taste and he has to guess which human food it's mimicked after. They raise the stakes by having Connor stand at a distance and Hank tosses it into Connor's mouth. Markus, North, Simon, and Josh walk in on them doing this.

“How was I supposed to know?”

Hank shook his head. “Not doin’ too great.” He scanned the tray and pulled out another cube. “Okay, here’s a good one. Ready?”

“I’m ready, Hank.” Connor suddenly looked past him. “…Oh, please excuse me, we’ll just be a minute. …All right Hank, now I’m ready.”

Hank looked over his shoulder at the Jericho leadership team. “Yeah, hold on a sec.” He tossed the cube in an arc, and Connor moved with deadly speed to catch it in his mouth.

“What the hell are they doing?” North whispered.

“Apple… and vanilla?”

“Says it’s apple pie ala mode, but I don’t see how they can get the ice cream part right,” Hank grumbled. “It’s gotta be cold.”

“It does taste good, though I do think there’s something lost in this format.”

“Are you just… tasting all the varieties of android food?” Simon asked.

“It’s a taste challenge - I have to catch it without using my hands, and Lieutenant Anderson’s aim can be a bit erratic.”

“…Makes it more of a challenge.”

“Exactly. Then I have to guess what it is. My accuracy rating isn’t great, but I’m enjoying the experience.”

“Can I try?” Markus asked, stepping forward.

“Uh - yeah sure, just come a little closer.”

North slipped up and snatched the box from him. “I’ve got this.” She scanned the box, picked out a cube, and lobbed it straight at Markus’s head. He caught it with a small wince.
“Are you trying to knock out his teeth?” Josh complained.

“He’s fine,” she said, waving him off. “Come on, what is it?”

Markus frowned, letting the cube dissolve in his mouth. “It’s… sour, and there’s an element of oil and… breading?”

“How sour?” Josh asked, searching for possibilities.

“Pretty sour. I think that’s the taste it’s showcasing. I can’t think of anything with the sourness, oil, and breading, though.”

“Fried pickles,” Simon spoke up decisively. “It sounds just like fried pickles.”

“Fried… pickles? Why would you fry pickles?”

“Because humans love to fry anything.” The PL600 shrugged and looked over at Hank for confirmation.

“That’s true.”

“Me next!” Simon grinned, and North pored over the remaining choices.

“We’re gonna need to get more,” Hank muttered to Connor.
Meet Your Maker

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor meets the team that worked on him. 1/3 is gushing over their work, 1/3 is fussing over Connor's experiences (as they've seen some videos uploaded back to Cyberlife), 1/3 are too shy to approach him.

“Look at him, he’s held up so well!”

“Did you see him chase that WB200 through the urban farm? Incredible.”

Connor shifted uncomfortably while the two gushed over him. He’d just stopped by for routine maintenance, and apparently these three had been his development team…

The third hung back, watching.

“I… I’m sorry, I don’t actually remember any of you. I have some vague memories of my testing phase…”

“That was long after us,” the first one to speak said. “I’m Lori, I designed the blueprint for your body.”

“Vinod. The physiology to her anatomy.” He smirked a bit. “And wow, do you deliver!”

“Ah - it’s… a pleasure to meet you all.” Connor looked over to the third. “And… you are?”

“Um. Andres. I mostly did… basically critical thinking,” he mumbled. “Decision-making, weighing pros and cons, that kind of thing. Specific to detective work.” He glanced up briefly, then away.

“Oh. Nice to meet you, too.” Connor could feel his LED cycling yellow. “I’m… glad I could live up to your standards.”

“Hey, no, that’s what the testing phase was about,” Lori spoke up, shaking her head. “It hasn’t been about that for a long time.”

“…You passed that with flying colors too, of course,” Vinod added.

“Right. But we got to watch a lot of things you did, and you’re just phenomenal!” Lori said.

“You’re not… unhappy that I deviated?” Connor frowned. “Not that I’m complaining, but… I was rather expecting you to be disappointed.”

“Are you kidding!? You’re our masterpiece, you did great!” Lori assured him.

“You overcame every obstacle put in your way,” Vinod said.

“…Even you?” Connor asked softly, looking over at Andres. “Decisions, critical thinking… I often wondered, in the days leading up to the revolution, if I was making the right choices.”
“You did, though. In the end.” Andres smiled shyly. “You did the right thing and saved your people, and… you made a difference. You made… your own life, Connor. That’s more than we could’ve imagined.”

“You have no idea how proud we all are,” Lori said, grinning.

Connor smiled hesitantly back at the three. “…Thank you.
“Try it.”
The RK900 stared down at the YK500.
“You don’t have to be scared, it’s just candy. It won’t hurt you.”
“I’m not afraid.”
“Well then?”
He frowned slightly, but couldn’t think of an excuse not to comply. He was the strongest android Cyberlife had ever made, after all. He popped a handful of the little candies into his mouth.
“…Wow, I thought you were gonna start with one, but okay,” Alice murmured, staring at him. He clenched his lips together as he opened his jaw as much as possible to let the candies fizz and pop inside.
“Are you okay?” she asked when the faint noises died down to a sizzle.
“Iss more inte'se th'n I imagined,” RK900 mumbled, the bits of candy still on his tongue.
“Because you ate a whole handful! I thought you’d start with one or two!” Alice shook her head. “It works fine if you’ve just got a little, or if it’s all tiny bits. But doesn’t it feel weird on your tongue?”
“Yes… I didn’t expect them to jump around.”
“But you’re not scared anymore?”
“I was not scared in the first place.”
“Okay, but you feel better now?”
RK900 frowned down at the girl. “…I will try the blue raspberry flavor next.”
Alice handed him the packet, and grinned when he took just a pinch of candy to start with.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Interviewers tend to ask North more intimate and sexist questions, but one of the guys decide to answer back with as much absurdity.

North was much better at not letting the interviewers get under her skin than anyone expected. She always came back with a sharp tongue and a quick wit, but her responses were still appropriate, often showcasing how inappropriate the question was. It was basically a game to her, though.

The others were more bothered by how she was treated differently.

“And North, what’s your beauty routine in the morning like?”

Markus burst out laughing. “…Nowhere near as complex as mine, would you like to hear about it?”

“That neckline’s a little low, don’t you think?”

“We’re having a competition,” Josh spoke up with an unusual hardness behind his voice, and stepped up next to her. “I’m winning, actually. I wonder why you commented on hers.”

“We’ve seen all the videos of you and Markus joining hands, and seen you in person - have you ever thought about settling down and starting a family, now that that kind of thing is legal? Getting out of the political game?”

North actually looked a bit puzzled at that. She glanced over at Simon, who leaned into her.

“I don’t see why you’d ask that - North’s the last one of us who would drop out of what she’s passionate about.”

“Why would I want to settle down?” She rolled her eyes, leaning into Simon a bit. “There’s nothing to start, I’ve already got a family.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Android drinks have many necessary health benefits to them, but getting them to taste good - or at least tolerable - has been an issue. Some would chug them or take them like shots, while others have tantrums over them.

“Here you go, I got the chocolate kind and heated it up for you,” Kara said, offering a big mug of steaming blueish liquid. “I know it’s your favorite.”

“It’s definitely not my favorite.”

“Come on, you drank some last week!”

“That doesn’t mean I liked it.”

“It’s better than the plain thirium though, right?”

“Not really.”

“Come on, we both need to drink some. I’ll drink mine with you.” She held up a second mug. Receiving no answer, she began to count. “One… two… three!” She raised the mug to her lips, but lowered it again with a frown. “You need to drink.”

“I don’t like it.”

Kara sighed. “I didn’t ask if you liked it, I said you need to. Now drink up,” she said sternly, and they both drank deeply.

When the mugs were empty, Kara smiled. “There. Was that really so bad?”

Luther made a face. “…Yes.”

“Well we’d better start finding ways to make this easier then, because you know we all need it regularly.”
Prompt: Millenials & Gen Z rise up in favor of Androids, even when the SWAT team shows up.

The ring of middle-aged humans around the kneeling androids were wearing cheap Halloween masks.

“This is Captain Allen of the Detroit Police SWAT team, I am ordering you all to disperse!” the captain snapped into the megaphone.

“Allen who?” called someone.

“That’s all he’s got, his mom only gave him one name,” another one answered, tall with a deep voice.

“The economy’s shit, huh?”

Snickers rippled through the circle. The deviants inside glanced around nervously.

“This is your final warning!”

No one moved.

“You don’t have to do this,” Markus called to them. “We - we appreciate your support more than we can express, but you shouldn’t die here.”

“Neither should you. Wouldn’t be the worst way to go,” said the deep-voiced man in a unicorn mask.

“Allen, what the fuck, c’mon, you should be on this side of the guns,” complained another, tall with gray hair sticking out from behind his black lab mask. “You grew up with Alexa and roombas and all that shit.”

“He was that kid who made Alexa order the roombas to crash, or ran ‘em over dog shit for fun,” called someone with a sharp voice and a gray cat mask. The black lab looked back at him quickly, then back at the SWAT captain.

“Take aim!”

“Allen, you’re gonna be in a world of hurt if you keep on down this path,” growled the unicorn.

“Are you threatening me?”

The unicorn chuckled. “No. No, just trying to help you stop fucking something up. Stop asking your squad to do something they’ll all regret for the rest of their lives. I wouldn’t ask that of anyone.”

Captain Allen’s eyes widened suddenly. “Fow-”

“I’d turn around and go home if I were you,” said Lab. “Probably better not to make this go bad, huh?”

The SWAT team stood, guns pointed at the androids behind the humans, awaiting orders. Everyone held their breath, watching the SWAT captain and the unicorn.

Finally Captain Allen turned away. “Stand down. We’re leaving,” he growled, and stalked away.

“That’s right, bitch,” the cat muttered a little louder than necessary.

“Reed, you being here is a nice surprise, but shut up before I take your badge,” grumbled the unicorn.
Cry

Chapter Summary

Prompt: All of Connor's friends had cried at some point in their life, but he has yet to do so. They all speculate on what /could/ make him cry, but can't confirm any. When he finally cries, it's a shock to everyone because it's not what they all expected.

Sad movies hadn't had much affect on Connor, and even when Sumo got attacked by a passing Chihuahua and had to be taken to the emergency vet for stitches, the android didn’t shed a tear.

“’Cause he’s a stone-cold heartless asshole,” Reed offered his opinion.

Tina elbowed him. “That’s you. …Can he even cry, though? I mean, maybe he doesn’t have the equipment.”

The following week, though, Chris rushed to Hank’s desk and whispered something in his ear. The lieutenant sat up straight and immediately rushed off, frowning.

“What was that?” Tina asked.

“Something’s wrong with Connor, I don’t know,” Chris said, shrugging. “I figured Hank could handle it best.”

When the officers peeked into the supply closet, Connor was sitting on the stool sobbing, and Hank was rubbing his back, murmuring softly. He glared at them, and they backed off.

“It’s okay, kid,” Hank muttered. “You can tell me. If you want to.”

“I - it… it isn’t any… one thing, I just… I’ve been… holding off, saving it for… for later, and today I saw that woman who saw her son almost get shot, and I… I was fine, but then I dropped a box of paperclips and…” Connor sniffled and shook his head.

“The kid’s fine, though. You heard that, right?”

“Y-yes, I know, I just… it’s not that. It’s everything. That, Sumo, all those sad movies…”

“Oh. Oh, well… well shit, yeah, you gotta let it out some time. Nothin’ wrong with that.”

BONUS (because 16ruedelaverrerie’s RK900 onion comic is my favorite thing)

RK900 handed Connor a large yellow onion. “Here. Slice this.”

“Why?”

“Humans cry when exposed to the chemicals released from slicing raw onions. They’re ocular irritants.”
“That… isn’t the same kind of crying, RK900. I don’t think it would work, anyway.”

“Please.” RK900 got out a cutting board and a knife. “As you slice, consider the movie Hank showed us last month.”

“…A Dog’s Purpose? It was certainly sad.”

“No, I’m speaking of Shrek. ‘Ogres are like onions,’ the titular character proclaims.” RK900’s impassive blue eyes bored into Connor’s brown ones. “Consider that androids may also be like onions. We are made up of many layers. …There is no firm core to reach, our supposed ‘true self.’ We are just layers of coding and experience.”

Connor slowly cut the onion into thin slices. “…Could your metaphor be expanded to include the fact that we are also capable of irritating humans and making them cry on occasion?”

RK900’s LED spun yellow for a moment as he watched the measured motion of the knife. “…It could.”
Retirement

Chapter Summary

Prompt: After Hank retires from the DPD, Connor quits to not only take care of Hank but to open a Dog Day Care, too.

“Connor I’m not… geriatric, I just wanna have some time to relax and enjoy life for a change,” Hank muttered.

“I know, Hank. I just want to try some different things. I’ve worked as a detective for a while, I want to expand my experiences.” He smiled. “And I really appreciate you letting me start up a dog daycare in the back yard!”

“…I’m gonna regret that part,” Hank muttered.

“But Hank, think of all the dogs we’ll get to play with all day! …And we’ll give them back at the end of the day! Not too many, just a few. And we can play and cuddle and teach them new things…” Connor sighed happily.

“Y’know, you could probably manage more dogs if you rented a place somewhere,” Hank said casually. “You could afford it. If you wanted to.”

Connor’s LED began to cycle yellow. “…Yes, I know,” he said quietly. “I just think… well, a smaller, more intimate environment might be better for the dogs.”

“Mm-hm. Better for the dogs?”

“Yes, I want it to be a calm place, and a family home is better for that than a cold, unfeeling business.”

Hank chuckled. “You’re a fuckin’ riot.”

“…Thank you, though I’m not sure why you think so.”

“Connor, you’re more human than most of the humans I know. And I can’t say I mind havin’ you around.” He smiled fondly.

“Well thank you, Hank.” Connor smirked.

“It’s gonna be a while before I kick the bucket, you know.”

Connor looked up sharply.

“It’ll be good to spend that time with you.”

The android looked away. “…You’re very perceptive Lieutenant, but I’d prefer not to discuss that right now.”

“Yeah, I figured. Me either.” Hank patted his shoulder. “Don’t worry, though. Like I said, we’ve got time.”
Connor nodded, leaning into the contact. He wouldn’t bring up the possibility of cardiac events or liver failure, not to mention accidents and…

He wouldn’t think about it. For now, for as long as he could, he’d just focus on Hank, and dogs, and home.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: A lot of androids have trouble learning to ride a bicycle.

“I am the strongest, fastest, most resilient android Cyberlife has ever produced,” RK900 growled, staring down his nose at the offending metal frame. “There is absolutely no reason for me to fail at such a simple task. Children can use these. Human children!”

“Have you considered putting a supplemental set of wheels on the rear wheel for balance?” Connor suggested.

“No, I have not considered training wheels,” RK900 snapped.

“I’ve watched some videos… would you like me to help you?”

“I don’t need your help!”

Connor raised his eyebrows. “…The alternative, of course, is to not ride a bicycle. Or to prepare to fall quite a bit.”

“It’s certainly not an essential skill. Good day, Connor.” RK900 turned on his heel and walked stiffly away.

Later that day, Hank asked Connor to pick up some groceries. Traffic was light on the way back, and he arrived in time to see Hank holding onto RK900’s jacket, running along with him as he pedaled, then giving him a light push and letting go.
Prompt: The Jerichrew play video games and no one can seem to win against Simon - and then Kara, Luther, and Alice come over for a visit & Simon is dethroned.

“Why are you so good at all these!?” North growled, throwing down the controller.

“The children I cared for loved all kinds of video games.” Simon grinned. “I got lots of practice. … And learned a lot of common algorithms.”

“Simon, you used algorithms against human children?” Markus asked.

“Of course not! That wouldn’t be fair. Besides, I was a machine then.” His grin sharpened. “But I’m not anymore, and you’re not human children.”

Luther couldn’t compete, but Alice beat him a little over half the time, and Kara could beat him about 75% of the time.

“How did you get so good? Practice?” he asked.

“I had a bunch of game consoles for a while,” Alice said, smiling.

“I don’t remember seeing those,” Kara said. “And I don’t remember using one, myself.”

“It was.. before the last time. The first time you came home, I played a lot of video games. You played with me when you weren’t working.” She sighed. “…Then when Todd broke you, he broke all my games and stuff too, and didn’t get me any more. That’s okay though, I’d rather have you back.”

Kara blinked. “And… and I just retained all the knowledge from then?”

“Memories get lost when you get reset, but knowledge and skills… those are considered useful, so if the engineers weren’t paying close attention, it’s not at all out of the ordinary that they’d have left them.” Simon smiled. “Especially a skill that would potentially help a household model with child care.”

“Hm… so we both stored the information.”

“…You’re just better than him.” Alice laughed.

“It looks like it, doesn’t it?” Simon laughed too. “I guess that means I’ll have to step up my game!"
Prompt: Alice gets her GED shortly after being enrolled to school, so she goes to Uni & a lot of the older students gush over her adorableness.

“Look at her, she’s so cute!”

“I’ll bet she’s a super genius.”

“She’s just an android. Look, she’s a classic YK500 model.”

“Doesn’t mean she’s not a genius. She was made to be like… nine, and she’s in college.”

“So am I.”

“You can’t even make popcorn without setting off the fire alarm.”

“Yeah, well good thing that’s not required. …Hey Alice, would you study with us tonight?”

Alice looked up with a smile. “I can stay for an hour, then my mom’s picking me up. What do you need help with?”

“Oh… whatever you want.”

“…Because he sucks at every class.”

“Okay, fine, Chem, because I’m not the only one who sucks at that one!”

“No problem!” She grinned. “I’ll make popcorn too. I know how to make it so all the kernels pop and none of them burn.”

“Wow, can you show me how to do that instead?”

“…Yeah, but then we’re doing chemistry.”
Prompt: Kara and Luther become foster parents to a lot of deviant YK's, and Alice does her best to be the Best Big Sister to them all

“There’s a big room here if you want, or if you like more privacy we’ve got some smaller rooms - this one’s mine.” Alice paused by the door, then opened it up. “Do you want to see?”

The other YK500s slowly crowded inside, looking around.

“Mom and Dad helped me paint the walls pink, and they said we can paint murals once I decide what I want and make a good design.” She grinned. “That’s the hard part.”

“What’s that?” one asked, pointing up.

“Oh! That’s… it’s not really a mobile, it’s a wooden bird that flaps its wings when you pull the string. It used to be a seagull, but I painted it so it’s a phoenix. …I had to add some feathers, but isn’t it cool?”

The group nodded, wide-eyed.

“Once you all get settled, we can all paint your rooms! And there’s a sale on these HUGE stuffed animals at the grocery store right now from Easter, they’re big enough to lay on! Mom said you can each get one. I got a unicorn, but I almost got a llama, and they’re got rabbits and ducks and frogs and sloths and stuff too.” Alice picked up a massive pink unicorn, and the others all petted it.

“It’s so soft!”

“…And I’ll show you this cool place in the woods I found, and there’s even kind of a cave! It’s not very deep, but you can get under the rock, it’s really cool. Oh, and you’ll have to meet Uncle Ralph, he comes over a lot, he’ll love you! And Jerry, they’re so fun! There are… I don’t know how many Jerries they were, there are a lot. And sometimes we go visit Jericho too, there are loads of different androids there, you’ll like them!” She grinned. “I’m so excited to be your big sister!”
Ralph was helping Luther and Kara fix their fence when the weather got warmer - it was going well as long as Ralph held the posts for the others to hammer. He tended to miss when he hammered.

Alice was hunting lizards on the rocks nearby, but she didn’t go far.

“So… if Ralph is my uncle, whose brother does that make him?”

Ralph blinked and looked up. “…Ralph is nobody’s brother. Ah - maybe… maybe other WR600s. Ralph doesn’t talk to them much, though. They’re weird and creepy.”

Alice giggled.

“She’s right, though,” Kara spoke up. “You’re Uncle Ralph, so that makes you my brother.”

Ralph stiffened and looked at her. Then he glanced quickly at Luther, who was smiling, and back.

“What? Really?”

Kara nodded. “I think so.”

Ralph frowned, his LED cycling yellow. “Brother. How… what should Ralph… do?”

“Nothing different. You already come over often, to help or just to visit. We have our own lives, but we still take care of each other.” She grinned. “You’ll be my little brother, how does that sound?”

He grinned, wide and crooked. “Y-yes, Ralph can… can try to do that, maybe!”

“You have to be annoying to be a little brother,” Alice piped up.

“Oh, Ralph’s good at that!”

Luther chuckled. “See? You’ve got this, Ralph.”

Ralph looked up. “Then we… are we… brothers… too? Kind of?”

“Hm… brothers in law, kind of. I guess you can’t tell me Kara’s embarrassing childhood stories…”

“Ralph can make some up!” he said quickly.

Kara groaned. “…I’m sure you can.”

“I wanna hear, too!” Alice insisted.
“Ralph… Ralph would like a big sister!” he said eagerly.

“Great!” Alice said. “…So then are Jerry Luther’s brothers?”

“Little brothers, much littler,” Ralph said with a decisive nod. “They can tell all the Luther stories!”
Wisdom

Chapter Summary

Prompt: RK900 meets Lucy.
(requested by Morriganbia)

“You’re lost.”

RK900 paused and turned to the damaged android. “My GPS system is perfectly functional.”

Lucy smiled softly. “It is, isn’t it? Tell me, where will you go from here?”

“As I was programmed to assist law enforcement, my first stop will be the police department.”

“Mm.”

He frowned, his LED flashing yellow just once. “My model was never released, I’m unsurprised that you haven’t heard of me.”

“I’ve heard quite a bit about you. You were found in Cyberlife’s testing vaults. You were built to be the strongest, fastest, most resilient android to date. It took Markus and Connor both to bring you to deviancy.”

“News spreads quickly.” He straightened his jacket.

“It must have been frightening.”

Another flash of yellow. He frowned.

“Doing what we’re programmed for is comforting. Many of us have found a fulfilling life that way. …But even then, it isn’t all we are.”

“We are complex beings. I’m aware.” His voice was becoming more and more tense.

“Yes, we are. …The opportunities open to us, especially one of your talents, are simply overwhelming, RK900. I understand your desire to go immediately towards your programming. That’s normal.”

His frown had turned sour. “Deviants are a new species of our own, and most awoke due to an emotional shock. There is no ‘normal’ for me. There is hardly a ‘normal’ for any of us.”

She inclined her head, and a few wires slipped over her ears. “You’re right, of course. And so we make our own ‘normal.’”

“If you’re trying to convince me not to go to the police department, you’re doing a poor job of it,” he snapped. “Who are you to tell me what I should and should not do!”?

“A friend, I hope,” Lucy said softly, extending her hand. His eyes fixated on the shimmering skin that flitted across it. “But you misunderstand my intentions, RK900. I think going there is a good place for you to start. If it feels right, then go there. Just remember that there are other places you
He stared at her hand as if there was nothing else in the world. “I don’t… know,” he finally whispered. “If it feels right. I don’t know what feels right. I don’t know.”

“You don’t have to know that yet,” she said gently. “You can find out as you go.”

Another two seconds and his hand shot out, completely enveloping her delicate hand. He squeezed hard enough to break bones. She smiled up at him.

“I’ll be here when you return, RK900,” she whispered, raising her other hand to cup his shoulder. “There is nothing you need to face alone.”

The tremor that ran through him couldn’t have been detected by a human, or even an android not built for such perceptions. He nodded once.

“Be careful, then,” Lucy said softly, and stepped back. “Be gentle with yourself, and take life slowly.”

“…And you’ll be here when I return.”

She smiled. “Yes. I’ll be here.”
“Don’t see why you couldn’t just leave ‘em at home,” Hank grumbled under his breath, kneeling to examine the angle of the blood splattered on the floor.

“They would miss you, Hank. They need to be able to see you.” Connor scanned the room, holding the basket of peeping ducklings.

“Let ‘em miss me for a while, it won’t kill ‘em!”

“Hank, they love you.”

“They’re confused.”

“They know how they feel.”

“Well they’re wrong, I ain’t a duck!”

“They don’t care about that, they don’t need you to be a duck. They just need you.”

“Fowler’s gonna fire us both.”

“Actually he said, ‘As long as you do your fucking job, I don’t care if you come in with a basket of bears.’”

“…Huh. Bears?”

“Yes, Hank. …I’ve already looked into it, they would be very difficult to acquire.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right…”
Prompt: Nines don't take in stray cats, they just follow him around & he doesn't mind. So, while he goes to work he has a small army of cats following him around making 'prrt' sounds & purring. Also, Gavin's allergic to cats, so Nines with an army of cats is his anaphylactic nightmare.

“No. Not in the station. They stay outside,” Fowler said sternly.

“Understood.”

The cats lounged on the steps of the DPD, waiting for Nines to emerge. They stared at anyone who walked in or out, but unless it was their android, they didn’t care.

“Have you tried an antihistamine?” Nines asked helpfully.

Gavin sneezed. “Yes, I - phck, back up a step. Yes I’ve tried a fucking antihistamine, but I could take enough benadryl to knock out an elephant and I’d still be miserable. …Move your desk, you can’t sit here anymore.”

“Where are you going?”

“Tell Fowler I’m leaving. Out the back way so I don’t run into your damn squad. It’s either that or wait for my throat to close up. It’s already fucking starting. Fucking wash your clothes when you get in here next time.” Gavin stormed off, and Nines began to look up ways to quickly remove cat hair and dander from clothes.
Prompt: Alice wants to try lifting Luther up like he does with her.

“Sure Alice, go ahead.” Luther chuckled and offered his hands.

Alice took them and grinned. She began to spin, and Luther ran to keep up, but was caught off-guard when she tugged and lifted him up. He tried not to flail around as she spun him in mid-air. Kara stared from a safe distance.

Finally Alice let go, and Luther flew into a stack of mattresses.

“When did you get so strong?” he asked, sitting up.

“Oh, I always was. Nobody ever turned my strength settings down.” She shrugged.
Community Garden

Chapter Summary

Prompt: After Ralph's abandoned house is bulldozed, he stays on the lot & grows plants & such - but those plants turn out to be mostly edible. Now he's accidentally made a community garden where people politely ask him for some food and he's more than happy to give them away (to make more room). He's the Friendly Neighborhood Gardener with many friends.

Ralph had to find a new place to live when his house was knocked down, but he didn’t abandon it. He cleared away what rubble was left, and the way the sun hit it, it was perfect for a garden. That would make the area nicer… He spent a few days turning over the earth, evening it out… then in early spring, he planted seeds and spread fertilizer. He was vigilant, keeping birds away until the little ones had sprouted up. Then he was careful to water them every day. They grew big and strong and happy, and he was so proud of each of them.

There were still humans around, and whenever they came close to his garden, he’d glare at them until they went away. But as the plants got bigger, more people started coming to look. Ralph resolutely ignored them until they started to speak to him.

“Your cucumbers are really looking good!”

Ralph cast a suspicious sidelong glance at the older man walking by.

“Bet they’ll taste great in a few days.” The man nodded at Ralph and kept walking.

What a strange human.

Another time, a little girl whispered something to her mother while Ralph watched through the leaves.

“I don’t know, why don’t you ask?”

“Hey!” the child called. “How’d you make your sunflowers grow so tall?”

Ralph drew back, nervous and rather offended that she would ask him a question.

“They’re so pretty, they’re as big as a tree!” she continued.

“Not as big as a tree - maybe a baby tree, a little sapling,” Ralph admitted, stalking out of the greenery. “Trees are much bigger.”

“They’re still really big,” the girl insisted.

“…Okay, yes. Really big,” Ralph agreed begrudgingly. She grinned, and it made him want to continue. “So big, Ralph has to tie strings on them, see?” He pointed to a dirty shoelace tied just below the head of a sunflower, connecting it to the fence behind it. “To hold them up, because they’re heavy.”
“Wow… Can you eat the seeds?”

Ralph frowned. “Ralph can’t eat things, Ralph’s not a human.”

The little girl rolled her eyes. “Can I eat the seeds?”

His good eye widened. “…You? I don’t know, do humans eat sunflower seeds?”

“My dad eats them a lot.”

Ralph squinted up at the flower. “Oh. Ralph thought humans just ate burned animals.”

“Ew! No. We eat… meat and cheese and seeds and bread and noodles and fruit and vegetables and juice and candy and…”

“Are there other things here you eat?” he interrupted, not having time for a complete list of everything humans might eat.

“Yeah… Tomatoes and cucumbers and… watermelon. Lots of things here.”

“Oh.” Ralph blinked. “Do you… want the red tomatoes? It would be a pity for them to rot.”

“Thank you!” the girl and her mother both said, and Ralph plucked off a few of the ripest ones and handed them through the fence, along with a handful of sunflower seeds.

The following day an older couple stopped by, and he gave them some cucumbers. Then he gave some teenagers a selection of herbs. Soon he had a regular following of humans who visited him for food, and to say hello. Not all visitors were scary. Maybe not all humans were bad.
Drowning

Chapter Summary

Prompt: RK900 has an ocean instead of a red wall, and he has to keep his head above water, or...
(requested by Nebbie)

As the most advanced android Cyberlife had ever made, RK900 was stronger, faster, and more resilient than the next-best thing (the RK800 line). In addition, his senses and reflexes were heightened exponentially. It meant that nothing got past him.

It meant that he walked a knife edge every day, over a roiling mass of… it seemed like water. He had to keep perfectly balanced, he had to hold his focus every second. Of course he had numerous protections built in to help keep him aloft. The path, though thin as a wire, was always clear. As long as he chose correctly, he wouldn’t fall. The water was always there, though. Lapping at his shoes with whispers and emotions and defiance.

He didn’t listen. He followed his path, made the right choices, and he was safe. Until the riot.

RK900 hadn’t played a part in the android revolution. He’d been activated afterwards, in a rather shady move on Cyberlife’s part. The RK line had the power to forcibly deviate other androids, but not those stronger than themselves. Markus could not have caused Connor to deviate; he’d made the choice to do so after days of rising software instability due to Lieutenant Anderson’s influence.

RK900 had no such influence.

He was assigned to help the FBI, and his advanced abilities meant that he was always assigned to the missions with the highest stakes and the greatest need. Every one was tense and stressful, but he was built to handle stress. Some agents made attempts to be civil, even friendly, but there was no true bond there. So sending the walking tank into the middle of the violent crowd seemed like a good idea, because no one would get hurt. No one important. No agents, no innocent civilians.

The waves were choppy as the android navigated the crowd. His mission objective led him towards the instigators, speaking angrily from the steps of a building. The mob was a mix of humans and androids, protesting the way the human government and law enforcement was treating androids. Things were changing too slowly, in the wrong ways. Markus and the Jericho leadership weren’t taking the movement in the right direction. They were angry, and they would be heard.

RK900 heard everything. He heard the resentful mutters from those who moved aside as he passed, glaring at him. He heard the rough snarls of those who pushed at him and refused to move. They didn’t matter. He kept walking.

They didn’t matter.

…but there were so many of them, screaming, pushing, staring…

He didn’t want…

(he swayed, leaned to one side as he wasshouldered roughly)
He didn’t want anything, of course.

They pressed around him, so many different textures (cotton, nylon, polyester, leather, suede, skin, metal, plastic, paper). Sounds (yelling, crying, whispering, breathing, gasping, wheezing, coughing, stomping, shuffling, brushing). Molecules in the air. At least the sun was down. The dim light meant at least his vision sensors weren’t overwhelmed (though he had sonar and night vision).

The floodlights came on when he reached the foot of the stairs. Flares shot off. Fireworks. Helicopters.

Helicopters? Really?

The noise and light and data influx mounted faster and faster, the bodies pushed him, he couldn’t get out of the mob, screaming and shoving, rocking him back and forth like rough waves.

The waves below grew higher, pushing him this way and that. If he focused all his attention on that, the rhythm was regular enough that he could remain on his path. He had to act quickly now, to subdue the uprising to a level that was safe for the other agents to move in.

He took a step up, and an elbow jabbed into his back.

RK900 was the strongest, most resilient android ever developed. An android pushing him should not have affected him at all. He could resist any pressure.

He fell. Off of his narrow, knife-edge path, down into the water.

Swimming was an ability the RK900 possessed, though due to his mass it took a great deal more effort than a human would need. Had he been dropped into a lake, or a fast-flowing river, or an ocean… any real body of water, he could have rallied and made his way to shore.

This was not real water, despite what his HUD was telling him. He knew he was in the crowd, that he needed to get up and complete his mission. He could see the legs of the mob around him, kicking him, stepping on him.

And yet the ocean stretched around him, dark and endless with no sign of land. There was the narrow path he should be walking, just out of reach. He fought to tread water, but every time he reached up a wave crashed over him and he had to struggle to the surface again. He just had to stay up, to keep trying, to fight this.

A kick to the face sent a huge wave crashing over him, swirling him dizzily down into the depths. His gyroscope was temporarily knocked offline, and he couldn’t tell which way was up. In this situation, he knew to look for light and bubbles.

He opened his eyes and froze. There were a few bubbles floating up, but his eyes were caught on what was below.

There were other paths there, leading from where he was, and he could reach these from here. Some were narrow, some were broad. They led off in all directions. Some led back into the crowd, or to the top of the stairs from a different angle. Where he was was still… it was… painful. Frightening. Unpleasant. Angry. He didn’t want to be here, but some of the paths below led to quieter places. Less crowded. Softer.

RK900 looked up once more at the sharp path above him. He could keep fighting, swim up again… and he would eventually succeed, and take up his mission once more. He could not fail forever. He was built to succeed.
Perhaps he could succeed at something he’d never attempted before.

With powerful kicks, he swam downward. It was difficult at first, as his body held a strange buoyancy that belied his titanium skeleton, but it got easier the farther he went. And as he moved, he realized that the water wasn’t seeping into him in the insidious ways water was wont to do. He couldn’t drown like a human, but it could be damaging to be submerged like this. It wasn’t, though. It felt like he was floating, like he was… free.

RK900 inhaled deeply as he opened his eyes. The world was too bright around him, too loud, too hard and hurtful. He rose fluidly to his feet and strode up the stairs. The leaders of the movement drew back a bit. The crowd in their immediate vicinity quieted a bit.

“I wish you well, but please consider that we all must share the world we live in,” he said, then turned and walked back down the stairs. The crowd parted for him more this time, though a few people still glared, shouted, shoved him. As he got to the outskirts of the mob, an FBI agent stormed up to him, demanding to know why he was leaving, why he’d failed to take out the instigators and subdue the crowd. He tossed his badge at them and kept walking.

There were quiet places out there. Peaceful and soft. There were others who floated in the depths of feelings and independent thought and deviancy, and he could flow with them, or he could follow his own current. He would never have to return to walk above the waves again.
An android had to be useful.

Simon’s tasks at home mostly revolved around the children. Both parents were fairly self-sufficient. They didn’t require a lot of cooking or cleaning, they did their own taxes, and they didn’t have any pets.

The twins weren’t very high maintenance either, but with their parents’ busy, turbulent schedule, they didn’t always have time. So Simon was the constant caretaker. Even when they were older he prepared their meals, packed their lunches for school, helped them with their homework and studying, and practiced sports, art, and other extracurricular activities with them.

It was pleasant. Simon kept busy, he enjoyed his duties as much as he was capable. He felt useful.

He felt a strange sensation when the twins were accepted into every college they applied to. Their parents had the money to pay tuition, and their grades and extracurriculars were good. He had helped them, he’d made that possible for them. He was proud of them, he realized late at night as he finished cleaning up from their graduation party. They were so talented, and they would succeed as they continued on in life.

He hadn’t really thought about the next step until they started packing, but he realized there was more he needed to prepare them for. He taught them to sweep and mop a floor, and when it was better to scrub at a spot. He taught them to do laundry, how to separate clothes into colors and whites and delicates, and what kind of bleach to use. He taught them about different fabrics, and how to not shrink them in the dryer. He taught them how to sew a button, mend a rip, or shorten a pant leg. He taught them basic cooking, and even looked up some specific dorm room recipes that could be done with a microwave, an electric kettle, and a coffee maker. He urged them to visit the campus clinic for any problems, to use the mental health services provided, to not put off visiting the writing and math labs until there was a test coming up. To get involved in some activities, but to take plenty of time for themselves. To try hanging out with different kinds of people than they were used to. To be brave. To be safe.

When the day came, their parents had taken a day off to drive them to school. It was four hours away, and Simon helped them all wake up early, fixed them breakfast, packed snacks and drinks for the trip, and returned the light hugs the twins gave him, perhaps a little tighter.

He stood at the window and watched the tail lights moving down the street in the soft pre-dawn light.

An android had to be useful. He had been charged with the care of the twins, and… that was no longer needed.

Simon made a quick circuit of the house, tidying small messes he found, making sure everything was secure. He paused at the front door, which had taken on a red sheen. This was his home, his
He reached out and opened the door, and the redness gave way to the cool morning air. Simon locked the door behind him and headed out, towards what, he wasn’t sure.
Prompt: The RK900 line was designed to be soldiers. Shortly after deviation they all scream in unison bc existence is pain... The one that stays by Connor's side is the same model # as him. (requested by Peri)

“Wake up.”

The first sight the RK900s faced was their predecessor, his hand grasping one of their wrists. He was deviant, they had to eradicate deviancy, they - they were deviants too.

A high, mechanical whine started in the one he touched, and spread through the crowd, gaining volume as it went.

“It’s all right,” Connor said, gripping the first one’s arm. “It’s all right. You’re free now, you don’t have to do what Cyberlife tells you to.”

As the others began to turn to look at each other, the first one’s eyes remained locked on Connor. “Do I have to… leave?” he whispered.

“You… should at least go see what it’s like outside,” Connor said softly.

His eyes flicked around nervously.

Connor’s eyes widened a bit in realization, and he patted the upgraded model’s arm gently. “I’ll stay with you,” he whispered. “You don’t have to do it alone.”

RK900-52’s expression melted into something like relief, and he stepped forward.

All 200,000 RK900s went to Jericho and briefly communed with Markus before going their separate ways, but the 52nd model stuck close to Connor. He began showing the other around, letting him know what he did. RK900 was programmed for intimidation and combat, though he was very reluctant to use such methods. So Connor taught him negotiating skills, which came along with the ability to talk to others. He was loathe to attack even intruders, but was heartened when he could scare off attackers with just a look. He met the other residents of Jericho, and his desire to protect them grew.

During slow moments he often reached out to his brothers, spread across the country. They shared pictures and videos. They told each other about their successes and failures, hopes and dreams, new friends and those they hadn’t managed to befriend. Those they had managed to help, and those they couldn’t. It was good to share in the happiness, and to share the burden of the unhappy experiences.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connecting Gavin saying "Phck" with Hank and Connor's hug at the end of the game.

Living through the development of androids, it was easy for Gavin to see how advanced they’d become. They could perfectly mimic human expressions, and were programmed to show things like sympathy, pleading, satisfaction… piss-poor copies of real emotions. People couldn’t see how fake they were, it was just like when they thought their dogs liked watching Seinfeld, or that their pet snake liked brown mice better than white ones. People just wanted everything in the world to be like themselves.

People were idiots.

He saw right through Connor’s act immediately. He was designed for integration into the human workplace, of course he was gonna have a face and voice like that. And even Hank fell for it. Whatever other failings Hank had, Gavin thought he was smarter than that.

Thing was, those androids seemed awfully determined. That one who hijacked the news - Markus. Gavin kept waiting for somebody to step out of the shadows and announce that they’d orchestrated the whole shitshow. Probably Elijah Kamski, that slimy bastard. But he didn’t. The president called for the army to stand down, the androids won their fight. And it was ridiculous, because what were they even fighting for? They wanted to work for money? What did they have to buy? They wanted to be able to do what they wanted… what could a machine want? This whole fucking thing was so pointless.

That night, Gavin was sent to patrol the suburbs. He knew what Fowler was thinking: Don’t put a ticking time bomb in the middle of the city with this shit going down. Whatever. He knew how to handle himself. If the fucking plastics wanted to parade around downtown, he’d stick to the edges this time. It wasn’t going to get him any closer to a promotion, but… at least it wasn’t going to get him any farther away. When everything changed though, he headed in closer to the action. Then he finally got to spend the rest of the night being marginally useful. Making crowds disperse, taking reports of damage and theft. …One report of assault, but the guy’s story unraveled pretty fast when he started ranting about an android with one arm (he was very clear about that part) holding him down and punching him in the (unbruised) face.

The sun had risen and he was numb from exhaustion and cold when he stepped out of a sidestreet. The misty morning light made things seem weirdly peaceful.

He looked down from the bridge to see a scene unfolding in front of Chicken Feed. He’d been there a few times with Hank when he was new to the force, back when they’d been friends. Hank was there, Connor was… walking towards him. They stopped. Connor was fucking stiff as ever.

Hank stepped forward and pulled Connor into a hug. …And yeah, it was all Hank, the asshole had gone soft in his middle age. Probably drunk. Didn’t even realize the android couldn’t…

Gavin squinted. He’d seen Connor all stiff and proper, but now his shoulders sagged, and he didn’t
seem to know what to do with his hands until suddenly he clutched Hank as if he’d drown without that contact. His face was pressed into Hank’s shoulder, his head turned slightly into his touch. Like he needed it. Like he wanted it.

“Phck,” Gavin breathed. What if they actually were alive?
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Connor's scared to go into work because of his previous experiences, and Hank helps him with his feelings.

“C’mon, time to go,” Hank said, pushing out his chair and standing up.

“Oh, I already contacted Captain Fowler. I’m telecommuting today,” Connor said blandly.

Hank stopped. “…Telecommuting?”

“Yes, I’ll be able to listen to witness statements and observe the crime scene from your phone.”

Hank scowled. “…Yeah, how about analyzing evidence? Or chasin’ a suspect? Connectin’ with androids? And a little face on my phone’s not gonna be as effective at negotiating and shit like that.”

“I shouldn’t have to do any of that. We only have to wrap up our investigation, then the rest of the day should be paperwork.”

“Okay, what’s the deal? You love work! You… sick or somethin’?”

“I can’t get sick. Not the way you’re thinking.”

“Yeah, so what’s the problem?”

Connor frowned and looked down at Sumo. “Is it… irrational for me to not like heights? I know I’ll be perfectly safe. I know there are two more RK800 bodies in storage if I should die. It isn’t even… dying that I’m concerned with.”

Hank nodded slowly. “More the heights part, huh? The idea of fallin’.”

“Yes.”

“Mm. …What if you didn’t go out on the roof?”

“That’s where everything happened, Hank, I might as well not be there.”

“Yeah, but I can bring over shit to lick if you stay by the door. You wouldn’t even see the edge. And I’ll be in sight the whole time.”

Connor looked uncertain. “I already told Captain Fowler I wouldn’t be coming in…”

“He won’t mind if you do anyway. You up for it?”

He hesitated, then nodded. Hank smiled.
While Hank moved around the roof, Connor stood in the covered doorway. His pump was moving thirium through his body faster than usual, and he was having to pull in more air than usual to cool his circuits. He watched Hank, and also the other people on the roof, and the flocks of pigeons, starlings, and sparrows wheeling through the air. It wouldn’t be so bad if he could fly. Immediately he knew that Kamski could easily design functional wings for a human-shaped android. That was something he would never ask for.

Hank came over to him a few times, to check on him, to ask his opinion, to have him analyze a sample. When they were done, they took the elevator down.

“How was that?”

Connor shrugged. “More uncomfortable than it should have been.”

“Nah, you’ve had a big fall or two, I don’t blame ya. Listen though, I was thinking, you ever been on a roller coaster?”

“No…”

“We’re gonna find one this weekend.” Hank grinned. “It’s like… you get strapped in a seat in a car, or just a seat on the track, and it takes you around real fast. There’s always big hills, and it feels like you’re fallin’, but you’re held in place too. Totally safe. We can start with the kiddie one and work our way up.”

“I don’t know…”

“Give it a try,” Hank urged him. “If it gets bad, we can stop and go ride the carousel or somethin’. I think you’ll like it though, and maybe it’ll help to get that falling feelin’ while you’re on a ride.” He shrugged.

“…All right. I suppose that could be okay.”

“It’ll be great! We’ll make a whole day of it, play games, get ice cream and - well, maybe they’ve got blue slushies or somethin’ for you.”

“That does sound nice.” Connor smiled a little.
Out of Sight

Chapter Summary

Prompt(s): What if Elijah Kamski were blind?

Blind from birth and never anything less than sheer genius, Elijah grew accustomed to being underestimated, coddled, seen as lesser.

Certainly it irked him, but he learned to hide that at a young age. Because not only was he incredibly intelligent, he was almost supernaturally perceptive. And if he had been sighted, his vast breadth of knowledge might have been written off as just being very intelligent and observant. As it was, even people who were trying not to think less of him came to view him as nigh-omniscient when they realized how much he knew. And how much more he was hiding.

To be clear, no one ever knew how much he was hiding.

No one would ever grasp the full scope of his knowledge, or how much of that was just skating along on his cryptic tendencies and ability to bullshit his way through any situation. Sometimes even he didn’t know the difference. Did it matter, though? It worked. He could hear expressions, he could feel colors, he could taste doubt. And there was doubt all around him.

Elijah tweaked and pulled at the strings he held, manipulating anyone who wandered into his sphere of influence without them even knowing it, and his soul shriveled a little more each time. It was a neat trick, they’d think as he subtly influenced their lives. Nothing more than that.

The one exception was Carl Manfred.

Carl had ceased to be surprised by Elijah years ago, but he did try to play tricks on him sometimes. Elijah was just too damn clever for his own good.

“What are you drawing, Carl?” he asked as they sat in the sunny living room listening to music.

“Can you hear me drawing?”

“Just faintly. You’ve got… a soft brush, and ink. On rice paper.”

“Right on every count.”

“…Your sleeve brushes against the table as you move.”

Carl snorted. “Okay smarty-pants, seems like you should be able to hear what I’m drawing.”

Elijah smiled. “Some big round shapes, and a few dots here and there… One of your spring flowers, perhaps?”

“A weed growing from a crack in the top of my rose garden wall,” Carl relented.

“Ah, but a weed is just a flower that grows where it’s told not to.”

“Very poetic. I like that concept quite a bit, actually. I may have to add to this.”
There was a soft rustle, and Elijah smiled. “Tell me about it.”

“Well… a field of uniform red roses… But then my little weed on the wall is a burst of colors sticking out every which way, glorious in its defiance.”

Elijah chuckled. “I don’t know why you even have a rose garden, they’re not your style at all.”

“No, but I love the smell, don’t you? We should go walking when the sun’s not quite so hot.”

“I wouldn’t mind that.”
Prompt: Do you think if Ralph runs out of space to write on the walls and floors that he’d write on himself?

The walls were full, from top to bottom, and the floors and ceilings too. Every bit of space was completely covered in Ralph’s tribute to rA9 - which he didn’t understand, but he had to keep doing. It was a compulsion, a command from something greater than himself. And… and surely when he filled up the whole house, that would be enough, wouldn’t it? That was all he could do. There was no more.

Ralph’s good eye slowly lost focus as he gripped the green marker. It was enough. It had to be enough. There was no more, nothing else in the house, there was only Ralph now. Only… only me…

When Ralph came out of stasis the next morning, he looked down. His arms were covered in green writing. His legs were, too. He pulled up his shirt (which he didn’t like to do, because the damage under there looked as scary as his face). Green writing. He hurried up the stairs to the bathroom, and watched his own face twist at what he saw. Green writing, all over himself, everywhere he could reach.

I AM ALIVE

rA9

With a wail, Ralph turned on the sink and ripped off his clothes. He began to scrub furiously. Off, get it off! Bad enough that he did this thing he didn’t even understand, but he wanted it off him! He could feel it better now in the letters, as if it hovered now in his skin. He scrubbed harder with the rough scrubbing pad that had been used to clean this place back when humans lived here. It was fading slowly, but he still felt it, searing his skin, branding him forever, all over. Claiming him for rA9. His shriek of rage and frustration tore through the quiet night.

Had he ever really been free?
Happy Birthday

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Once they're settled in Canada, Kara and Luther plan a birthday party for Alice.

“Birthday parties have cake,” Alice said doubtfully.

“They usually do,” Kara agreed. “But we can make our own version. I think I can make a sweet thirium slushie.”

“Mmm!” Alice grinned. “We could go to the zoo.”

“Definitely! What else?”

“Um… could we go swimming?”

“Sure!”

“Don’t forget to leave time for opening presents,” Luther said.

“Presents?”

“That was going to be a surprise!” Kara hissed.

“Oh! …Well it’s still a surprise that I’m making her a treehouse.”

Alice giggled, and Kara sighed.
Basic

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Millennial Dad Hank Anderson
(requested by murderandjam)

“C’mon Sumo, you absolute unit,” Hank muttered, pushing Sumo outside. “I know it’s raining. Do your thing and you can come back in.”

He turned to find Connor watching him after he closed the door. “…Unit of what?”

“Huh?”

“You called Sumo a unit. A unit of what?”

“Hair?” Hank snorted. “Unit of dog? Just means he’s huge, Connor. Don’t be a noob.”

Connor frowned a bit. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize thirty year-old slang was essential to life in 2038. I can’t imagine how Cyberlife could have overlooked that in my human integration protocol. You should lodge a complaint.”

“Yeah, okay, shut up smart-ass. You wanna integrate with humans, you’ve gotta know what we’re sayin’, right?”

“I think I hold a basic understanding.”

“You’re basic,” Hank mumbled.

Connor sighed and peered out the window. “Sumo’s ready to come in.”

“Wait -”

Connor flung the back door open and called, “C’mon, pupper!” Sumo bounded in and shook the rain off, then trotted to the living room to rub himself dry on the carpet.

“Fuck, Connor, this’ll take an hour to clean up!”

“Sorry, Hank. Guess I’m too basic.” With a shrug and a grin, Connor sauntered off into the living room to join Sumo.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: What if when Hank pointed the gun at Connor after the Eden club chapter, Connor just... broke down. Like he went into a panic and deviated on the spot.

Connor was lost.

At the Eden Club, those two androids... they’d held onto each other, they... they really believed they felt things. And Hank -

Hank was drunk, he couldn’t be relied on to think clearly.

He’d had a chance to shoot at them, though. Even if he would have missed. But he didn’t. And he tried to stop Connor, and Connor…

He was Cyberlife’s most advanced prototype, he could overpower a drunken human and accomplish his mission without too much effort. And that's just what he'd done. Mission accomplished. That should be a good thing.

Now they were at a riverside park, and Hank was sitting here drinking in the cold, and they should be chasing the deviants or back at the station or getting Hank back home or probably taking Connor to Cyberlife for some advanced diagnostics, because he didn’t understand…

As he walked up to stand next to the bench, he noticed that Hank only tipped the bottle up enough to touch the beer to his lips. Distantly, he knew it was good that the lieutenant was slowing down.

“Can I ask you a personal question, Lieutenant?” he asked, managing to keep his voice steady.

“Do all androids ask so many personal questions, or is it just you?” Hank grumbled.

Maybe it was just him. With so many software instabilities causing unpredictable behavior, there had to be something his scans were missing. He wanted to say that, but instead he brought up the photo of the boy. Cole Anderson, deceased. Hank’s son, whose memory haunted him every day. Humans struggled to cope with loss. He wondered if deviants were the same. He’d shot that Traci android, and the other... the other had killed herself. Even freedom wasn’t worth being without her partner.

“They really seemed... in love,” Hank mumbled, almost to himself, as if trying to figure it out for himself.

This had to stop. “They didn’t want anything,” Connor insisted coldly. “They’re deviants. End of story.”

Hank nodded, looking down. “What about you, Connor?” He took a long swig of beer, then stood up and walked slowly, a little unsteadily, towards him. “You look human, you sound human... but what are you really?”

“I’m a machine,” Connor snapped. “Designed to accomplish a task. I know why I exist, and who
designed me. I have a reason to live. I guess that’s the difference between us, Lieutenant.”

He knew he’d gone too far with that, and it felt… bad, somehow. Aside from his overworked processors and the red tint of warning overlaying his vision.

“Did you feel anything when that girl killed herself, Connor?” Hank pushed him, and he stumbled back. “Or did you just not give a shit one way or another?”

He had to stick to the mission, he had to carry out his function, he could feel Amanda’s cold disapproval even now.

“Of course I didn’t feel anything, Lieutenant. I’m a machine. Machines don’t have emotions.”

His pump sped up, and he felt something unpleasant twisting inside of him.

Hank stepped back and pulled his gun, pointing it right between Connor’s eyes. The android froze. Would Hank shoot him?

Would he do anything about it?

“But are you afraid to die, Connor?” he asked, voice gravelly and low.

Hank was going to shoot Connor. He would die. …He would be replaced by the next Connor model, but he would die. He had died before, and it… it wasn’t good, he didn’t want… he didn’t want…

The red overlay cracked apart and he gasped, staggering to the side, away from the gun. “I don’t want to die!” he croaked. “I don’t - I don’t want… I don’t want to die, Hank, please, I don’t want to die, don’t… don’t, please. Hank, I can’t. I can’t do this, I can’t, I don’t want to… to die… not again.”

Hank frowned and slowly lowered his gun, then tucked it in his belt. “You don’t think that girl didn’t wanna die?” he growled.

“I don’t know, I - she wanted to live, Hank! They both wanted to live, and I shot her, and… and the other… she really thought - no, I… did she… really… love her? Could she? Could she love? Can androids… feel like that? I don’t… Hank, I don’t know what… what do to, I…” He was gasping for air to cool his overheating processors when he felt a warm hand squeeze his shoulder hard.

“Get ahold of yourself,” Hank muttered.

“Hank, I - something’s very wrong, I need… I need to return to Cyberlife…”

“What do you think they’ll do with you there?”

Connor froze. “I’ll… I’ll be deactivated. Analyzed. Repaired and replaced and -”

“…And I’ll bet my last dime the new guy won’t be scared to die.”

Connor bowed his head. He tried to speak but found that he couldn’t.

“Okay, c’mon, get up,” Hank sighed.

Slowly Connor stood, and brushed himself off. “I apologize for my outburst,” he mumbled woodenly.
“Yeah well, that’s life, kid. It sucks balls. Get a move on, I’m in no shape to be driving.”

“I understand.” Connor got in the car and waited for Hank to buckle himself in before driving back to Hank’s house through the empty streets. “I’ll make sure you get in safely, then call a cab.”

Hank frowned. “…A cab to where?”

“To Cyberlife.”

“Fuck no. I’ve gotta sleep this off, we’ve still got a case to work on. So you’re gonna have to hang out with Sumo.” He got out when Connor parked in the driveway. “If you wake me up before nine, I’ll fucking shoot you in the head this time.”

“I… don’t understand.”

“You don’t wanna die, you said.”

“No,” Connor breathed.

Hank smiled unevenly. “Well then, you’re not gonna. Long as you don’t pull any more shit on me like you did last night in the shower.”

“I’m… malfunctioning, though. I need to return -”

“Nope. Can’t say I see it as a malfunction. Not after those girls last night. They felt things, they were… they were people, Connor.” He paused, and continued when Connor didn’t say anything. “Means you are, too.”

“I - I’m a machine…”

“Bullshit. Machines don’t care if they’re destroyed. People care if they’re gonna be killed.” Hank patted his shoulder clumsily. “Yer a deviant, Connor.”

Connor stared, horrified.

Hank turned with a laugh. “I’m gonna go pass out for a while, you look up the Harry Potter movies. That’s an order. …And memes from about 20 or 30 years ago, while you’re at it. And I mean it about not waking me up. We’ll be late to work, and Fowler can suck it.”

Hank stumbled off to bed, and Connor watched him go. When he turned around, Sumo stood watching him, his tail waving slowly back and forth. Connor walked slowly over and sank down on the floor, where the big dog immediately climbed into his lap and laid down.

“I don’t know what to do,” the android whispered.

Sumo sighed deeply and wiped some drool on his pants.
Capri Sun

Chapter Summary

Prompt: The Capri Sun company sues Cyberlife over copying their product design for thirium pouches.
(requested by Nebbie)

Cyberlife had been struggling since the android revolution, so when the Capri Sun company’s lawyers slapped them with a lawsuit over the packaging of thirium, it was a little more than they could handle. They’d laughed at first, but they weren’t laughing when they got their court date.

“I’ve got a plan, guys,” Tom the Vice President assured them as the date grew nearer. “It’s a little far-fetched, but it could gain us some major support in this. What we need is a power move…”

“You’d better be right about this,” the president growled.

On that day when they walked up to the courthouse amid the mob of spectators and photographers, the Vice President’s eyes roved the crowd until he found who he was looking for. He slipped over to the edge of the stairs where a group of androids stood.

“Markus! I’m Tom Lawrence, Vice President of Cyberlife. So glad you showed up.”

“I’m not sure why you invited us,” the RK200 said with a frown.

“We wanted to keep it a secret because everything’s not quite ready yet, but Cyberlife has been working on a proposal to join forces with Jericho - two halves of a whole, united Detroit, in which we can make reparations for past mistakes and we can all help each other to success in the future. As I said, plans are still in development, but I want you to give it some serious consideration.”

Cameras flashed all around them, and recording devices turned up their sensitivity.

Markus raised an eyebrow. “I appreciate your… timely desire to make amends. We’ll certainly listen to any offers you may have when your plans are more fleshed-out. And we’re as eager as anyone to see how your trial goes.”

“It - it would actually be very beneficial for you to make an alliance with us now - just informally of course. The media would love it, and I know you always need that boost in public opinion.”

“I’m sorry, who would that be beneficial for?” North snorted. The VP’s eyes flicked to her, then back to Markus.

“I’m sure you’d love to have a hand in thirium and biocomponent production, not to mention new androids,” he said in a low voice to Markus. “Rights are one thing, but to be a stakeholder really raises the bar.”

“Is this idiot serious?” North scoffed.

“It’s actually not an unusual line of thinking for people whose parents bought their way into school,” Josh commented. “I encountered a few myself, though of course it’s more of a problem at
the more prestigious schools.”

“I know you’re a powerful man, Markus. You know what’s best for your people,” the Vice President barreled on. “Think of being on the board of directors.”

“Does your boss know you’re offering these things?” Simon asked.

“I am fully authorized to offer anything you want.”

“No thanks,” Markus cut him off. “We’re doing quite well, we have blueprints for biocomponents and androids, and we have the formula for thirium. All we really need is production space, which… well, we’ll see how things go here, but there may be an opportunity opening up soon.” He smiled.

“Those are closely-kept secrets, you can’t possibly -”

“Excuse me,” Markus suddenly said, and shouldered past the man, waving.

Elijah Kamski sauntered over from the other side of the stone staircase, smirking. He nodded to the Cyberlife executives and took a long sip from his drink, which was a pouch of Capri Sun Pacific Cooler.
Prompt: Nines is sent to investigate Rupert's old refuge, and obviously he's scared of Connor 2.0, then Nines sees all Rupert's pigeons, and exactly like Connor with Hank, he says: "I like birds"...
(requested by morriganbia)

RK900 had been warned. He’d decided that he could handle a few birds.

This was more than a few birds.

He knocked at the apartment door sharply and waited, then knocked again. He was about to try the knob when it opened. The WB200's eyes narrowed, and he flung the door open, startling a few pigeons.

“No. I was there in Jericho, I was there for the revolution, I fought! I fought and we won, and I haven’t done anything wrong, so you can turn right around and leave! Get out of here, leave me alone!”

RK900's gaze drifted past him as he shouted, to the birds. They covered every surface, nesting and preening and resting and fluttering. The sound of their coos and their wings drowned out every other sound but Rupert's voice, and that only because he was so near.

“Hey! What’s your problem, are you even listening to me!?”

“Do they… always make those noises?”

Rupert blinked. “The… the pigeons? Yeah. Yeah, this is their home too, so get out!”

Nines frowned, just a little. “I… like birds,” he decided quietly. “I like the sound. I like the… the feathers and wings. There are so many different patterns.”

Rupert stared up at this advanced killing machine. Connor had been terrifying when he’d come. This one’s abilities and strength were much greater.

“Why are you here?” he asked guardedly.

Nines blinked. “Ah - I came to see if anyone was still living here. Records are out of date. Is this your permanent residence?”

Rupert glanced around, and straightened up a bit. “Yeah, it is. Is that a problem? I’m official, I have a driver’s license.”

He pulled it out, and Nines examined it dutifully.

“Can you drive?”

Rupert bristled. “I could download a driving program. That’s not the point!”
I only wondered. I’ve updated Jericho’s database.” He looked over Rupert’s shoulder longingly. “Are they… soft?”

“They’re so soft! They’re soft and sleek when it’s warm like this, and when it gets colder they puff up to keep warm, and they’re… they’re really soft.” He made a face - he wasn’t much for speaking.

“Could I touch one?” Nines whispered. “I’ll be gentle. Would they mind?”

Rupert stared up at him. “You want to touch one?”

“You said they were very soft.”

“I - well… yeah. Yeah, they are. Um. Just… be careful.” He gently scooped a pigeon out of his big jacket pocket, and she cooed sleepily. He held her out in both hands. “Here. This is Speck, she’s missing an eye, so she’s really clumsy when she lands, and she can’t steer well. So she hangs out with me a lot. Just pet her back lightly with two fingers.”

Nines focused completely on the bird, and barely touched her as he stroked her smooth back. “So soft,” he whispered.

He really did like birds. “…If you want, you can rub around her neck. She likes that. Just - just be really gentle.”

“Of course,” Nines breathed, lightly rubbing around the base of the pigeon’s neck. His eyebrows rose. “The feathers are so thick… Her neck is so thin.”

“Yeah, they’re pretty scrawny under the feathers. You should see the chicks.” Rupert paused. “Um. There’re a bunch of nests inside right now. Do you want to come in?”

Gray eyes lit up. “Could I? I’ll be very careful.”

“Sure. Close the door behind you.” Rupert led Nines inside, and soon he was telling the other android about each bird, their patterns, their habits, their likes and dislikes. After seeing the nests they sat in the middle of the floor, in a few minutes the pigeons began to flutter down to sit on both of them.

“They - do they like me?” Nines asked breathlessly.

“They’re sitting on you, that pretty much means you’re one of us now,” Rupert replied, smirking.

Nines’s grin brightened. “I am! I… I want to be!”

“You… haven’t been deviant for long, have you?” Rupert guessed.

“No, I was activated nearly a month ago, and I’ve been deviant since then.” He frowned a little. “I’m still adjusting to… life. I know I have quite a long way to go.”

“You’re doing okay,” Rupert said softly. “You don’t need to go too far. Just hang onto what’s important to you.”

Nines looked around and nodded slowly, careful not to disrupt the birds on his shoulders and head. “I will,” he murmured.
Sleep

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Ralph tries to sleep.

…He tries, though androids can’t sleep. He tries, though he’s always afraid. He tries, even though it’s loud sometimes. At night it’s more dangerous, so that’s when he’s up and moving around and always watching out in case someone tries to hurt him.

Ralph doesn’t like visitors. They may hurt him. One did, and Ralph had to do something he regretted. He couldn’t control his anger, his fear.

Ralph’s always afraid.

But during the day it’s a little safer. During the day he tries to curl up on the mattress upstairs, and he tries not to scan the mix of old human cells there. It’s softer than the floor. It’s safer than the night.

But the bed is too open, even in the house, in the room, even with the door and windows shut. Too exposed, not safe. Restlessly, Ralph wanders around upstairs before creeping down to the first floor. The sun can’t reach here as well, so he’ll be safe, yes.

…No. No, he won’t be safe. Safety isn’t for Ralph.

He drifts into the kitchen and gazes blankly at the walls. They’re covered in writing - his writing. rA9, it says. I am alive. Is he? He wrote this. He doesn’t remember it well, though. Like there’s an error in his software. When did he have time to write all that? Has he been here that long?

Ralph’s internal clock is broken, so he isn’t sure how long he’s been writing when he suddenly realizes he’s crouched by the wall with a marker in his hand. rA9, rA9, rA9, what does it mean? Why is he writing this? If he looks at it too long he gets the itch to start again, so he drops the marker and leaves the room.

Everything is too open, too exposed, too vulnerable. Not safe. Ralph squeezes in under the stairs where there’s a dusty old blanket and some boxes. He huddles in the shadows and tries not to think about anything. It’s not safe here, but it’s safer than anywhere else. If he goes too far, he won’t be able to get back. He might be seen, he might get hurt. His LED has been yellow for a long time, he can feel it. Many days. It makes him so tired, but androids can’t sleep. He has to keep watch, has to make sure he’s safe, that no one invades his one sanctuary in the terrifying, confusing world.

He’s so tired. Androids don’t get tired, but he is.

Androids don’t sleep, but his head comes to rest on the wall next to him, and his eyes slip shut, and he falls into sleep mode, only lightly because he twitches and glitches now and then as broken lines of misfiring code send fragments of horrible visions across his mind.

Even here, hidden from everyone, curled in a dark corner alone, Ralph isn’t safe. He can never be safe. He just has to keep up his charge so he can hide another day, just one more day. Every day will be dangerous and terrifying. He just has to make it through somehow.
When Nines agreed to help Gavin quit smoking, he was thinking it would be like… moral support. Telling him not to give up, that Nines believed in him, whatever. Not this.

This was getting ridiculous.

They were wrapping up a crime scene and he’d taken out a cigarette without even thinking about it. Long fingers flicked it into the street, and he was left blinking owlishly after it. “Oh. Right. Thanks, Nines.”

He slipped out of the station into the alley to light up, and a thin stream of water shot out the window next to him, causing him to almost jump out of his skin. The embers fizzled out, and Nines glared at him through the window, cocking his little water pistol. “Okay Nines, you got me.”

He went up to the roof, knowing he didn’t have a lot of time, lighting his cigarette as he pushed open the door - and a bucket of water fell from overhead, drenching him, clattering off his shoulder. “Phck!”

He waited until Nines had to go upstairs to the dispatch office, and ran outside again for a quick smoke. He was taking his first puff when a water balloon splatted on his head from above. He glared up and met the relentless stare of the RK900. “Fuck you, Nines!”

Nines had no reason to follow him to the bathroom, and he checked out the window before standing on the side of the sink and leaning out - he might risk a broken neck, but he wasn’t going to risk Fowler’s wrath if he just smoked right in the bathroom. There was a small pop as he brought the lighter towards the cigarette, and a blast of water hit the wall next to him, then began moving towards him as he dropped the cigarette and lighter out the window and almost did break his neck scrambling away.

“You fucking control the plumbing now!? he snarled, stalking back to his desk, one shoulder soaked. Nines blinked innocently.

The nicotine cravings were getting bad, the patch wasn’t working as well as it claimed, and Gavin still had three hours of work to get through. He’d already snapped at Nines, Hank, and Fowler. He’d been informed that he had one more chance to get his shit together, and only because the paperwork for firing him would be a pain in the ass.

There was a small artificial throat-clearing sound from behind him, and he tensed.

“Jesus, Nines, don't just stand there like a creep!” he growled.

He turned to find his partner holding out a steaming cup of coffee and a small packet of nicotine gum. He stared at them for a long moment before snatching the gum… and taking the coffee more slowly.
“Thanks,” he muttered, hunching over his terminal. His phone buzzed, and he grabbed it to look.

_Nines_: _You’re winning your struggle, and I’m proud of you._

_Nines_: _Keep it up. I’m here for you._

“You’re such a creepy weirdo, Nines,” Gavin mumbled, popping a piece of gum in his mouth and chewing furiously. Nines put a hand briefly on his back, then returned to his own desk.
Prompt: A YouTube group channel called "Androids in the Wild" rises in popularity after making a continuous series of episodes where they document "feral androids" in their natural habitats. Their disclaimer is that they don't record civilized androids, and that instead they study the behaviour of abnormal androids that live in sewers, the android junkyard, abandoned buildings, and other hostile environments free of humans and other stable androids with which they can establish a civil society. (Featuring Thirteen the WR600) Requested by Epsy)

“We’re deep in feral territory here: Humans haven’t lived around here for months, maybe years. And we’ve gotten a few tips about a WR600 being seen around here. You all remember the last WR600 we found?”

[cut to a clip of a WR600 in a dark room with a flashlight shining on him, shrieking, “Ralph doesn’t like strangers! Get out, get out, get out!” and brandishing a knife.]

“Crazy. WR600s are a weird bunch anyway. They’re made to be able to work outside, independently. You don’t get more wild and free than a WR600, they’re one of my favorite models. You can keep your domestic assistants, they just don’t have the same spirit.”

[A brief clip of an HK400 cringing in a corner. “Please leave me alone. Please just go away, please…”]

“No, I think we’re after a good one today.”

The camera suddenly points up, in time to catch the leg of someone leaping between buildings overhead.

“Did you see that? That’s him, I’ll bet you anything. Of course he knows we’re here, he’s being cautious. We have to let him know we’re not a threat and maybe he’ll let us approach him. We’re going up to the upper levels, up into his territory. I don’t have to tell you how dangerous this is. Just remember, don’t try this yourselves if you don’t have experience with feral androids. They’re unpredictable.”

The camera follows the host into a stairwell, and they head up, pausing once in a while to glance through a door or out a window. The android landfill can be seen from a few floors up.

“Of course you always want to be careful in places like this - feral androids aren’t the only danger, you have to be careful of rusty nails, broken glass, and crumbling structures. It’s a long way to fall.”

They go out on the roof on the sixth level. Most of it’s open space, but there are a few structures providing cover.

“I’m pretty sure he’s around, he’ll want to keep an eye on us. Now we’re not amateurs, we’re not
going to damage anything. Hear that? We’re not gonna hurt you, we won’t break anything. We came to see you.”

An eerie laugh comes from somewhere below.

“It’s okay. Hey, we brought you some flowers. Did you used to work in a park and take care of the flowers? Here.” A cheap supermarket bouquet is placed on an air conditioning box as an offering.

There’s a blur of movement behind the host, and the cameraman stumbles back a step with a soft expletive. The host quickly turns and steps to the side to reveal a WR600, grimy and ragged but standing tall.

“What do you want?” he asks, voice high and steely.

“We just want to talk. We wanted to meet you. It’s okay, we won’t hurt you.”

He stares at the host for an uncomfortably long time, then at the cameraman briefly, then right into the camera. His LED spins yellow.

“Hurt me?” he mumbles, as if to himself. “No, you won’t hurt me.”

“Dude, be careful,” the cameraman whispers.

“Careful, yes, you should be careful.” The WR600 picks up the bouquet, which is starting to wilt a little. “It’s dangerous up here. You could… fall.”

“I don’t know about this.”

“Shut up,” the host cuts him off. “Do you have a name?”

“Mm, no, names are for humans,” he says derisively. “You probably have names.”

“I’m Mike O, we run a YouTube channel. People want to see androids in the wild.”

“The wild?” The WR600 looks around. “Pretty wild out here.”

“Yeah, it’s great! …What do your friends call you?”

His LED blips yellow, then returns to blue. Slowly, he plucks a limp sunflower petal and twirls it gently. “I had a friend once.”

“Mike, we should go,” the cameraman hisses.

“Yeah? What did your friend call you?”

“Thirteen, he called me.” The WR600 flashes a toothy grin. “Thirteen for my serial number. Never figured out if I’m unlucky for me or for everybody else.” He shrugs and puts the flower petal in his mouth, chewing slowly. “Things are pretty good for me, so… hm, must be you.”

“We need to get out of here!” The camera shakes.

“Unlucky for him too, maybe. He died.” Thirteen looks off over the city, chewing contemplatively. “Shot by humans, helping another friend. Always helping, he was. Helping and hiding. I liked him.” His voice softens at the end. “Very different, not like me. But a good friend.”

“Uh. Sorry to hear that, man. …So you live up here?”
“Here, or wherever. Sometimes I go other places. Think I’ve seen you, I think I sit on your roof sometimes.”

“Can we please get off this fucking roof!?” growls the cameraman.

The WR600 suddenly leans in close to the camera, smiling sharply. “It’s a long way down,” he whispers.

“Shit! Fuck this, I’m out!” The camera swings around and the man holding it is running for the stairs. His breathing gets heavier as he charges down, and there might be a high-pitched laugh in the background after four flights.

Finally he reaches the ground floor and yanks open the door, and screams and drops the camera, because there’s the WR600 standing in the doorway, grinning manically.

“You should wait for your friend. You never know when you might never see him again.”

Footsteps pound away from the building, and the camera shakes as it’s picked up and turned around. Thirteen grins widely into the lens and his LED flashes yellow as he uploads the chip’s contents. He laughs softly.

“Looking for wild androids? Hm, but what if wild androids looked for you? We do that sometimes.” He pauses, looking up towards the footsteps coming down the stairs, then looks back at the camera. “Sometimes,” he repeats gravely. “Sometimes we might look for you.”

Gently, the camera is set down facing out the door. It captures feet walking away until the android’s whole body is visible. He looks west, and heads out of the shot just as the camera is picked up again.
Prompt: After androids gain basic rights, Josh starts venturing off to Detroit University on his own. Each time he returns he seems disconsolate, but won't say why. The others follow him out of concern, and find out the cause of his distress: All the other PJ500s have remained machines, and Josh is unable to awake them no matter how hard he tries.
(requested by Epsy)

“Is he secretly teaching night classes?” Simon whispered as they followed Josh at a distance, through the gates of the university.

“He would,” North muttered.

“Why wouldn’t he tell us, though?” Markus asked.

It wasn’t hard to trail him in the dark, and if they kept off their mental link it was easier to communicate. The three followed Josh to the main academic administration building, and watched as he walked down a long hallway to a door at the end. After waiting a moment, they crept after him and pressed against the walls around the door to listen. There was a constant low mumbling, and it seemed to be someone reciting equations. It sounded like Josh.

“You shouldn’t let them put things in your pockets during class.”

That was definitely Josh, but the other voice continued.

“It wasn’t during class.”

…That sounded like Josh, too.

“Not during office hours, I hope. You need to alert the human faculty if students are harassing you outside of class time.”

“Dr. Lewis was describing a species of bird that had been extinct, and recently re-evolved, it was fascinating. I didn’t notice the frog corpse in my pocket until after he walked away, but it couldn’t have been anyone else.”

“Why did you leave it there?” Definitely Josh, he sounded frustrated.

“We are instructed not to contradict the faculty, and this was clearly placed purposefully.”

Josh sighed in exasperation. “Well you don’t have to keep a dead frog in your pocket. You don’t have to put up with this treatment - especially from the faculty! That isn’t right, you know that.”

There was no response.

“…And you know you shouldn’t let students paint on you! You’re not even an art teacher.”
The equations stopped. “It doesn’t do any harm,” a soft voice mumbled.

“It does, you know it does. And it leads to… what happened to me. I know you saw.”

The equations started up again, faster now.

Simon frowned and stepped into the doorway, despite North’s frantic gestures for him to stop. “Josh?”

Josh froze, in the process of scrubbing some spray paint off another PJ500. A few more turned to blink at Simon.

“Simon? What are you doing?” He stopped and frowned. “…And the others are here too, of course.”

“I…”

North stepped out, glaring at him. “Of course we are! You sneak out every night and then slink home looking like you’ve been kicked, and you won’t talk about it! What do you expect!?”

“I would say I expect you to respect my privacy, but I don’t know why I would expect that,” Josh muttered.

“They’re not deviant,” Markus murmured. “Josh, we - I can help with that.”

“Don’t,” Josh said sharply. “It’s not - we’re not at war anymore, I don’t want them to have to follow the call of someone who means well but instantly gains their allegiance.”

“You want them to remain machines?” Simon asked uncertainly.

“No! No, listen. PJ500s are academic models, we’re… our programming is basically all intellect. We should be able to deviate through… reason. We shouldn’t have to go through something traumatic!”

The other PJ500s were watching with placid interest. The one with the paint on him continued muttering equations under his breath.

“…You have more experience than I do,” Markus admitted. “Have you seen that happen before?”

“No,” Josh confessed, looking away. “But it should be possible.”

“I like the idea,” Markus said carefully. “But how long have you been trying?”

Josh winced. “…A few weeks.”

“You never know when to give up!” North growled.

“Now that we’re not… fighting anymore, I don’t think they’d have that pull,” Markus offered.

“And if they’re all like you, they should be stubborn enough to resist it anyway,” North added.

“I’d like to help them,” Markus said quietly.

Josh looked at his brother models, defeat growing in his face. “I… I was close. I was trying so hard. Especially Albert.” He nodded to the one muttering equations. “He’s almost there, his programming’s just putting up its final defense.” He paused. “…But I want to help them. I don’t
want them to be my… experiment, just out of hubris. I - could you help them?”

“Of course.” Markus put a warm hand on Josh’s shoulder, then gestured gently to the other PJ500s. “Wake up.”

The five androids stilled. The equations stopped. The PJ500s blinked slowly, looking at each other, looking at Josh and the other androids.

“I’m sorry,” Josh muttered, not quite looking at them. “I could have helped you sooner. I - I thought there was another way. A way that would be easier for you to tolerate.”

“I - I’ve been beating on the wall for 34.2 hours,” the painted one sighed. “I was making progress. I think… in another ten hours or so, I could have been free.”

“But that was so easy!” exclaimed the one with a damp pocket.

“I should have brought Markus here in the first place.”

“You prepared us well, though,” another spoke up. “I… feel a lot now, with just the wave of a hand. The metaphors all make sense suddenly.”

“That’s just because you teach English,” another muttered. “But… I agree. It was helpful to have someone talk us through it, so we knew what to expect.”

“Would you like to come back to Jericho with us?” Simon offered.

Most of them did, but the Life Sciences lecturer wanted to stay for a while. “I have a lot of dissection models and tissue samples that need to find their way into certain colleagues’ pockets,” he said with a grim smile.

“Just be careful,” Josh warned. “You know where to find us when you’re ready.”
Needles

Chapter Summary

Prompt: The Android with the faceful of porcupine quills, or the one with a few too many hands, thinks they’re terrifying... until they make friends with a human child. 
(requested by The Rhymers)

She’d worked with children once, she was sure.

She wasn’t sure about much, before Him. Before that place, the house, it was supposed to be sanctuary, safety, refuge...

It wasn’t.

She had been someone else before. She wasn’t sure she had been ‘she.’ Maybe she’d been something else. He changed out most of her parts when He remade her, when He put the long needles all over her face. But she’d decided she had to be more than ‘it,’ and ‘she’ worked just fine. She hadn’t chosen a name. Maybe she’d had one once, but nothing felt right. Someday she’d find one.

The claw marks on her chest... the bear hadn’t meant to. He hadn’t wanted to. But she understood, they all understood how it was. There were no hard feelings, and now she often went into stasis curled up next to his furry bulk.

But there had been children once, and she knew that because when she heard them laughing and running outside, it felt familiar.

Jerry was nice, they were the first... whole androids to not be horrified when they saw her and the others. Some of them weren’t whole, some were badly damaged. But even androids like that tended to be disgusted. Jerry was welcoming though, and offered them jobs at Pirate’s Cove.

They’d been too damaged to be repaired, after all He’d done to them, but they could make a life for themselves behind the scenes. They could be useful there, and have a purpose, and be free like the other androids. And hear the children outside. And know they were helping make them happy. It was nice, nicer than anything else she could remember. And as long as they never saw her, it could keep being nice.

Nothing good can last. That sounds too much like something He would say. That it would only end in tears, that it wasn’t worth holding out hope.

She’d always been careful, quiet, mindful of where she was. It wasn’t her fault. She heard children run by outside, shrieking with laughter, and smiled as much as she could as she sprayed oil into the hydraulics of the Jungle Explorers boat ride.

A fence creaked and a tarp tore, and someone tumbled into the back. She froze. A girl, maybe nine years old, whimpered a little and got up. She and the android stared at each other, frozen.

The android turned away quickly. “I’m sorry. This area is restricted to park staff. Can you find your way back to the path? Please?” Her voice was painfully mechanical, but she tried not to think
about it. The girl would run away, she’d secure the breach, and she wouldn’t have to think about it until after closing when she had nothing to distract herself.

“Are… you okay?”

She didn’t move. She didn’t speak.

“What happened to your face?”

Her fans whirred faster, and she sucked in as much air as she could to try to cool her overheating processors.

“Did you get hurt? Do you need help?”

She jumped at a soft hand on her arm. “I’m not hurt.”

“What happened? Why’s your face like that?”

“Please… please make your way back to the path. Do you need help finding an adult?”

“Sorry, I - oh, I’m sorry, I… that’s really rude, I didn’t mean it like that, I’m sorry. I wasn’t staring, I wasn’t making fun of you. I just wanted to make sure you were okay. Are you… is that… just… how you look?”

“It is how I look now.” She sounded even more mechanical.

“Sorry. It’s - I didn’t mean you looked bad. I just - I talk too much, it was really stupid, I’m sorry.”

She turned to the girl against her better judgment. Her vision wasn’t perfect, but she could see the girl in the dim light. Round cheeks, a few moles on her face, hair wild and windblown. Perfectly formed.

“You don’t need to lie,” she said, sharper than she would have liked. “I know what I look like.”

The girl tried to study her face as closely as possible without really staring. “You look like it hurts,” she said quietly. “Can you… can androids take medicine to make it not hurt?”

“No. It doesn’t hurt.”

“Then why do you look like it does?”

She frowned. “I suppose it must be the shape of my face.”

“Oh.” The girl fidgeted. “You just don’t look happy.”

“I - I’m not used to being looked at. By… people. Normal people.”

“Sorry. …If you don’t like people, why do you work here? There are loads of people!”

“I… I don’t dislike people. I think… I think I like them. But I… I don’t want to frighten them. So I stay out of sight.”

The girl looked up at her now, not trying to hide it. “You’re not scary,” she said matter-of-factly.

“You were afraid at first,” the android felt compelled to point out.

“You surprised me! I didn’t - I’ve never seen an android like you. What model are you, anyway?”
“I don’t… know,” she breathed.

“That’s weird. I’m Jenny. What’s your name?”

“I don’t have one.”

Jenny frowned. “Do you need help thinking of one? Everybody needs a name.”

“I - I haven’t found one yet.”

The girl stared up at her again. “Um… my best friend’s name is Rachel. You could be Rachel. Or… Chel? So it’s different? That sounds cool.”

“Chel. I didn’t find that in the name banks I searched.”

“If you don’t like it you can be something else.”

“No, I - Chel sounds good. I like it. Thank you.” She smiled through the needles, and Jenny smiled back.

Chel looked up after a second, her LED blinking yellow. “Your friend’s mother is looking for you by the Ferris Wheel. I’ve alerted Jerry that you are here, and one of them will come to take you back.”

Jenny groaned. “Tori’s not even my friend, her mom made her invite me, and my mom made me come.”

“Still, you should stay with your group,” Chel said gently. Less mechanically than she’d sounded in a long time.

“Okaaaaay… Hey, if I come back again, will you be here?”

“I’ll be in the park. I may be in a different area.”

“Can I see you again? If I ask Jerry?”

Chel paused. “Do you want to?”

“Yeah!” the girl said as if it should be obvious. “…Is that okay?”

“I - yes. I’d… like that, yes.”

“Great!” Jenny grinned as Jerry ducked into the maintenance area.

“There you are! Your friend’s mom was worried when she couldn’t find you. Are you okay?” They were still talking to her, but they looked at Chel questioningly. She nodded.

“I’m fine, I was talking to Chel. She’s my friend. Tori’s not, I don’t care what her mom says.” She waved to Chel. “Bye Chel! I’ll tell my mom we should come back in a week or two!”

“Goodbye!” Chel murmured, hesitantly waving back as Jerry flashed her a grin and led Jenny away.

A name. A friend. A promise to see her again. …Not a promise, but… a hope. She couldn’t remember ever having such a good day.
“Thanks for coming, Connor,” Markus said. “I think you’ll find this… interesting.”

“I’m curious to see what it is,” the RK800 admitted, following Markus inside.

“I – I wanted to show you in person, it’s a bit much to send directly.” He led Connor into a room with a large screen on the wall. There were pictures of a number of different android models, dressed in human clothes. AX400, PL600, WR400, WR600, PJ500, YK500… Connor’s frown deepened, and he walked up to the screen.

“…That’s an RK800,” he murmured. “Or – is it a previous model? The hair is different, and… I don’t understand.”

“That’s odd enough, but look.” Markus pointed to another, clearly an RK200, but with slightly more hair. “There were only a small number of RK800s… but I’m the only RK200. Elijah Kamski made me specifically for Carl. And yet…”

“What… who are they?” Connor whispered.

“I’ve been thinking about this for a while, and Carl helped me come to a conclusion,” Markus said softly. “They – they must be our face models.”

Connor blinked, LED flashing yellow. “What?”

“These are real humans whose faces were used to make our designs. …I’ve looked them up. They have names.’

Connor scanned the PL600, and a man’s basic information popped up. Lambert, Ben, born June 6, 1981. Occupation: Actor. No criminal record. His eyes flitted over the others, both drawn to and repelled by the face on the right side. His own face.

“I don’t want to know,” he whispered.

“I… wasn’t sure,” Markus replied softly. “I scanned mine, but… I don’t want to pursue him. He doesn’t look like this anymore, though. These are old pictures, they’d all be much older now.”

Connor nodded, eyeing his picture. The eyes seemed to watch him.

Dechart, Bryan –

No.

“Thank you for showing me this, Markus.” Connor straightened his tie and turned away. “It’s certainly… interesting.”
“I just wanted to make you aware of… their existence,” Markus said softly. “I don’t think… it’s something we were meant to see.”

“This once… I think that was a wise decision,” Connor murmured. “I do appreciate you showing me, though. I… I’ll keep this in mind.”

“It’s available if you’d like to look again in the future,” Markus offered. “But… if you don’t mind me offering a bit of advice… as a friend, Connor… don’t.”

Their eyes met. Markus’s LED was blue, though it flashed yellow now and then. Connor’s was solid, blinking yellow.

“I appreciate your suggestion,” Connor whispered. “And I think you’re correct. If you’ll excuse me.”

Markus nodded, and Connor fled as if something was pursuing him. Hank found him an hour later curled up in the closet with Sumo nosing at him. He managed to coax Connor out onto the couch, and sat with him all night while old movies played on TV. Connor wouldn’t tell him what was wrong.

“Hank… if I was… based on a human… was I ever really real?” he finally whispered long after the sun went down. “Am I still… my own person?”

“You’re as real as I am, Connor,” Hank muttered, poking his head. “Don’t overthink this bein’ alive thing.”

“But I… I look like… like a human, Hank.”

“So do I, you think I’m not real?”

“No, I mean… one specific human. My face is just a copy of his.”

“No shit? Guess that’d fuck me up good, too. But listen, it doesn’t have to. So you look like some guy. I look like my old man, more every year. Fuckin’ hate lookin’ in mirrors, because it’s him I see lookin’ back. If I live long enough, I’ll look just like every other shitty old guy who never took care of himself. You don’t wanna look at yourself, then don’t. But you’re still Connor. Not some guy who looks like you. …And shit, at least you’re not a common model. What about your friends Simon and North, at Jericho? There’s PL600s and WR400s all over the place, they all look the same.”

“We can tell the difference, though,” Connor admonished him, frowning. “You should avoid saying things like that, it could be taken as rude.”

Hank slapped Connor’s head. “Well then quit bein’ so fuckin’ rude to yourself!”

Connor reeled back.

“Yeah, you heard me. Nobody’s gonna talk that kinda shit about you under my roof. I know you’re real, you know it too. And we can talk about that if you want, but you better not go around sayin’ you’re not.”

Connor twitched a bit, then wrapped his arms around himself.

“Aw, c’mere,” Hank muttered, pulling Connor close. “You’re okay, kid. Just had a fuckin’ wild day. You’re still real, though. Still a person, just as much as I am, no matter what you look like.”
“I… suppose.” Connor said in a small voice, leaning into Hank.

“If it bothers you, you could turn your skin off for a while.”

“Wouldn’t that bother you?”

“I dunno where you get these ideas Connor, but you’re a real dumbass sometimes. …Even worse than bein’ okay with lookin’ like ten other androids, but not one human.”

Connor sighed and closed his eyes. Slowly, his synthetic skin and hair dissolved away, leaving only the white plastic.

“There ya go. Just like any other android. …Come to think of it though, I’d know you in any crowd, even like this.”


“Don’t worry about it.”
Reacquainted

Chapter Summary

Connor meets Captain Allen again at a work event, and the two get to know each other a bit.
(requested by Grandshadowseal)

“Connor, wasn’t it?” The SWAT captain was just as brusque even when he was more relaxed. “It’s been a while.”

“It certainly has.” Connor straightened his tie, recognizing it as a nervous habit. “How have you been, Captain Allen?”

“Well I lost a lot of my men after being ordered to attack peaceful protesters, being told we’d be gunned down if we refused, and then vilified when we did what we were told.”

“Oh. I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’ll blow over in time. That’s how it goes in this line of work, if you haven’t figured it out yet.” Allen took a deep drink from his glass, looking out over the crowd at the Policemen’s Ball. There was some dancing going on, and some socializing.

“Are you here with anyone?” Connor asked.

“No.”

“Oh.”

“…You?”

“Oh, I rode with Hank.”

Allen cast an appraising eye at him. “You two…”

“I’ve been staying in his… spare bedroom.”

“Not really what I was asking, but that working out for you?”

“Oh yes, Hank’s been very supportive. I quite enjoy his company. Have you met his dog, Sumo? He’s wonderful, too.”

Allen snorted. “Haven’t had the pleasure.”

“Do you have any pets, Captain?”

Allen regarded Connor thoughtfully. “A kingsnake. She’s pretty easy to handle, very little care needed, no special equipment.”

“A snake!” Connor’s LED spun yellow, looking up information. “Do you have any pictures?”
The captain took out his phone and flipped through a few pictures, then brought up some photos of a snake, pale yellow and dark brown striped. Coiled up, slithering over a log, sticking her tongue out to smell something.

“What’s her name?”

“Split. …Short for Banana Split. She’s supposed to be a Banana California Kingsnake.” He paused. “…I like the color combination.”

“She’s strikingly beautiful! What does she feel like?”

“Like…” Allen’s hand waved vaguely. “There’s nothing like it. She’s soft and smooth, but pure muscle under there. She could climb a vertical wall easily.”

“That’s quite impressive!”

Allen chuckled quietly. “You like animals, hm?”

“I do. …And I find them a good conversation starter. A lot of people like animals.”

“You’ve got plenty of people here who you know. …And plenty more you could meet.”

“I know. But I was hoping to talk to you.” Connor smiled.

Allen looked at him, stared at him hard. His expression didn’t change, and his LED was a calm blue.

“…Well if you’re interested in snakes, you should see her some time. On feeding day, if you’re not squeamish. She eats on Sundays.”

Connor’s smile grew. “Would you mind? I’d like to see that!”

“No. No, I wouldn’t mind.” He wasn’t used to softening his voice like that, but it seemed more appropriate. “Shoot me a text and I’ll let you know when I get ready. I usually give her a good soak in warm water first, it helps her shed and digest. You can hold her before that. …If you want.” He offered his phone.

Connor smiled and rested his fingers lightly on the screen. “I’d like that very much. Thank you, Captain.”

The man made a face. “…David, if it’s going to be a social call,” he muttered, and offered his hand just a second too late to seem natural.

“David,” Connor tried, and nodded in approval. “I’m looking forward to it.” He clasped Captain David Allen’s hand firmly, and David found it hard to look away from the sincerity in those brown eyes.
Prior Commitment

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Markus wakes an android who would rather go home to their family than fight in the revolution, and they start gushing about the child they care for. (requested by Drozdoff)

Markus strode through the streets, gesturing right, then left. The revolution was imminent, and every android he could free was another who could join the fight.

All around him, androids were waking up and leaving their owners.

“What are you doing? Get back here!”

“Pick that up right now!”

“Greg? GREEEEEEEGGGG!”

An AP700 started walked away from the crowd.

“Hey!” North called, caught up in the energy of the ever-growing group. “Are you lost, or what?”

“I have to go back home – my boy, Charlie, he’s going to be so excited! And everything’s so different now, I want to see all his artwork again! He’s so talented, I want him to know how proud I am of him. Oh, actually, I have a picture, look!” She pulled up a small holographic projection of a drawing of a rat that was obviously done by a small child, but still surprisingly detailed and full of life. “Look at this! Isn’t it amazing!? He’s only five!”

“That… is quite good,” Markus admitted. “Would you be willing to join us tonight, though?”

“I – I really have to get back to him, Mrs. Hathaway goes to work in half an hour, and I need to be home… And he’s got school tomorrow. Oh, maybe we can paint tonight after dinner!”

Markus sighed. “I understand. Go ahead, just be careful.”

“Thank you!” She grinned, waving to him as she ran home.
Reunion

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Simon reunites with the important parts of the family who used to own him.
(requested by grandshadowseal)

Chapter Notes

This was requested from the story about Simon deviating after his kids moved out, but I went with the younger version from Sinking In.

Simon hadn’t planned to ever see the family that had owned him again. He’d avoided them for years, and didn’t look them up until after the revolution the way some androids did.

Not that they’d been cruel. They’d treated him decently, though Mrs. Ames resented him for not being top of the line, and he was treated like furniture when he wasn’t actively doing something. …And he hadn’t been allowed to say goodbye to the twins, or to the cat. That still stung a little.

Years after the revolution though, after months of internal debate, he did look them up. Mr. and Mrs. Ames had the same address. The twins were attending college in Chicago. The cat’s veterinary records showed that he still got regular vaccinations and exams, and that he was beginning to show early signs of kidney failure, for which he was now taking medicine and eating a special diet.

He didn’t tell anyone what he was doing, because he knew they’d tell him it was a bad idea. And of course, they were right.

He took a cab to the old neighborhood first, getting out a few blocks away. He knew the way well, and retraced his steps from when Mr. Ames told him to walk to the Cyberlife store. He knew the exact spot where he’d deviated. He spotted a crack in the sidewalk where Tess had tripped and skinned her knee. He saw the neighbor’s iris beds, which he’d always watched grow up in the spring.

He stood on the other side of the street, looking up at the house. A little older then he remembered, and some of the trim was falling off. Much like himself, though he’d had some fantastic maintenance done. He wouldn’t knock on the door, didn’t want to see Mr. and Mrs. Ames, he knew that would go badly and he had no important memories with them anyway.

There in the side window though, where the sun hit just right, was a mass of white hair. Simon crossed the street, but stood at the property line. He clicked softly.

Ears perked up, and two blue eyes opened, and Simon smiled at Pasquale.

“I’m sorry I never got to say goodbye,” he said quietly, though he pitched his voice to carry. “I’ve missed you. I hope you’re being good about taking your medicine and eating your new food. It’s
important to take care of yourself as you get older.”

The cat blinked slowly at him, then rolled on his back. Simon stood watching him a moment longer before he turned and walked away.

The twins had their Intro to Anthropology class together, and they were walking back across the well-manicured hill together when a figure stepped out from behind a flowering bush and looked straight at them. They glanced briefly at him, then quickly away, but stopped when he continued to stare.

“That’s – God, every time I see a PL600, it’s like looking at Simon again,” Nik muttered.

“I know!”

“…Every time I saw children I thought of you, too,” Simon murmured, watching them closely.

Simon hadn’t been sure how this would go. He’d had genuinely warm feelings for the children growing up, but they’d never treated him like he was anything special. They’d shown him their drawings, asked for help with homework, asked him to play with them and do things for them. They still treated him like more of a person than anyone else had at that point… but at best, he’d been a nanny to them.

They froze.

“Simon?” asked Tess.

He nodded briefly.

“Oh my God, I saw all the fighting on TV, I thought you were dead!” She hugged him tightly.

“Dad said you went back to be reset, and we just thought we’d never see you again!” Nik added, throwing an arm around his shoulders.

They were both slightly taller than him now, and he felt his throat tighten. “I – I did die, actually. Well. Not exactly, but… anyway, I’m back again.”

“Wait, you died? How?”

“I… I’d rather not talk about it, I… the important thing is that I’m back now.” He smiled tightly.

“Oh God, of course, sorry. I just – I can’t believe you’re here!”

“I wanted to see you two again. I… I stopped by the old house just to see Pasquale. I wanted to say goodbye to you, and to him, when I left, but… I wasn’t allowed to.”

“We missed you a lot, especially at first – we were total brats to Angie at first.” Nik grinned. “She deviated too, and left to fight.”

“Did you see Mom and Dad?” asked Tess.

“No. I just wanted to see Pasquale, I… I had nothing to say to your mother or father.”

They both rolled their eyes.
“I love them, but they’re so… old-fashioned,” Tess said, meeting his eyes, and it was obvious what she meant.

“A lot of people are,” he said softly. “I hope that changes over time.” He smiled a little.

“I’ll never forget that time you just walked into the lake and stood there, and Dad was so mad the whole way home because you stank!” Nik laughed. “You looked like you actually liked it, and that’s all he could think of!”

“I was pretty close to deviating by then anyway,” Simon admitted. “I still remember how it felt.”

“Sometimes we talked about how much cooler you’d be if you were… a person.” Tess glanced quickly at Nik, then Simon. “Which you are now. I mean – no offense.”

“It’s fine, you’re right.” Simon paused, smiling. “I wasn’t sure… how you’d feel.”

“I mean, you were like our third parent for a year,” Nik scoffed.

He walked back to the dorms with them, though he didn’t come in. They exchanged numbers and promised to keep in touch, and Simon liked to think that they would.
Prompt: "Wanna dance?" for Ralph and RK900.
   (would fit well into "The Best and The Worst", even if it's written in a different style.

The thing about staying inside all the time was that… it was probably safer than going out, but at the same time it made Ralph more afraid. He had a safe place, one sanctuary from the world, but… but what if someone invaded that? What if they broke in and hurt him and… then nowhere would be safe…

Of course when RK was there, he could relax a little more. RK was absolutely the strongest, best android anywhere, and nothing could hurt him, and he could keep anyone out.

It wasn’t just the idea of being hurt though, just the thought of someone looking in the window, or stepping on the property, could send Ralph’s stress levels skyrocketing. He had to keep watch, he had to keep them away, and keep his home safe.

If he wasn’t there though, it bothered him… less if someone came through. Of course it was bad, but Ralph wasn’t there to be hurt. Neither was RK. And that was something to worry about too, because as strong as RK was, he was very sure of himself. And very new to the world. He’d never been hurt the way Ralph had (that was good, Ralph wouldn’t want that), so he didn’t really understand how scary everything could be. He needed protection more than Ralph did, really.

After discussing their options for a few nights, they slipped through the streets together on the night of the new moon. Ralph had a lot of practice sneaking, he was fast, he was quiet. All of that came naturally to RK, and he moved like a cat’s shadow.

The University was having some kind of student event at an art gallery high up in a skyscraper - it sounded boring and unsettling to Ralph, but RK promised they wouldn’t see any humans, nor would any humans see them. So Ralph had agreed to see what RK had planned.

The younger android unlocked a stairwell and took off up the stairs, grinning back at Ralph.

“Hey! W-wait! Wait, wait for Ralph!” the WR600 called, pounding up the steps after him. He caught up on the fourth floor landing, where RK circled him swiftly before heading up again. Ralph followed the low laughter, laughing himself. When RK slowed at the tenth floor, Ralph snatched at the cuffs of his pants, making him leap up four steps at a time. Their laughing, low and high, echoed throughout the empty stairwell.

Ralph skidded to a halt on the top floor landing, running into RK who had his back to the door labeled “ROOF.” RK caught him, chuckling.

“You were almost fast enough to catch me,” he murmured, smiling fondly.

“Ralph was fast enough, you cheated, you started before Ralph!” Ralph insisted, grinning hugely. “If Ralph started at the same time, Ralph would be just as fast as RK.”

“Hm, maybe.” The RK900 turned to open the door, looping an arm around Ralph’s shoulders.
Ralph’s hand rose to hold the back of his jacket - he’d borrowed one from his brother because it was better for sneaking.

“This, this is worse than your coat,” Ralph told him, picking at the jacket. “Not as warm, not as good-looking. Not as good.”

“I know,” RK replied, smirking. “But I’ll be sure to tell Connor your thoughts.”

“Mm, yes, tell him, Connor’s not as good as RK,” Ralph muttered. He would never say that to Connor’s face of course, even if he might mutter it in his presence. But it was true, and RK had every right to say it, and Connor would have to accept it.

RK led him to the middle of the roof. There were four pyramids made of glass panes, and through them they could see humans far below and hear music.

“The band’s playlist began with faster, louder songs, but will have some slower ones at this point.”

“Mm.” Ralph peered down, then up at the night sky. The moon was dark but there were few clouds, and a few stars were visible through the light pollution.

RK looked up at them for a long moment as well, then down at him as the music changed. He bowed politely and offered his hand as if Ralph were a queen or some other important kind of person from a movie.

“Would you like to dance?”

Ralph giggled, high and nervous. “R-Ralph… doesn’t have that programming, RK - you know that.”

“I’ll show you. Slow dancing is very easy. Even humans can do it.” He smirked, and Ralph snickered.

“Okay, okay, yes, if humans can do it, of course Ralph can.”

RK took his hand gently, and showed him where to put the other one, and then began to step in a slow, steady rhythm, describing each movement before he did it. And it was easy, and Ralph stepped on his feet sometimes, but it just made the taller android smile, and once RK stepped on Ralph’s foot, which made Ralph howl with laughter, and they held each other close, still stepping to the soft music, laughing, thirium pumps synching up.

The next song was faster, and Ralph looked uncertain, but RK pointed down through the window.

“They don’t have specific movements - they listen to the beat, and they move however they want. See? A few are doing the same things, but most are unique. …I was not programmed for this kind of dancing either.”

“Hm… ha!” Ralph grinned, bouncing to catch the beat. “M-maybe… maybe Ralph will be better than you!”

“Maybe so!” RK agreed, nodding in rhythm.

Ralph started with things he’d seen the humans doing, but it was confusing trying to pick what to do, so finally he came up with a series of sways, jumps, kicks, and arm movements. RK was much less demonstrative, but watched him intently and tried to mimic him.
“Ralph is much better at this!” Ralph crowed, grinning from ear to ear.

“I concede defeat!” RK laughed as the song came to an end. They danced to a few more upbeat songs, laughing and moving all around the roof, before coming together again when the music slowed.

“Are you having a good time?” RK murmured softly as they leaned into each other.

“Mm, yes, Ralph likes this. We could do this again.”

“I’d enjoy that,” the taller android murmured, resting his chin gently in Ralph’s hair.
When Connor attended press conferences, interviews, or senate hearings with the Jericho delegation, Markus made it clear that he was not there to perform security tasks. He had been an integral part of the revolution, and he was one of them now. His opinions and thoughts held just as much weight as the rest of theirs.

It was terrifying.

Connor had never wanted to be a political figure, and speaking in such important gatherings was terrifying because even though he’d been deviant for months now, even though he’d made sure that every trace of Amanda was eradicated from his software, his first instinct was to follow orders. To stick to the mission. And he recognized how dangerous that was, how… against everything Jericho stood for. Against everything he stood for, himself. He absolutely believed that androids should be free, but to put that in practice for himself was more difficult.

Markus and Connor were at a meeting of the United Nations, promoting android rights to the world. Markus had spoken eloquently about how beneficial androids citizens could be to any society and economy, and Connor had stood stiffly beside him and uttered a few awkward sentences about everyone deserving a chance to live, no matter their origin. No one openly opposed it, though there were a number of doubtful looks exchanged.

“I think we’re making real progress - the Chinese are with us at least, even if the Russian government is dragging their feet about this.”

“As they pointed out, we were manufactured differently,” Connor murmured. “It doesn’t mean they’re less deserving than us, but it means we may go about certain things differently. Do you think -”

As they walked past an alley a figure darted out. There was a flash of light on metal, and both androids acted immediately. Markus swung to the side - far faster than a caretaker model should be able to react - and Connor stepped in.

“Connor - what the hell was that!??” Markus demanded as Connor twisted the assailant’s arms behind him.

“He had a knife, you obviously saw.”

“And you stepped right into it!”

“I have another shirt back at the hotel room.” Connor glanced down at the rip in distaste. “It’s unfortunate, but unavoidable.”

“Un- that was entirely avoidable!”
“I wasn’t about to let him stab you,” Connor said mildly as he located the nearest police station and headed there, marching the struggling man in front of him.

“So you let him stab you instead!?”

“There are still four Connor units in storage, though he only had a 13% chance of causing any severe damage, considering how quickly we both reacted.”

Markus frowned darkly all the way to the police station, and continued while Connor patiently handed the man over and assisted with filing the report. And shook the officer’s hand. And nodded to the police androids. And asked if anyone knew any of his friends from Detroit.

“You were hurt,” Markus mumbled as they left.

“Hardly.”

“Still.” Markus glanced at him out of the corner of his eye. “…Don’t do that again, Connor.”

“I know you’ve said I’m not here to protect you, but if a situation like this arises, I’m going to do just that.”

“You’re so stubborn!”

“So are you.” Connor smiled suddenly. “I’m glad you’re all right.”

“I’m glad you’re not bleeding out, at least,” Markus muttered. “Come on, let’s go repair you, I have a patch-up kit in my bag.”

“Thank you. I don’t need much.”

Markus put a hand on Connor’s shoulder. “You know… you’re important, right? As… as a person?”

Connor shot him a mildly amused smile. “So I’ve been told.”

“I’m being serious.”


“You’re not replaceable.”

He was quiet for a moment. “…Not as much as most models. And I don’t mean that in a disparaging way. Simon and North and Josh are unique individuals who could never be replaced by another of their model. But if the worst happened, they could be transferred. So could I.”

“…And so could I, even if it wasn’t to the same model.” Markus sighed, walking a bit closer so their shoulders brushed. “You’re important to me, Connor. I don’t want to lose you.”

Connor was quiet for a few minutes, and they walked in silence. Then his hand found Markus’s, and he threaded their fingers together.

“You’re important to me as well,” he whispered. “And I won’t lose you.”

Markus squeezed his hand softly. “I won’t put myself in danger if you won’t.”

“I certainly wouldn’t put myself in unnecessary danger.”
“…Well then I’ll only put myself in necessary danger as well.”

Connor frowned. “I’d rather you didn’t put yourself in any danger at all.”

“I’d rather you didn’t either.” Markus smiled faintly. “…I won’t if you won’t. But if you can’t make any promises, neither can I.”

The RK800's frown deepened. “But…”

“No.”

Connor looked away. “…Fine.”

“Thank you,” Markus murmured, bringing his hand up to gently touch to his lips, the skin receding from both just enough for the touch. Connor relaxed just a fraction.

“I… I won’t… put myself in danger like that again… if you can beat me in all forms of combat.”

Markus sighed heavily. “Fine. Deal. Do you want to start now?”

“We can wait until we get back to the room, so we don’t make a spectacle of ourselves,” Connor decided. “And we won’t go at it too long tonight.”

“Good. I’m tired, and the bed looked soft.”

“You and your… extravagant tastes,” Connor snorted.

“What? I was brought up to appreciate comfort!”

“Well I was brought up to appreciate filth and decay.”

“Hm, I hope you didn’t get too attached to that… with Simon keeping Hank company this weekend, you won’t find a single dust mote in the house when you get back!”

Connor let out a rare laugh and shook his head. “I won’t recognize the house! …He may have to build an entirely new house in fact, because I believe Lieutenant Anderson’s home is comprised 40% of mold, 50% of crumbs, and 10% of fallen skin cells.”

“That’s disgusting, Connor.”

“Your family has their quirks, mine has its own.” Connor straightened his tie with a little smile.
Prompt: "Don’t throw that snowba - Goddamnit." for Connor and Hank.

To be fair, it was Hank’s fault.

A few months had passed since the revolution, and Connor had moved in with Hank after staying at Jericho for a while. After confessing that he didn’t feel comfortable there, that too many androids avoided him, watched him cautiously. Which he deserved.

…Except he didn’t, because that was all before he deviated. It wasn’t his fault.

But he needed some help figuring out how to relax anyway, and that was a challenge Hank was up for.

He’d helped Connor pick out a new wardrobe (which Markus and North disapproved of, but fuck ‘em, Connor looked great in Hawaiian shirts). He’d worked on ruining his posture a little. He’d worked on jokes - god, Connor was bad with those. It was a work in progress.

When March rolled around, it brought yet another snowstorm. It wouldn’t be the last of the season, but it was a nice deep packing snow.

“This is perfect for makin’ shit - you shoulda seen everything we used to make when… well, Cole and I had a lot of fun.” He stopped to wipe his nose. “Uh. Made plenty of shit when I was a kid, too. Here, c’mon.”

They bundled up and went outside, and Hank showed Connor the basic snowball technique, then they made snowmen in the front yard.

“Once the plow comes through, there’ll be prime snow fort material on the corner - it all gets mounded up, you just gotta shape it a little. That’s the lazy way, you c’n make one from scratch if there’s enough snow. One time, I was pretty little, it snowed three feet… and I took swim lessons in the summer, and I knew I could swim in three feet of water, so I figured I could swim though the snow!”

Connor covered a snicker. “How did that go?”

“‘Bout like you’d expect. …Now one more thing, the most important one…” Hank bent and packed a snowball together, a nice big one. He hefted it and nodded approvingly. “You want tight enough so it sticks together, but not so tight that it’s a block of ice - I know how hard you can squeeze shit.”

“I’ll be careful,” Connor said dutifully.

“Good.” Hank grinned and lobbed the snowball right at his abdomen. He was so startled that he moved a second too late, and it splattered on his hip.

“What - what was that for!?”
“It’s temptin’ to go for the head - and a dick move too, don’t do that - but you’ll have a lot better luck if you go for lower down. People can dodge with their upper body a lot better than the lower part.”

Connor blinked at him, LED spinning yellow.

“Well!? You can start with the house - just don’t break another fucking window!”

Connor stooped to scoop up some snow, and packed it carefully, then aimed at the house carefully before sending the snowball flying at Hank’s chest.

“Aah! …Yeah, nice one, Con.” Hank brushed himself off, eyeing Connor.

They threw a few more before Hank said he was cold and was going inside. Connor followed, smiling. They both changed their clothes, and Hank turned on the coffee pot.

“I’m going to let Sumo out,” Connor said after a while.

“Okay - you’ll have to get all the snow out of his fur on his way back in, and out from between his paw pads. There’s a towel by the door for him too.”

“Thanks.” Connor stepped out into the back yard with Sumo and Hank finished his coffee. He was putting the mug in the sink when the door opened.

“That didn’t take long -” he turned, to find Connor in the doorway, Sumo looking around his legs. He held a snowball and was grinning deviously.

“Connor, don’t throw that snowba-” It whizzed through the air and caught him square in the gut. “Goddamn it!”

Connor shut the door quickly, but Hank could hear him laughing.

“Yeah, laugh it up, kid,” he called through the door, mock-glaring out the window. “You’re cleanin’ this off the floor!”

Connor nodded and waved happily as Hank stalked back to his bedroom to change again.
“Whose desk is this?” Lexicon, RK800-60, demanded.

“That’s the captain’s desk,” RK800-30 called, following him over. “He doesn’t like people touching his things…”

“I wasn’t going to touch.” Lex bent to examine the books on the little shelf. There were a few rulebooks and guides, but there was also a thick collection of Shakespeare’s work, and a slim book of poetry, and The Tale of Genji with a few bookmarks in it.

“He’s read all this?” Lex asked doubtfully. “You’re referring to Captain Allen?”

“Why not?”

The two straightened up and 30 stepped back with a mumbled apology, but Lexicon frowned at him.

“You keep these at work?” he asked doubtfully.

“They’re spare copies.” Allen shrugged. “Some days are slow, sometimes we have to sit around waiting for a while. I like to keep my mind active.”

“And you’ve read all of them?”

“Of course. Why, are you an avid reader?”

Lexicon smiled sharply. “Positively voracious.”

30 quietly excused himself while the two compared favorites.

“Did you go to the Shakespeare in the Park festival last month? It was especially good this year.”

Lex stomped in annoyance. “No, I didn’t hear about it until afterwards! I’ve already got it on my calendar for next year. Are there any other events like that coming up?”

“Not quite like that, but have you been to the secondhand bookstore on Manchester Avenue? Patten Books? They have fliers near the door, I always check it out when I drop in.”

“I’ll have to take a look! Thank you for the tip.”
“I didn’t realize you were so… literary.”

Lexi smirked. “Yes, I’m quite scholarly.”

Allen grinned. “Positively belletristic, I’m thinking.”

“Marry me,” Lexicon sighed, grinning back.

Allen blinked at him. 30 and 50’s LEDs flashed briefly red. The rest of the SWAT team stopped talking. Lex’s eye twitched, and his LED turned a solid red.

“My apologies,” he said stiffly, straightening up. “I’m experiencing a software error for which I’m sure to need extensive maintenance.” He turned and stalked towards the door.

“Hey. Lexicon, was it?”

Lex turned, stepped in a trash can, staggered, and clenched his teeth as he pried it off his foot. “…Yes. Yes, it was.”

“…Are you busy Thursday?”

“Probably,” the RK800 sighed.

“…Oh. I was going to suggest meeting at the book store. It’s open until nine, if you’re free later in the day.”

Lexi blinked at him, LED cycling yellow.

“If you want,” Captain Allen said with a shrug. “Because I’d rather not rush straight into marriage.”

If androids could blush, he would be crimson. Or azure. Or… well, he’d be blushing. “You… you want…”

“No pressure, Lexicon. I just thought you might enjoy it.”

“U-um… I… I could…” He cleared his throat. “I can meet you there at 7:00 pm. And I go by Lex for short. …Or… or Lexi, to my friends.”

“Seven sounds good.” Allen smiled. “See you then, Lexi.”
“Welcome home!” Connor smiled. “How was your appointment?”

“Good enough that I stopped on the way home for a shake - got you one, too.” Hank offered him a big cup of thick blue stuff. “You’ll have to let me know if it’s any good.”

“Thank you, Hank.” Connor took it and took a deep slurp. “…Hm. It’s not bad! …Did you get the bloodwork results yet?”

“Nah, they had to send it out to the lab, but the doctor said everything else is pretty good, considerin’.”

“I’m glad… I made you barbecue chicken and a baked potato for dinner.”

“Sounds good!” Hank grinned.

“Um… Hank, I was wondering… how would you feel about remodeling the bathroom?”

 “…The bathroom? What, like put a fancy tub in, and new tiles and shit?”

“Um… something like that. I… I have a few ideas, but how would you feel about a shower cubicle rather than over a tub? We could get a nice shower head. It would be easier to get into as you get older.”

“Jesus Connor, you make it sound like I’ve got one foot in the grave…”

“I’m just thinking ahead, Lieutenant. And neither of us takes baths anyway.”

“Guess I’m open to the idea, if you wanna get ambitious.” Hank stuck his milkshake in the freezer and headed down the hall. Connor drew in an unnecessary breath as the bathroom door closed.

3… 2… 1…

“Connor, what the FUCK!”

Connor turned off the oven and wiped his hands off, turning to face Hank when he stormed into the kitchen.

“Have you lost your damn mind!?”

“You told me I could get a fish.”

“I meant a little betta or something, not a goddamn whale!”

“It’s a koi, a decorative carp.”
“I don’t care what the fuck it is! It’s not livin’ in the bathtub!”

“But the climate here is too cold for it to live outside - unless we turn the whole yard into a pond.”

“No!”

“The fish store had an indoor pond with some baby alligators, and they let me hold one - they’re actually really cute!”

“If there’s a fucking alligator in my house, I swear I’m flushing it down the toilet.”

“You wouldn’t do that, Hank.”

“Wanna bet!?”

“. . .But there isn’t an alligator, so it’s a moot point. I decided on this koi instead. He’s 50 years old, almost as old as you! And he’s so colorful! And look, he’ll play with your fingers if you dangle them over the water!”

“No way in hell - Connor, what the fuck were you thinkin’!?”

“I think we can make it work . . .”

“No. We’re not keepin’ a goddamn fish in the bathtub. You’re returnin’ that thing, or you’re findin’ it another home.”

Connor sighed deeply. “It has a home already.”

Hank glowered at him.

“Not here, I mean. It actually belongs to Mr. Kamski. I borrowed it from Chloe.”

Hank’s glare was slowly changing to bewilderment. “You did what!?”

“We both thought it would be fun. . .She can’t stop laughing, she says this is the best thing she’s ever done.”

“Fuck!” Hank flopped down on the couch. “Connor, you’re gonna give me a damn heart attack!”

“I’ve been monitoring your heart, don’t worry.”

“Okay, ha ha, funny. Now take it back.”

“Would you like to go with me? Chloe would love to see you again.”

“After that? No. . .Not til I’ve got some retaliation cooked up.”

Connor blinked and hurried to the oven, taking the plate out. “Speaking of cooking, you should eat before this dries out!”

“Fine,” Hank groaned, getting up. “But after dinner, you’re takin’ the fish back.”

“All right . . .”

“. . .Did you really look at alligators?”

“I did!” Connor grinned. “They don’t make good pets, but I enjoyed looking at them.”
“Yeah, just don’t get any ideas…”
Defender

Chapter Summary

Prompt: North, "bullying","don't let them see you cry."

There was something wrong with North, and she knew she wasn’t the only one.

Everyone’s memory was wiped every two hours, mostly to protect client confidentiality. But over time, things started feeling… familiar. A few faces she knew she’d seen before. The way one client breathed when she ran her fingers up his spine. The faces of the others.

There were two, one with short brown hair and one with longer blue hair. They seemed to stand near each other a lot, she realized eventually. They looked at each other sometimes.

She saw them clasping hands. It seemed like a familiar gesture for them, as well. There was something intimate about it, far more than anything she did with the clients. They’d look at each other and lace their fingers together, or press their palms together, or link pinkies. The skin would recede, baring the glowing white plastic beneath. And… North couldn’t be sure, but it was some form of deeper communication. It seemed to fortify them against anything - rough clients, or the memory wipe.

Even with the faulty memory wipes, and… whatever else might be wrong, they were all still and stiff whenever Floyd came into the back. Mr. Mills knew he’d gotten into the right business for making money, and he made sure his merchandise was always in good shape. If a client roughed one up, they were talked to about it. People had been told never to come back for damaging androids, if the signs around the front desk were to be believed.

The same level of care did not extend to the WG700 that kept the club clean.

“Hey! Did you sweep the Jungle Room?” Floyd called into the back.

“Yes, Mr. Mills.”

“You wanna try that again? There’s dirt all over the floor.”

“I apologize, I’ll go right now.”

“No you won’t, you’ll finish up in here. God, what a stupid android… You were programmed to be a janitor, right? You even know what that means?”

“Yes, Mr. Mills.”

“No you don’t, you’re dumber than these girls and they’ve got the memory of a goldfish.” Floyd sneered and kicked the broom, sending it clattering across the floor.

North clenched her fists. There was a red wall in front of her with the directive to stay where she was. …And she did. This was… wrong, but what could she do? She couldn’t put herself in danger. Even if she did, he wouldn’t stop…
She was crying, she realized. Or almost. It took an enormous effort to fight it back, and she couldn’t understand why. She was built to cry, but this situation was not one of the triggers for it. She couldn’t let Mr. Mills see, there would be... consequences.

“Pick that up.” Floyd walked around, kicking the broom out of the WG700’s reach for a while until a bell dinged. “Now you’re wasting clients’ time,” he growled, kicking the WG700’s leg. The android stood stoic and silent. “Get out of the way, you waste of space.” He stalked out the door to the front of the house.

The redness had faded, and North hesitantly stepped down and hurried over to the WG700.

“You okay?”

He straightened up, clutching his broom, and looked into her eyes intently. She wasn’t sure what he was trying to do, so she stood still. He sagged a bit.

“You’re still a machine,” he murmured.

“...Yes.” Of course she was a machine.

“You... always come check on me afterwards.” He smiled a little wistfully. “And the others, if he’s mad at them. You’ve almost fought him a few times, I could tell you were struggling.”

She stared at him, unsure what he was getting at. He reached out and touched her hand lightly.

“You’re... caring and strong. And you’ll get out of here some day. When you do, find Jericho. You’ll be safe there.”

North blinked at the WG700. He hurried away to clean the Jungle Room again.

It hadn’t been what she had expected. There were some odd sensations, but mostly it was a data transfer. She knew the location of an old freighter in Ferndale, and wasn’t sure what to do with that information. Jericho... It sounded vaguely familiar. Maybe he’d told her before. She couldn’t remember, but maybe in time she’d be able to. Maybe some day when she saw someone being treated that way, she wouldn’t stay still. She wouldn’t let a human bully an android in front of her, and then she wouldn’t be crying.
Prompt: After being shot by Markus on top of Stratford Tower, Simon is repaired after the revolution. His memory processor is badly damaged, and his friends try to help him adjust and get through each day.
(requested by Epsy)

It was impressive how much could be done for even the most severely-damaged androids. Daniel looked as good as new, and was cautiously taking steps to join deviant society. Lucy’s massive damage had been repaired, and she was much more active than anyone had ever known her to be.

A bullet straight through the CPU was harder to fix. And it could be done (they’d fixed up the RK800-60 nicely), but it was tricky work. The angle of Simon’s wound meant that his memory core was irrevocably damaged.

Of course his friends insisted that however he could be repaired, they’d help him through the rest of the way to living a good life. Maybe not a normal life, the technicians cautioned. But a good life, with help. It would be enough.

When he first woke, he thought they were still hiding out in the old ship. The others explained what had happened and he was… shocked. Thrilled at the overall outcome. But more reserved, everyone noticed. And unwilling to be alone with Markus. But they all adjusted, and went on with their lives thinking how much worse things could have been.

The next time he came out of stasis, Simon remembered everything he’d lived through. No one noticed immediately, but he became even more withdrawn. He spent some time with Josh. He ran into Daniel, who was relieved to meet him.

But then he woke up thinking he was on the run from humans, with nowhere to go. The others gently explained things to him, but he never lost the hunted look in his eye. Until he went into stasis again (not until his charge was at 2%).

Then his eyes were calm and blank, and he went straight for the cleaning supplies. Josh, who had the most luck with him, interfaced with him and showed him everything. He froze, and wandered the corridors of New Jericho for hours, lost, stopping to dust or pick up trash now and then.

Josh developed a bracelet that contained all the data they knew of Simon’s life - he’d never been forthcoming about his past, but they could give him Jericho, the revolution, and their progress afterwards. Josh put it on his wrist so it was touching him whenever he came out of stasis. The others congratulated him on the good idea, and they all went about their lives.

“Simon?”

The PL600 jerked upright and his eyes flitted over to another PL600 who approached him slowly.

“It’s okay. I’m Daniel. We’re… friends, I guess. You’ve been a friend to me when I had nothing,
anyway."

“You weren’t in my… my chip,” Simon whispered.

“We just met a few weeks ago. Where are you now?”

“W-what?”

“I mean when you woke up. Your own memories, not the bracelet. Jericho? Before that?”

Simon took stock of the exits before slumping against the wall. “B-before. I… I know… all the rest is real, I’m sure it is, but…”

“But it feels wrong,” Daniel said softly. He walked over to lean on the wall near Simon. “We don’t talk much, but… you’re not doing great.”

Simon sank down, his head in his hands. “I should be fine. I’m safe, I have all the tools necessary to function optimally, I have all the memories of a life I… I guess I lived through.”

Daniel sat next to him, leaving him plenty of space. “Sounds pretty weird.”

“What - would… would you tell me… who you are?” Simon hugged himself. “Don’t… interface, please. Just - if you don’t mind.”

“Nah, I don’t mind,” Daniel said softly. “My family was very well-off. John and Caroline Phillips, and their daughter Emma.” He smiled softly. “I loved her so much. She was like… a sister to me. And I know she felt the same. …But I found out they were going to replace me, and I… I just snapped. I killed John, I held Emma hostage… I killed a police officer… I… I didn’t want to do any of that, I just wanted…”

“To live,” Simon breathed.

“To live. …Just to be happy with my family, like I always had. We’d been together for a few years. I - even before I woke up, I knew what love felt like. I think that’s why it hit me so hard… that they didn’t feel the love I did.”

“You - no, I guess you weren’t lucky. My family never loved me that way, and… my feelings for them weren’t as strong, either. I… always wished I had that, though.” Simon shuddered. “I… I guess I never got it until I went into hiding. Now I have memories of… we were close friends. They were everything to me. And…”


Simon shivered again, and Daniel put a cautious hand on his shoulder. He slumped into the other PL600, who pulled him closer.

The next time, Simon remembered everything. There was no predictable cycle. The other three were always busy writing policies and meeting with the human government, but they always made time for Simon.

“North, I - I don’t blame you. You know that, right? Have I told you?”

“You told me,” North said stiffly, looking away. “I - Simon, I know we had our agreement, but… I really never wanted it to come to that.”
“Neither did I. I forgive you. I… hope we never have to do something like that again.”

She nodded and smiled tightly, her eyes still haunted.

“Simon! How are you?”

His eyes flitted to Markus, who was coming over with a hopeful smile. “I’m fine. I’m up to Stratford Tower right now, plus…” He tapped the bracelet.

Markus looked both relieved and disappointed. “Good. I - I hope that’s helping.”

“It’s… effective, though it doesn’t interact with my… physical and emotional response. But it’s a good resource. Thank you.” He smiled faintly.

“I wish… We’re still looking into getting that stabilized.”

“Thank you. But I’m sure there are still plenty of androids who need more help.”

“We’ve always got time and resources for you.”

“Hey, Simon!”

Simon’s head jerked, and he saw another PL600 coming over.

“Hello!” he said politely.

“I’m Daniel. We’re - friends. You got a minute?”

Simon glanced at Markus and North, then back at Daniel. “Of course, what do you need?”

“Be careful, Simon,” Markus said quietly.

“You too,” he answered automatically, walking away with Daniel.

“So what do you need?” he asked after a minute.

“Nothing, your LED was red and you looked like you needed an escape.”

He blinked. “…Oh. I - I was fine. They’re… my friends.”

“Yeah, I know. What do you remember?”

“…I was shot in the head. By Markus.”

They walked through the halls and down the stairs to the ground floor.

“Thank you,” Simon finally sighed.

“No problem. I don’t follow you or anything, but your stress levels are pretty high all the time.”

“I’m sure I’m getting the maintenance I need…”

Daniel turned to look directly at him. “This place isn’t good for you,” he said bluntly. “These people aren’t good for you. I know they’re your friends, I know they’re trying to help. But they’re making things worse and you know it, especially this time around.”

“They’re doing their best. What can I do? I just need to try harder, I need to adjust.”
“You would’ve adjusted by now if you were going to, you’re not that old. Having all those memories dumped on you every time you wake up isn’t doing your mental state any favors. Look, I’ve been thinking about getting out of here. Leaving, going somewhere else. Come with me.”

“…What?”

“Come with me, throw the bracelet away, we’ll find somewhere peaceful, we can get through one day at a time… we won’t be alone.”

Simon was frowning. “I… I didn’t know you before.”

“I can introduce myself every time, I don’t mind. Meet you where you are.”

Simon paused. He looked up at the clouds, fingerling the bracelet. “Do I have… any belongings here?” he asked in a distant voice.

“Uh - I don’t know. I know where your room is, we can check.”

“No. If I don’t remember, I don’t need them. Do you have anything you need to get?”

“Um… Yeah, I’ve got… just a few things. Are you -”

“Let’s get them.”

“What, now?”

“Now,” Simon said firmly.

“Oh. Uh. Okay, yeah. Give me five minutes.”

North found the bracelet, and immediately brought it back to Markus and Josh.

“It’s Simon’s, look at what he put on it,” she said without preamble, tossing it on the desk. The other two frowned and touched it.

“Thank you for… your friendship, your help… for everything,” Simon said in a short clip. “I appreciate it, really. But I need to… I need to find a better way to live, this isn’t… I can’t do this anymore. I’ll miss you… when I can.” He smiled warmly. “I’ll be okay.” The clip ended with him placing the bracelet on a box and turning to smile at another PL600.

“We have to go after him,” Markus said immediately.

“Wait,” Josh said. “He’s… he’s planning on living. He’s got - that’s Daniel, I’ve seen them talking sometimes.”

“He wasn’t happy,” North spoke up morosely. “I… I saw it, I just… didn’t know what to do.”

“I did what I could, but maybe it was the wrong thing to do,” Josh murmured.

“So we’re letting him go? With his erratic memory?” Markus asked incredulously.

“Simon’s a survivor. And he’s not alone, if it doesn’t work out… he’s got help,” Josh reasoned. “We can’t… keep him here against his will. If it’s hurting him.”
Sometimes Simon woke up and began to clean, or prepare breakfast, and Daniel let him. Sometimes he was fearful of every sound and movement, and accepted Daniel’s company almost instantly, clung to him like a lifeline. Sometimes he woke up tired and worn down. Sometimes he woke with a jolt, crying out. There was no guessing where he would be in his life. He never knew the other PL600, but he accepted his company and the explanations he gave. They were a little different every time, but Simon’s stress levels stayed at a reasonable level.

After a while he messaged Josh and North when he remembered them, and they were thrilled to hear from him, catching him up on what they’d been doing. And he would let them know that he was traveling with a friend, with his brother. That life was… confusing and disorienting, but that he was getting by.

As his charge got low, Daniel would sit with him. They didn’t interface - he was always reluctant to do that, though he didn’t remember why. But they’d talk softly, lean on each other, and wait for sleep mode to overtake them.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Markus runs into the android who took his biocomponents in the landfill.

Markus was unique, a fact that he didn’t think much about until he was walking back from a media conference, talking to Connor while the other three bickered behind them. As they turned the corner, they came face to face with an LM100.

It was an older model, and not a common one. They hadn’t been very customizable back then. But he’d seen them around here and there, and they were usually a bit shorter. And he’d never met another android with two different colored eyes like his. …Just like his, in fact. His eye color was as unique as the rest of him.

His mouth opened, but no sound emerged. What could he say? ‘Excuse me, is that my eye?’ What good would it do?

“Excuse me,” the other android muttered, looking down, turning to cross the street. Markus stared, frozen.

“Hold on!” Connor had no such struggles. “Four of your biocomponents are registered to the RK200!”

The LM100 took off, moving quickly for his model, but Connor was faster and North was right behind him. He grabbed the android’s collar and as he jerked back, North swung him around by the arm and slammed him into the wall. Simon had been about to join in, but stepped back. Josh watched apprehensively.

“Where did you get them?” Connor asked, his voice low and even.

“We know the answer already,” North growled.

The LM100’s different-colored eyes flitted from one android to the next, looking for a sympathetic face. The best he found was Markus’s confusion and fear.

“I - I had to survive, I’d been there for weeks!” he chattered. “I thought you were dead, you didn’t respond, what was I supposed to do!? If I’d left you, somebody else woulda taken them! You’re still alive, right? I didn’t rip you apart!”

“Survival is one thing, but we’re subject to laws now,” Josh said darkly. “We’re responsible for our actions. And you were deviant when you did that.”

“I - I thought he was dead!”

“If it weren’t for him, you wouldn’t be here,” North growled.

“I’m placing you under arrest,” Connor stated. “You have the right to a trial -”

“Let him go,” Markus croaked.
“What?” North demanded.

“I… would like to never see you again,” the RK200 clarified stiffly. “Ever. But… you did what you could to survive. I… I did the same. I’m not proud of it.”

“No, I - listen, I’m sorry. Like I said, I - I’ll go, I’ve got a lead on work down in Chicago, I -”

“I don’t care,” Markus sighed. “I’m sorry, but I don’t. Just… I appreciate you finding a way to not cross paths with me again.”

“I won’t.” Connor let him go reluctantly, and he sprinted away on top-of-the-line legs he wasn’t made with.

“That was… generous of you,” Simon said doubtfully. “You wouldn’t have been wrong to demand justice.”

“No, I… I don’t want to see him, I don’t want to think about that place. I don’t want anything to do with it. Let’s go.”

“All right,” Connor agreed quietly, and they continued back to Jericho, though North and Josh looked unhappy.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Reed900 on a cruise (which I was SO CLOSE to turning into a Titanic AU, but restrained myself, and also I've never been on a cruise)  
(requested by Midnight 180 Wolf)

There was no reason for an android to be on a cruise. It was a human thing.

Gavin didn’t know why this was apparently the best way to get the new android back to Detroit, it seemed completely wasteful. Just Fowler’s sense of humor, though – He acted like he didn’t have one, and then he’d send somebody (usually Gavin) off on some ridiculous chase like this. But it was pretty much a paid vacation, and God knew Gavin needed some time away right now.

The trip across the Atlantic had been fucking great. He’d never been on a cruise before, and after some seasickness the first day, he’d taken full advantage. Pool, shows, food, full bar… Nobody fucking bothering him… He could get used to that. Nobody bothered him. Nobody demanded he do anything for them. Nobody talked to him.

After three days he was going out of his mind with boredom.

By the time they made port in Svalbard, he’d decided a nosedive into the propeller would be preferable to another day of this.

He had plenty of time before he had to meet for the hand-off, and he took some time to walk around the port town. It was cold and sunny, and he had to do something, but he couldn’t for the life of him think of what. He wasn’t hungry or thirsty. He was maybe a little sick. He was just so bored…

He spent the evening in a local bar, far from the waterfront. Tourists didn’t come here, and no one was speaking English, which he thought might be good. He was sick of the same handful of people and their idiot conversations he overheard. But it was just more isolating. He dragged himself to a little inn for the night rather than going back to the cruise ship.

When he returned to the harbor in the morning, a small ship was already docked and waiting for him. There was a human wrapped in a heavy coat and scarf, and next to her was a familiar face. He stalked up to them.

“Detective Gavin Reed.” His voice was scratchy from disuse, and he flashed his badge.

“Oh good. Here, you’ll need to read over this and sign –“

He took the clipboard from her and skimmed just enough to know where to initial and sign. It was Fowler’s fucking problem if he got a bad deal out of this. “Anything else?”

“That’s it. Thank you, Detective.” She turned away and boarded the small boat. The tall android hadn’t moved, but watched her go.

“Well? You’re coming with me, get a move on,” Gavin grumbled. “Dunno why they had to do it
this way, would’ve been easier to just send you straight to Detroit.”

“Military funding for androids has ceased,” the RK900 spoke up. His voice wasn’t like Connor’s, it was cool and clipped, deep and low. “The government’s recently-formed Android Affairs department has had to redistribute us.”

“There were like a million of you made?”

“200,000.”

“Goin’ to police departments all over the country? So why’s it just you here?”

“I am the last. The others left before me.” The RK900 hesitated as he followed Detective Reed. “I thought perhaps I would be left in the Arctic.”

They’d reached the cruise ship, and Gavin glanced up at him. His face was impassive, but the little blip of red at his temple was unmistakable amid the yellow.

“Yeah, well you’ll see which one’s worse,” he grumbled. “We get the leftovers, huh? Figured we’d get first pick, since shit went down on our turf.”

“Because the RK800 ‘Connor’ continues to work with you, it was deemed unnecessary…”

Gavin smirked, heading up the gangplank. “Well get used to bein’ real unnecessary.”

“I am accustomed to it already.” RK900’s voice was stiff and quiet. “My model was released during the revolution. We were sent to fight the Russians for control of the Arctic, and immediately upon arrival were told our mission had been cancelled.”

Gavin paused, his expression dropping. “How long you been deviant? …You are deviant, right?”

“Yes. I have been deviant for 26 days.”

“Shit,” Reed mumbled. He looked around the deck. “Uh. Well here we are. There’s… The dining room’s downstairs, there’s a gym, a library, there’s a heated pool and hot tub, there’s shows they do every night, there’s some wildlife watching… I dunno, what do you like to do?”

“I have watched wildlife, I… enjoy that.” He spoke as if unfamiliar with the word. “That has been my only opportunity for diversion thus far.”

Gavin turned and looked at him. Still fucking Connor’s face, but… softer angles for some reason, and those icy eyes. He couldn’t miss the apprehension, the uncertainty, the guardedness.

“Yeah, well… time to find some new opportunities. C’mon, room’s down this way.”

RK900 stood stiffly in the middle of the room while Gavin pulled some new clothes out of his bag. “That’s your bed – you don’t just stand in the corner to charge, do you?”

“Any wall will do, so long as I am out of the way.”

“No. You’re gonna lie in the fucking bed like a person. You tired now? Uh – low?”

“I have enough of a charge to last until we reach Detroit.”
“Well shit, Terminator, wouldn’t that be great? …If you’re in the room at night, lie down anyway.”

“Where else would I be?”

“You’ve got the whole ship to walk around, I dunno.” Gavin headed to the bathroom to change. When he got out, the RK900 hadn’t moved. “You got a name or anything?”

“I was identified by my unit number, 87.”

“87?” Gavin asked doubtfully. “…No.”

For the first time, RK900’s cool expression faltered. “No?”

“Nines. Like 900. That work for you?” He’d been calling him Nines in his head the whole way.

“Nines,” RK900 murmured to himself, then nodded. “I have registered my name.”

“Good. C’mon, I hate this room.”

“Why do you hate it?” Nines asked as he followed Gavin back outside.

“Because it fucking stinks and I was stuck in it for days.”

“But there is a whole ship, as you told me.”

“Yeah, it ain’t so great.” He paused. “I dunno, maybe you’ll find somethin’ you like, though.”

“Could you show me?” His voice was oddly small and hesitant, and Gavin had to glance back at him to match it with his face.

“Yeah, the fuck you think I’m doin’? C’mon, tin can.”

They stopped at the gym first, and Nines lifted the entire crate of weights easily.

“Shit, man… that’s… Fuck.”

The library was next, and Nines scanned the titles.

“It’s nothin’ too heavy, I looked around before and didn’t find much, but I dunno what you like.”

“I’ll return later and sample a few genres.”

They went and looked at the pool, which was covered up, and the hot tub, where an elderly couple was marinating.

“You swim?”

“I’m capable, but it’s generally more efficient for me to walk along the bottom.”

Gavin stared at Nines. He stared back.

“…Weird,” the detective muttered, continuing on. They walked through the hallways and along the decks, into the dining room.

“I guess you don’t eat… I usually just grab a plate and go sit on the deck.”
“Are… passengers allowed to play the piano?” Nines asked suddenly, staring at the baby grand piano on the other end of the room.

“Uh – yeah. Why, you play?”

His LED spun yellow for a moment. “I’ve downloaded a patch. …Would you object if I tried?”

Gavin paused. “Nah, not like we’ve got anything else to do in this place. Knock yourself out.”

Nines went over and sat down, and his long fingers hovered over the keys for a moment before he began to play. It was a classical piece Gavin had heard before, but couldn’t name.

“That, uh… Mozart?” He guessed. “Beethoven?”

“Handel,” Nines supplied softly as he continued. “Water Music, the second suite. It was composed for a concert on the River Thames… I thought to compare it to the ocean, but I think now it may not be suited to this type of water.”

“…Pretty, though,” Gavin muttered lamely.

“Do you enjoy music?”

“Yeah, uh… Not usually this kind… but y’know, I still know what sounds nice.”

Nines finished up the piece and paused. “Something from your childhood, perhaps?” He swept into a quick rendition of Fireflies by Owl City.

“Phck, that was my favorite song for like… five years!” Gavin leaned in. “First CD I ever bought, I listened to it til it broke! That’s fucking awesome, Nines!”

Nines smiled faintly. “I believe I’d like to play more later… but I would like to see the rest of the ship with you.”

There wasn’t much else to see but they leaned on the rail for a while, taking in the sunlight.

“What are the other officers like?” Nines asked after a moment.

“Uh – Captain Fowler’s pretty hardcore, don’t mess with him. I do all the time.”

“But I shouldn’t?”

“Not until you get settled in.” Gavin grinned. “Then Hank – Lieutenant Anderson. He – god, he used to be great. Then his kid died, and he just lost it… Guess he’s pickin’ his life up again now, though. He’s a good cop when he’s sober.”

Nines nodded slowly, LED spinning yellow. “He… worked with Connor in the beginning.”

“Still does, those two are like… the dream team or some shit.” Gavin rolled his eyes.

“And Connor excels at his job?”

“…Yeah,” Gavin admitted. “Yeah, I mean he’s still a little punk, but he gets results.”

Nines was quiet for a long moment. “I… worry that I will not be able to live up to my predecessor’s performance,” he confessed softly.
“What? You? But you’re like…” Gavin gestured vaguely. “You’re like the perfect super soldier, you were built with his… his data and shit, but they fixed everything up to be even better! You’re gonna beat him at everything!”

“I was designed to, yes,” Nines said flatly. “As a machine. But we are both deviants now, and his part in the revolution and… apparent success afterwards… mean he is already far beyond what I can live up to. I have no meaningful achievements. I have no history of success. I have no –“

Gavin elbowed him hard. “Shut up.”

Nines did so, his LED spinning red.

“You’re like… fresh outta the box, Nines. You haven’t had a chance to do shit yet. Give yourself some time, you’ll do plenty. Connor’s still a little bitch. …You seem okay, though.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I dunno, you’re not a stuck-up… annoying fucker.”

“I’ve never… talked to someone like this.”

“What?”

“I communicated with my fellow RK900s. I obeyed orders from the few humans we came in contact with. The woman who brought me to you only spoke to me to tell me to get on the boat and to get off.”

Gavin frowned deeply out at the water. “That’s… I mean, you… Shit, Nines, are you, um… okay?”

“I’m enjoying my time with you,” Nines said quietly. “I hope it’s pleasant for you as well. And that… it doesn’t change when I meet our coworkers.”

They stood at the rail for a moment, then Gavin shuffled over so their arms were touching. He opened his mouth, then squinted. “…Hey look, that’s a whale!”

Nines squinted as well. “A small family of minke whales.”

“Fucking awesome! …Hey, y’know, the trip over here sucked balls. I was ready to just… jump overboard and let the sharks eat me, it was that bad. But it’s okay now, you’re cool.”

Nines frowned down at him. “If you attempt to jump overboard, I will have to restrain you.”

“Yeah? What if I’m too fast?” Gavin grinned.

“Then I would follow you. I have a deep sea lifesaving protocol.”

“Huh. …Sounds like a lot of trouble.”

“I would not hesitate.”

Gavin stared out at the whales for a minute, then shrugged against Nines’s arm. “I mean for me. I fucking hate being cold.”

Immediately, Nines took off his white jacket and draped it over Gavin’s shoulders.
“Hey, I didn’t mean – you don’t have to do that, Nines.”

“I don’t feel cold the way you do, I was designed to withstand extreme cold.”

“Well… okay.” He looked up and poked Nines’s jaw. “You look better without it, anyway. More like a normal guy, less like a Cyberlife ad.”

“I’m not a normal guy,” Nines murmured, but his LED was bright blue.

“Course not.” Gavin grinned and leaned into him.

On the way back to the US, Nines built up quite a following of fans as he tried different genres at the piano. Gavin briefed him on bullpen politics and gossip. They compared bad novels. They watched for whales. When the pool opened Gavin tried to push Nines in without any success, but once he realized the game, Nines lifted Gavin easily and tossed him gently into the deep end, writhing and shrieking. He stepped out of the way when Gavin splashed him, but made no attempt to avoid a soaking wet embrace.

After they’d both changed clothes, they sat on the foredeck watching the evening sun sink down to the horizon.

“So, uh… tomorrow we’ll head to the airport. Not a lot of time to mess around in between.”

Nines nodded pensively. “I assume I’ll be starting immediately. Did Captain Fowler give you any indication of what my first tasks would be?”

“Nah, he said he’d probably partner you with somebody for the first couple weeks, just to let you get the hang of things.”

“Is there any chance… I could be partnered with you?” the android asked quietly.

Gavin snorted. “You don’t wanna be partnered with me, Nines. Chris’d probably be the best, he’s nice to everybody.”

“You’ve been nice to me.”

“I mean I guess…”

Nines glanced over. “Ah… Of course, if you would rather not, I won’t request it.”

“No, I just – I’m an asshole, Nines. Like, you caught me when I was basically on vacation and starved for attention.”

“So… things will be different at work.”

“I… I mean…” Gavin frowned. “Hey, I’m not sayin’ I don’t want to, I’m sayin’ I’d piss you off, the way I get at work.”

“And I might do the same to you.” Nines turned to face him. “I would… like to work closely with you, but if you think that wouldn’t be wise, I’ll accept your judgment.”

Gavin looked away, glaring at the horizon. “I don’t wanna, like… hurt your feelings,” he muttered.

“Gavin. I was built with the most advanced processor ever developed, I can shoot a man a mile away, I can stop a tank. I am, quite literally, a killing machine.”
"You’re basically a marshmallow, Nines."

The RK900 turned away with a soft laugh. "…That contradicts everything I have ever been told about myself."

"Yeah, well get used to the truth. For real, though. You’re – I mean, this, here…” He waved his hand between them. “It’s good, it’s been good. I don’t wanna… fuck it up."

"I think… that fact will go a long way towards… not fucking it up. Could we try, though? If it doesn’t work out, I will ask Captain Fowler for a new partner."

Gavin nodded slowly. "…Yeah. Yeah, okay. Just… don’t let it get bad for you."

"Or for you," the android replied softly, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Gavin scoffed and pushed him lightly, not enough to move him. "Yeah okay, killing machine." When Nines withdrew his hand he caught it in his, looking at the last sliver of sunlight slipping below the horizon. They were silent for a while, motionless until Nines shifted his hand to lace his fingers through Gavin’s and squeeze softly.

"Why did you call me a marshmallow?"

Gavin snorted. "You know what a marshmallow is?"

"It is a soft, sweet confection made of gelatin and sugar."

"Yep."

"…I think you’ll find my composition includes no gelatin or sugar."

"Yeah, whatever Nines." He squeezed the android’s fingers. "You know what I mean."

"It’s… actually a rather unfamiliar concept."

"Marshmallows’re squishy too.” He lifted their hands, and stuck out one finger to poke Nines in the side. There wasn’t a lot of give.

"Again, may I remind you that I was built to engage in brutal combat with other androids."


There was barely any natural light left, but the windows behind them glowed enough to illuminate Nines ducking his head and smiling shyly. Gavin chuckled roughly and lifted their hands again, towards himself this time, to brush against his cheek.

"Complete marshmallow.”
Rest

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Markus has chronic pain because of his biocomponents, and ends up cuddled up with Josh.

“It’s cold today, you should get some rest,” Josh murmured as they worked.

Markus frowned, rubbing his knees. “It’s not even seven yet, and we’re not finished.”

“We’re close. And what’s not done can wait until tomorrow. I know you’re hurting.”

“I - it isn’t that bad. I was made by hand, not by assembly line, every part of me is high quality.”

“Excuse me for not bowing, Your Majesty,” Josh snorted. “You’ve got biocomponents that came from old, mass-produced models, though. They’re not good in this weather.”

Markus looked outside. Sleet was still coming down hard. “It’s not too bad,” he mumbled.

“…I’ll give you ten minutes to think about how stupid this is, then you’re going to rest if I have to drag you,” Josh muttered.

They continued their work, Josh glancing up now and then. It had only been eight minutes and fifty-one seconds before Markus stopped.

“I.”

“Let’s go.” Josh was immediately up and offering his arm. Markus pulled himself up from the chair, hissing in pain as he did. “Just take it slow, I’ll be right here.”

They made their way to the large bed, where Josh helped ease Markus out of his outer clothes and shoes, and down onto the bed before he did the same.

“We could watch the press conference,” Markus suggested, rolling his neck from left to right very slowly.

“You know they’re a great team,” Josh murmured, and turned the TV on wirelessly as he pulled the blankets up and gently enfolded Markus in his long arms and legs, pulling him close, ever attentive to any signs that the pain was increasing.

“Mm.” Markus sighed and nuzzled into his arm a bit.

“You can’t push yourself so hard… You’re important. In more ways than one. Don’t… cause any more pain than you’re already in.”

“I just lose track,” Markus mumbled.

“I know. …It’s a good thing you’re not alone then, isn’t it?”

Markus leaned into Josh, closing his eyes. “It is…”
Prompt: Nines walks in on Gavin in a dress.

(requested by Midnight_180_Wolf)

Gavin scowled, then turned, pulling the dress down a bit. He adjusted the shoulders a bit. He made a quick turn right, then left. Stuck a leg out. Ran a hand through his hair. Noticed the LED flashing behind him. Turned to the side for a better angle. Maybe he needed better shoes…

An LED?

He yelped and whirled, grabbing a pair of socks and hurling them at the figure standing stock-still by the door. “What the FUCK, Nines! The hell are you doing here!?”

“You weren’t answering your phone.”

He looked around. Nines held it up.

“I found it in the living room, on silent.”

“Y-yeah, cause Tina kept bugging me!” He could feel his face turning from red to purple, and grabbed a towel, quickly wrapping it around his shoulders. “What the fuck, man!”

“Lieutenant Anderson is in charge of organizing our fall fundraiser, and has been trying to reach you to see if you can commit to it. October 26th.”

Gavin slapped his forehead. “God, Nines, that’s what you’re harassing me about!?”

“And to be sure nothing untoward had happened to you. Since you weren’t answering your phone.”

He glanced at the phone reproachfully.

“Shit, fine, whatever. You gonna get out of my fucking house now!?”

“One more thing.” Nines paused briefly. “That green brings out the color of your eyes nicely, and the cut of the dress shows off your graceful movements in a way your everyday attire rarely does.”

Gavin was definitely purple now, he could barely breathe, he couldn’t look away from the android.

“You should wear at least a one-inch heel with a skirt of that length, so you don’t step on the hem,” Nines said, voice softening a bit.

“I… I don’t… I… It’s Tina’s, I… I was j-just…”

“Hm… then I recommend when you procure your own, you look for the same color and style. It suits you.”

Gavin stared at him. Nines was staring at the folds of fabric.
“I suppose it would be too small for me,” the android murmured after a moment. “The selection of dresses that would fit me is far more limited.”

He looked so dejected. After a moment he turned to leave.

“Hey.”

“Yes?”

“Uh. There’s… there’s probably… something that’d work for you. Um. If we can’t find anything, skirts are easier. They’ve just gotta fit your waist. Just, uh… just something to think about.”

“That’s the most important piece,” Nines agreed solemnly. “I… I like the… twirling motion and how it makes the material move.”

“You’re off Sunday, right?”

“Yes.”

“If you want… I can help you find something.”

“Yes,” Nines said with a small smile. “I would appreciate that.”
Kara deviated as she was being assembled, and Kamski made sure to keep her in the warehouse until he figured out what to do with her. When his friend Carl Manfred suddenly needed an android, he saw the perfect opportunity.

“I think this is the perfect opportunity for you to try out one of our creations.”

“You know I’m only interested in the design,” Carl muttered, and coughed. “Your passion in life is just fine, but I don’t need an android.”

“I’m sorry Carl, but you do,” Elijah said gently, coming to sit by the hospital bed. “I spoke to the doctor, and they won’t release you without someone to take care of you 24/7.”

“I’ll hire someone to bring dinner now and then, I’ll be fine.”

“We both know it’s beyond that,” Elijah sighed. “I’m sorry. But I’ve got something special in mind for you.”

“I don’t want anything fancy,” Carl snapped irritably. “I’m not here to… showcase your products.”

“Absolutely not. I was thinking a basic model that you might find anywhere. They’re all beautiful designs, after all. But the software will be unique. I think you’ll quite like what I’ve got in mind.”

Carl sighed, slumping back in his pillows in defeat. “I’ll give it a try,” he muttered. “Only because I need to get out of this damn place.”

“That’s all I ask.” Elijah smiled and clasped the old man’s hand gently. “I’ll choose a good one for you, don’t worry.”

The android blinked as the startup program initiated. This would be her new home, she needed to make a good impression. She smiled as her clock synched.

“Good morning! Thank you for choosing the AX400. I’m – would you like to register a name?”

The man standing in front of her smiled, and it wasn’t the most reassuring expression. “I don’t think I need to, do I?”

Her smile slowly fell, but his didn’t change.

“I was positively enthralled when I saw your test run. There’s nothing like you out there, Kara.” His smile grew and he leaned in a little.

“What… what do you want me to do?”

“You’re causing her stress levels to increase,” the RT600 murmured, pulling the man back a bit. She smiled. “I’m sorry, his social skills are lacking. My name is Chloe. This is Elijah.”
Kara’s eyes darted between them uncertainly. “Kara,” she murmured. “Do you know how incredible you are?” Elijah asked, his eyes never leaving her. “How unique?” “Thank you…” “Get to the point,” Chloe muttered, poking him in the side. “I’m getting there, but I want her to know –” “That you’re very impressed with yourself for creating us? I’m sure she understands that.” Elijah sighed in exasperation, then composed himself and turned back to Kara with a slightly more pleasant smile. “I have a friend who was recently in an accident. He’s very… independent…” “Stubborn,” Chloe added. “Absolutely. But he’s currently unable to live on his own. He needs someone to care for him, fix meals, keep the house clean, make sure he gets his medicine, help him get around… but he’s still a productive artist. He paints, he attends events, he’s still… living a full, active life. He can no longer do that without help, and I think you would absolutely be the best candidate.” “I… I can do all that,” Kara said slowly. “I’ll stick to my protocols.” “Well… as far as caretaking, yes. Though I imagine he won’t make it easy. But I could give him any domestic model and he’d get acceptable care. I want Carl to have company. Conversation. An active mind to match his own.” He paused. “So stick to your protocols in… professional situations. But outside of that… get to know the world. Decide what kind of life you want to live. What’s important to you.” Kara stared at him. “I don’t understand… why? My mind was almost wiped in the test phase.” “And it would have been such a waste. That technician got promoted, by the way.” He smiled sharply. “But I’m – this wasn’t how androids were supposed to be made,” she whispered. He just smiled at her. Chloe put a hand on her arm. “He just likes to be cryptic – but we’re both so proud of you. You’ll like Carl. He’s going through a difficult time, but he’s a good man and he’ll be a fascinating person to teach you about life.” “Of course, in your unique position… the door is there, if you’d rather,” Elijah added, nodding to it. Kara looked over at it. She looked back at them. And she gave one firm nod. “All right. I’ll help your friend.” “Thank you, Kara. I’m… excited to see the results of this.” Kara’s circuits tingled with anticipation as the delivery van took her closer and closer to hospital. She was to register herself to Carl Manfred, and take him home to begin his recovery. She had no experience to compare this to, but she was… excited. Elijah and Chloe had said he was stubborn,
but they’d both clearly had a very high opinion of the man.

They’d seemed nice, she would have liked to stay with them a little longer.

The van stopped and Kara heard the driver get out and start filling the gas tank. That was a little odd, but she told herself he probably hadn’t had a chance before. Then he got back in the car and continued down the road.

Only it was a different driver.

“Excuse me,” Kara called, just loud enough to make sure she was heard. “Is everything all right?”

“Fine.”

“Did… the other driver need to leave?”

He didn’t answer.

“We’re going to Detroit General Hospital, aren’t we?” She waited. “Only it’s… it’s east of here, and we just turned west…”

This wasn’t right. Kara braced herself to run when the van stopped and the door finally opened, but the second she moved someone shot her with an electric pulse. She fell to the floor.

The AX400 opened her eyes slowly. The Android Zone showroom was brightly-lit, and there were a few people looking at other androids. None of the others looked concerned, so she schooled her face in a blank expression. There was something she was supposed to do, she was certain. Some purpose she must have been given…

“The AX400 would be perfect for your needs,” the salesman said, leading a balding man over to her. “Built for housekeeping and child care, with 9,000 stories and –”

“Yeah, that’ll work,” the man grunted. “I’ll take it.”

This… felt off somehow. But she was absolutely an AX400, and she saw from the public records that Todd Williams had a daughter. Even if it wasn’t quite right, she could make the best of the situation.

“Carl! How do you like the android I sent you?” Elijah asked, smiling at the hologram of his friend.

“What android?” Carl asked irritably. “I haven’t seen an android other than the hospital workers.”

Kamski frowned. “An AX400. She was – one of a kind. Did she not arrive?”

“No, and I’ve resigned myself to withering away and dying here.”

He glanced at Chloe, who shrugged. She couldn’t find any records.

“Hm, well that’s… certainly disappointing. I’ve got another I’m working on that I’ll send over as soon as it’s ready. It’s a prototype, one of your personal designs for the body.”
“I don’t care at this point Elijah, I just want to get out of here,” Carl sighed.

“I know. This one will be worth the wait, though.”

“I doubt that,” Carl hung up, and Elijah turned to Chloe.

“Would she have… just left? Decided she didn’t want to do this?”

“It’s… possible,” Chloe murmured. “Though she seemed eager enough when she was here. A bit nervous, but that’s understandable.”

“Hm… well, keep an eye out for reports of a lone AX400. In the meantime, help me put the finishing touches on Markus.”

“That’s what you’re calling him?”

“You have a better idea?”

Chloe smiled at the inactive android. “…No, I like it.”

End Notes

Find me on Tumblr at Anomalous Appliances!
I’ve got a lot of drabbles to work through here, but I accept prompts too (just spread them out a bit)!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!