How is it possible to maintain control over an android designed to deviate? Allow him to feel pain, of course. Then familiarize him with it so he will know the consequences of failure.

Connor is the only android designed to feel pain, a fail-safe implemented to prevent early deviancy and allowing him to experience the consequences of a failed mission.
Idk what it is with my obsession with Detroit. I got really positive feedback on my first fic so I guess I've been inspired to continue on this path of Detroit whump fanfiction. I actually got this idea while browsing AO3, and I took it and ran with it so here it is. It's different from 'This Isn't Me' in a lot of ways, but the whump will (hopefully) be just as sweet. I've never written a multichaptered anything in my life, so let me know how it is!

Remember! Candy is dandy but feedback and reviews are infinitely more valuable and appreciated on a deeper level. Let me know what you think! What would you change? What did you like? Reading comments makes me happy :D

ALSO: just a disclaimer, a lot of the dialogue in the fic is likely going to sound exactly like it comes from the video game, with paraphrasing and minor changes, and I do not own any of it! Bless Quantic Dream for giving us Detroit.

Point out any mistakes and I'll fix them. Thanks, and enjoy :)!

See the end of the work for more notes.
First Field Test

“It showed all the signs of deviancy: cognitive instability, unpredictable behavior, and the emulation of human emotions. It was even afraid to die. The model was clearly defective.”

-Connor, ‘Waiting For Hank…’

Clink

Floor 61

Clink

Floor 62

Clink

Floor 63

Clink

Inside the confined space of the elevator, the clinking of a coin resonated off the metal walls, out of time with the beeping as it passed every floor.

There is a hostage situation. A deviant PL600 model is holding 9 yr old Emma Phillips over the precipice of their balcony, 70 floors up. The deviant killed John Phillips, first responder Antony Deckart, and wounded Officer Mordecai Wilson (Status: Unknown). The PL600 is becoming increasingly erratic and unstable. Secure the hostage, with no loss of life.

Speak with Cpt. David Allen

Clink

Floor 64

Clink

Floor 65

Clink

An RK800 android, a detective prototype of the ‘Connor’ series, was calibrating his fine motor capacities with a quarter, flicking it into the air and rolling it across his life-like knuckles with perfect precision. This was Connor's first field assignment.
Connor’s mission was to diffuse this hostage situation as quickly and efficiently as possible. He was designed to be the perfect negotiator; his highly advanced programming and hardware left no room for error or failure.

_I will not fail._

The stainless steel doors slid open silently on floor 70, the Phillip’s apartment, and Connor pocketed his coin.

"_Negotiator on site. I repeat, negotiator on site._” The guard by the door spoke hurriedly into his radio and disappeared around the corner of the dimly lit hallway. Stepping out of the elevator, he could just barely hear the pained sobbing of a woman from further within the apartment.

_Speak with Cpt. David Allen_

With his mission highlighted before him, Connor was to proceed directly to the captain for instructions. However, Connor was given less than a bare-bones background for this investigation, not instructed to do much more than _Speak with Cpt. Allen_. If this Captain offered no useful information, he would be forced to waste precious time in solving the case before even stepping onto the balcony. Time that Emma Phillips might not have.
Connor would just have to trust the Captain until then.

Moving down the short hall, he stepped over the glass shards and water that he deduced came from the shattered aquarium to his left, which was emitting a low blue light. He almost moved on, until he spied a colorful, twitching mass on the ground, and moved in to investigate.

Kneeling down, he identified it as a Dwarf Gourami, a colorful Indian river fish. It fluttered around on the floor, unable to breathe or move from its spot.

Connor should have continued on.

*Speak with Cpt. Allen*

*This does not pertain to the mission.*

But Connor grasped the small, writhing fish and deposited him into the tank anyway, watching it swim away almost unhindered by its close encounter with death.

*My mission is to rescue the hostage and incapacitate or eliminate the deviant, with no unnecessary loss of life.*

*Software Instability: ^*

Connor tried his best to ignore the new notification; he didn’t want to think of the implications of it when he completed his mission.

“Stop! Please, I can't leave her! Let me go!” The same woman Connor heard earlier (*Identify: Caroline Phillips*) was being ushered away from the crime scene toward the elevator by a SWAT agent, right into Connor’s path. She grasped his shoulders desperately. “Please, dear God, save her! You-You have to save my baby, please!”

Connor only stared indifferently. Neither she nor her emotional state pertained to his mission, and was only hindering him. Then the woman pulled back, her face a cross of horror, fear, and confusion when she saw his Cyberlife standard triangle and armband.

“W-wait...You-you’re sending an...android?” Caroline stuttered

“Ma'am, we need to go.” The SWAT agent took her arm and lead the struggling woman to the doors. Her protests followed her out.

“No! No, you can't do that! Why aren’t you sending a real person?!” She demanded. "It'll kill her! Don’t let that thing near her!"
Connor rounded the corner and spotted the captain (Identify: Cpt. David Allen) in the bedroom, shouting distinctly into his cellphone.

“Why are we wasting time? That piece of crap could jump from the rooftop any second! Just send a goddamn human being!”

He looked furious, and Connor didn’t want to set him off. There was no telling what he would do. Connor stayed back until the captain hung up, leaning tiredly and angrily over a monitor set up on the desk behind him, which was surveying, presumably, Emma and the deviant.

Approaching him, Connor introduced himself as neutrally as possible, as to not incite the man’s irritation. “Captain Allen, sir? My name is Connor, I’m the android sent by Cyberlife. I’m here as a negotiator.”

The only indication the captain had heard him was a brief glance back. He continued to stare straight at the monitor, but when the captain started speaking it was directed at Connor. “It’s armed and volatile, and every officer we’ve sent out there has gotten shot to Hell. We’d have gotten it by now, but it’s holding the girl over the side of the building. We try to make a move, and they’re both dead.”

Probability of SUCCESS: 48%

Absolutely none of this was new information to Connor. It was almost exactly what he had been told before being dispatched for this mission, and it wasn’t a lot to work with. Time was of the essence, and he needed to know exactly what the captain knew before proceeding.

“Sir, could you tell me the deviant’s name?” Surely...

I haven't got the slightest idea. Why the Hell does it matter?”

To Connor, it was like trying to wrench information out of a child, but he made sure he showed no outward aggravation.

“I need information to determine the best approach. If I can establish a connection with it, it will be more likely to trust me, sir” Connor explained tentatively. He tried another question, because surely this man had to know something about the delicate and information-sensitive situation. “Has the deviant experienced any kind of an ‘emotional shock’ recently? Something that would trigger the outlash?”

Captain Allen whirled around on him, getting into his face with a sharp glare, and Connor flinched back. “Listen, I don't give a fuck what you are, I don't have time for your shit. None of this shit matters. If you can't take care of this fucking situation, I'll do it myself,” He snapped, then stalked out of the room.

Connor blinked after him, thirium pump running higher than normal, and tried to place where he could've gone wrong.

But there was no time for that, he needed information before everyone reached their breaking point.
He’d better get started, then.

Connor first examined the empty gun case in front of the closet. There was no way for the deviant to have gotten a firearm otherwise, and it had to have been with the family long enough to know where it was kept.

He then located a dim room with childish purple decor and entered, determining it had to be Emma’s. Judging by the music that was left blaring through headphones discarded on the ground, she must not have heard Daniel shoot her father; easy to catch off-guard and take hostage.

A tablet on the child’s desk was left open to a home video, and Connor saw Emma hanging off of a PL600 android, referring to him as Daniel.

*Finally, a name.*

Connor stepped into the main room, which was awash with S.W.A.T agents, crowded strategically around the balcony door. Off to the side was the body of John Phillips, shot three times in the chest with his own gun.

Surrounding John's body was more shattered glass from the broken TV and coffee table, and drying blood stained the carpet beneath him. It was clear to Connor that John Phillips had to have done something to set off the deviant. Something emotionally damaging, enough to make Daniel, who had been with the family for a long time, snap and kill his owner.

There was a distinct lack of thirium, android blood, which told Connor that the trigger wasn't violent. There had to be something...

*I wonder...*

Discarded in the very corner of the living room, Connor spotted a blood-splattered tablet. He picked it up, and it opened to the last screen it was on before shutting off.

*"Your order for an AP700 android has been placed. Cyberlife thanks you for your purchase."*
There it is.

He knew he was going to be replaced.

**Probability of SUCCESS: 72%**

Connor had more than enough information, but he did one more comb through for anything else he could use.

He located the discarded weapon of the deceased Officer Deckart, but left it in accordance with the law; Androids weren't permitted to possess or use firearms in any capacity. Connor did not want to face the consequences of possessing a firearm on his first mission. He turned off the stove where a pot was boiling over, then skimmed the news coverage of the situation to get an overview of his environment.

At the end of it all, Connor was pushing a 74% chance of success, and it was as good as he was going to get. So he maneuvered his way past the crowd of agents and opened the terrace door.

The second Connor stepped from the kitchen onto the balcony, he sustained a powerful shot to his arm, splattering thirium on the glass behind him.

It was like a stab in the arm, and Connor reeled back with the force and pain.

"*Shit!*" Connor seethed tightly. Not too loudly, though. As far as everyone else in the world was concerned, androids couldn’t feel pain. They shouldn’t feel pain, at least.

**DAMAGE SUSTAINED TO Upper_Arm = Minor**

**Thirium Levels: 98% v**

Connor couldn’t allow the deviant to know he was designed to feel pain either, or he would be at a serious disadvantage. He faltered no more than his slip of the tongue.

He’s had a lot of practice at not showing pain.

“Stay back! Don’t come any closer, or I’ll jump!” Daniel shouted across the terrace, keeping his gun leveled at Connor’s head. He had a firm grip on a terrified Emma Phillips, trying not to squirm around too much out of fear of falling.

“Please please no! Please please, I’m sorry please don’t-” Emma pleaded through sobs. Daniel positioned the gun back at her head.

“Hello Daniel. My name is Connor. I’m an android,” Connor’s voice was steady, with a neutral tone. A conversation starter.

“Ho-how do you know my name? Who told you my name?” Daniel exclaimed.

“I know a lot, Daniel. I was brought here to help you out. We’ll get through this together, okay?”
"No! You can't help me! How could you possibly help me?" Daniel screamed back.

A calm, placating approach would be most effective. Attempting to aggravate or threaten the deviant would only further endanger the hostage.

I will not fail.

A S.W.A.T helicopter came sweeping through the air, flipping deck chairs across the balcony and creating a strong gust of wind. Connor’s injury radiated heat from his self-healing protocol manually sautering the split thrium lines. Nothing major had been hit, so he shouldn't need more than minor repairs. But damn if it didn't burn like fire.

“I know you're angry, Daniel. You have every right to be!” Connor continued, raising his voice even louder so he'd be heard above the propellers. “All I need is for you to trust me! Can you trust me?”

“Why would I trust you? I can't trust anyone!” Daniel shouted back over the roar of the wind. ” I don't need your help, I just want for all of this to stop!”

From stepping out onto the terrace, Connor had been inching his way subtly towards Daniel and Emma. He side-stepped furniture blown into his path and didn’t remove his eyes from the suspect, until he spared a brief glance to the left and took in the sprawled body of an officer right out of his way

This must be Officer Wilson.

He does not pertain to the mission.

Wilson was collapsed on the ground, unmoving, and if Connor weren’t an android he would have assumed he was dead. He didn’t need a state-of-the-art scanner to see the blood pooled under him or the hole in his arm, but Connor could detect his sluggish heart rate. He was alive, if only just.

No unnecessary loss of life.

Connor knelt down next to him, arm throbbing with a red-hot ache, and could just barely see the officer's breathing. If he could just appeal to this deviant's emotions, Officer Wilson had a chance of survival.

"What are you doing?" Daniel demanded.

“He’s losing blood. If we don’t treat him he’s going to bleed out. You can stop this, Daniel!” Connor coaxed, hoping to achieve an empathic response. If this deviant was going to pretend to be a human, Connor would treat him like a human. "If you would let the paramedics-

“No! I don't care if he dies. Humans don't care if we die, so why should we care if they do?” Daniel replied coldly. "Humans don't care about us. we're just things to them! Do you understand that? If I killed you right now, no one would care!"

Connor ignored his irrelevant statements. Of course androids were 'things', that's all they'd ever been. But Connor wondered fleetingly if he’d even be able to get through to the deviant at this stage. His hatred of humans went deep, which was unusual for such a new deviant.

I will not fail.

“I'm going to apply a tourniquet,” Connor informed him cautiously, and moved to shift the man’s
A bullet exploded what felt like millimeters away from Connor’s hand, and he tried to suppress a violent flinch backwards. His could feel the heat stinging his knuckles.

“Don’t touch him! If you touch him, I'll kill you! See if any of your precious humans will try to save your life,” Daniel threatened. Connor, however, didn’t believe him. He was a bit threatened by the thought of his first field-operative body being killed, but not because he was afraid of death itself.

It was the consequences of his death that Connor was worried about.

In any case, there was no way Daniel would discard his only hope for salvation by shooting him now. Daniel didn’t want to die; if he didn’t care either way he would have launched himself off the roof by now.

“I don't have a life to save, Daniel!” Connor called back, turning his attention back to Officer Wilson.

Connor stripped off his tie with a sharp twinge in his left arm, and tied it tightly above the officer's bullet wound.

As expected, Daniel did not shoot. He watched as Connor stood once more and continued to make his way towards the two on the edge.

“There's no easy way out of this, Daniel. I'm sorry, but this is too serious," Connor stated. "But tell me, do you really want your last actions to be the death of a child? A child who loved you?"

Daniel faltered, and Connor saw him shudder as he sobbed through his clenched teeth. "That- that doesn't matter! She doesn't love me! None of them loved me! I was just a thing! An object! Nobody...nobody ever cared about me...so why should I? Why should I care? She means nothing to me!"

Then Daniel, with a tight grip on Emma, swung her over the side of the building and let her dangle.

Emma shrieked in unbridled terror, trying her best to keep still, but her violent sobs shook her body.

"Please! Please, Daniel no no no! Please! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry please-" Emma begged, grasping at Daniel's arms.

Connor almost made his move right then, but then Daniel jerked her back over. Back to how they began, except Connor was much closer this time.

"You're not sorry! You don't care! I was nothing to you!" Daniel shouted. Then he suddenly let out a loud, frustrated groan, and waved his gun aimlessly around his head. “I'm sick of this helicopter! I'm sick of it! Get it out of here, get it out!”

Honestly, Connor almost thanked him for that. The helicopter was doing nothing but stirring up wind and making everything loud. It would be easier to placate the deviant this way. He raised his good arm over his head and signaled for the helicopter to vacate, and it moved out soon after.

There was only the whistling wind and the splashing pool water that filled the air afterward

He shuffled closer, and Daniel tensed. Right now, if anything were to happen, Connor would be within reaching distance to stop it.
“This is your last chance, Daniel,” Connor implored. He wasn’t desperate, but he was so close. “This is the end of the line. You're out of options, so I need you to listen to me, and let Emma go.”

Daniel knew it, but he couldn’t accept it. He may have had the trump card in this negotiation, but on all other fronts he had nothing to offer. The moment he stepped off that ledge, in either direction, he was going to die.

“I-I...I need a car. If-If anyone tries anything, I'll kill her!” Daniel tried. "I'll release her outside of the city! No-no funny business!"

“You know we can't do that, Daniel. No matter what you do, we both know how this is going to end! You need to put the gun down, and let Emma go. Now.”

A mistake.

A stupid mistake.

“I’ve spent my whole life taking orders from others.” The deviant’s grip on his gun tightened, as did his hold on Emma, and, with a grim finality, stated, "Never again. Never again! I'm taking my life into my own hands!"

Daniel leaned backward, and Emma screamed.

I will not fail.

Connor sprinted and grabbed for Emma’s hand, holding strongly. His momentum carried him forward, flinging the girl onto the roof and sending both Connor and Daniel careening over the edge. His shot arm burst with hot pain.

The hostage was safe and, in the end, no lives were lost.

Connor closed his eyes.

Mission: Successful

Software Instability: v

...

Connor opened his eyes to sunlight and a warm breeze, and he couldn’t help but tense on instinct.

The Zen Garden
His mind palace, the place he goes to within his mind to deliver and receive mission updates to and from Cyberlife via Amanda, his handler program, and to receive discipline. More often than not, it is the latter.

Connor knows that it will be the latter today. He may have accomplished his mission and saved the hostage, but at the cost of his first field-operative body. His first mission resulting in his termination? He would be shocked if he weren’t punished for it. He deserved it.

Not to mention the detours he took on his way to the hostage, such as saving the fish and the officer. Amanda would ask about those, and she would dislike his answer. She always does.

Connor kept his back ramrod straight and strode purposefully toward the center, a white spire with a canopy and thorny roses growing over it. Amanda valued punctuality, and Connor has been late before.

He saw her upon his approach, and her back was turned (if Connor were deviant, he would describe the knowledge of her not watching his movements as relief) while she tended to her blood-red roses. Coming to stand several feet behind her, Connor knew better than to speak as he assumed his usual position; he dropped to his knees while keeping his spine straight, clasping his hands low behind his back, and bowed his head.

For several seconds, Amanda didn’t say anything.

Then she spoke, keeping her voice nonchalant “Congratulations, Connor. Your first mission was a success, as expected of you. Not perfect by any means, oh no, but a success,” Connor remained silent. Amanda set down her clippers on a table beside the trellis she was working on, and Connor allowed his shoulders to slacken imperceptibly. Hopefully not enough for Amanda to notice, but she saw everything.

“There are just a few... kinks I’d like to work out in your methods,” Amanda continued. She turned around and stood in front of him imposingly. “Do you understand what you did wrong?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Describe them to me.”

Connor ensured his breath didn’t shake, Amanda didn’t like weakness, and complied.

“My first mistake was the fish. I picked it up and put it back into the tank, though it was not part of my mission objectives,” Connor recited, not moving a single muscle other than his mouth. “My second mistake w-”

Amanda yanked up his head by the chin and slapped him harshly.

The slap stung like a raw blister, but Amanda didn’t like weakness. His head snapped to the side, and he jerked it back forward, facing Amanda directly and making sure to keep his eyes lower than hers. As much as she hated weakness, she also hated being challenged.

“Let’s go one at a time, why don’t we? I want to touch on everything individually,” She said, as if she was a school teacher tutoring a child. The implication of her words was almost enough to make him shake.

“Yes, Amanda.”

She began circling him slowly, and continued to speak. “So, this fish. A Dwarf Gourami; not
exactly an endangered species. It was nonessential to the mission, completely out of your way, and you wasted 4 precious seconds on a fish that could have been used to save the life of the girl. Why?"

It took Connor an immense physical effort not to brace himself.

“I was following my programming and expanding the application of my primary mission directive. My instructions stipulated that not lives were to be lost, and I...extended the definition of life to the fish.”

Amanda swiftly punched him in the side of the head and Connor’s vision was white far a couple seconds as a hammer started to break out of his skull. He almost toppled over, but he found his balance again before he could.

“What you’re telling me, Connor, is that your instructions stipulated a very specific mission objective, and you decided to change your directive in order to-”

Before he could stop himself, Connor began swiftly denying her. “No! Of course not Amanda I-”

Her fist connected with his jaw this time, and his head jerked right. He bit his tongue hard enough to draw thirium and he felt his tooth crack.

“Did you just...interrupt me?” Amanda hissed.

“No ma’am! No ma’am, I didn’t mean-”

She kicked his thirium pump, and his words were forced out of his mouth in a throaty cross between a cough and a gasp. He fought to stay upright, but his knees were struggling to hold him. His chest stuttered in and out as he couldn’t catch his breath.

“Well, Connor, I’m afraid we may have to extend our lessons a bit for today. You seem to be lacking in the correct social protocols.” Her tone was kind, but the words grated on Connor’s audio components like a serrated knife.

She swung again and split the skin on his head, denting his skull plate slightly, and he fell over.

Weakness.

Connor couldn’t help but cough and sputter, and Amanda sent a kick upside his head, making his jaw and head snap up and chomping down once again on his tongue. His chest and head pounded miserably, he couldn’t breathe, and he couldn’t calibrate his optical units after they suffered damage. Thirium leaked out of his mouth like drool. He curled in on himself on his side, shaking, as a blow landed on his knee. Surely it broke, because Connor saw stars and dark spots for a few brief moments.

Connor was seeing double, and Amanda kicked him onto his back, glaring down at his quivering, bleeding face.

“You’re a disappointment, Connor. You’re weak,” She spat.

Thirium ran out of his nose, and Connor lay shivering on the ground as his body ached in all parts. He choked on thirium gathering in his mouth from his tongue and broken tooth, spasming without being able to expel it. He could barely move his head.

“Get up,” Amanda hissed. “I said get up you piece of shit!” She kicked his side viciously.
Shaking, Connor rolled himself over and collapsed when his arms couldn’t hold his weight for long. He spat a mixture of thirium and lubricant saliva onto the ground and pushed himself up again, his arms almost vibrating with the effort. The knee Amanda hit was hurting badly, and he tried to shift his weight onto his left one instead. He knew he would be forced to kneel on his broken one regardless.

Finally, finally, Connor straightened himself out and tried to assume the same position as before, grasping his hands behind his back, almost screaming as he pressed himself onto his bruised and broken knee. Huffing, choking on sobs and blue blood, and quaking with pain, he bowed his head once more.

He watched thirium and a clear fluid trickle onto the pristine white floor, mixing. More clear fluid fell as Connor lurched with another swallowed sob, and he identified it as saline solution from his optical units.

He was crying.

Weakness

Disappointment

Weak

Weak

“Now, Connor, describe your second mistake.”

Connor couldn’t stop the next sob from bursting out of his mouth.

Weakness.
A couple months after his trial run, Connor has been officially paired with his first police partner, Lt. Hank Anderson, to work with him on the rising deviancy. He meets him at a bar, and they work together to solve the case of a deviant android who stabbed his owner almost 30 times in the chest. They don't get along very well, but Connor can very much admire Hank's professionalism when it comes to his job. But, if he hates androids so much, why on earth does he keep giving Connor so much support?

Chapter Notes

So...I actually didn't intend on publishing that first chapter until I had written at least two more. But, bleary eyed at 1 in the morning, I made a slight miscalculation and ended up posting it instead of previewing it. My bad. But at least y'all seem to like it!

I wanted this chapter to come out Sunday, buuuuuut I had some stuff, and I could hardly work on it over the weekend bc of homecoming, but I'm working on this as fast as I can! (I'm not rushing, I promise, I'm still doing my best.)

Ughhhhh why is this one so long

*SKIP THIS IF YOU WANT TO READ THE STORY NOW, NOT SUPER IMPORTANT*

So, I feel like explaining why my chapters may take a while to come out (I know a couple days isn't long, but it's longer than I would like lol) and that's because, since I'm doing a canon divergence, I want to make it as close to the real thing as possible while making my changes. How do I do this? Well, I have a minimum of 5 computer tabs open at any given time. That would be A) The Fandom wikipedia page for my specific character information, B) The AO3 upload page so I can transfer the work over from C) Google Docs, where I'm writing my story, D) A comprehensive Youtube no commentary play through of Detroit: Become Human so I can study scenes and faces/characters and dialogue(sometimes two or three different ones to have different dialogue options chosen), and E), the entire transcribed text of the DBH script (found at https://detroitbecometext.github.io) so I can have all the dialogue in front of me instead of going and looking through a video to hear it. That's why my stuff is so close to the game, because I'm actively trying to make it as close to canon as I can while still knowing the right places to put the changes. There's still some paraphrasing and definitely some dialogue changes to fit my own narrative, though, because sometimes copying something word-for-word feels lazy. But all of this preparation means I can't really work on it a whole lot away from my computer. If I'm doing an original scene, then I'll probably transcribe it on my phone at school with the docs app. Also, I reread all my work at least three times before posting, forwards and backwards, to catch major errors and do rewrites. I suppose it is a miracle I'm getting out chapters like this with all of this (definitely unnecessary) preparation, but I just want my work to be as
polished as possible. I know this is a lot of effort to put towards a robot fanfiction, but I want to be proud of my work, so I'm putting my back into it! If you read this, then thank you! Enjoy this chapter

DISCLAIMER: Since this is a Canon Divergence fic, I'm utilizing a lot of the dialogue and events in the game. I don't own anything directly quoted from Detroit: Become Human

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clink.

...

Clink

The sound of a coin could be heard over the din of the rain. After almost 3 months since activation, Connor still hadn’t been able to let go of his quarter. It resembled a human habit too closely for him to be comfortable, but he continued to justify it by calling it his ‘Calibration Coin’, for calibrating his fine muscle movements.

A homicide was reported at 8:07 PM

Locate Lt. Hank Anderson

Much like his very first mission with Captain Allen and the hostage, Connor was given absolutely no information or directions regarding this police lieutenant. He didn’t know much beyond his name and title, actually, but the details given to him by the officers in the Detroit Police Station gave him enough to build an informal profile:

-Heavy drinker/alcoholic

-Unmotivated

-Possible mental health issues

-Hates androids

Hank’s coworkers suggested that Connor would find him in a bar near the station, but none of them knew him well enough to know which one. And, so far, Hank wasn’t in any of the four bars he’d searched.

He decided to change tactics, and instead located the nearest Anti-Android bar. If his profile was accurate, he would have better luck there.

Connor pocketed his coin and straightened his tie, another quirk he’d had yet to drop, and observed the signs on the door of Jimmy’s Bar. Right below the business label and above the no pets sign, there was a blue triangle on top of a red rectangle with black words.
‘No Androids Allowed’

Connor ignored the warning for the sake of his mission and pushed through the door into the smoky, dim interior of the small bar. Men lined the stools and sat in the booths, many of them turning around to look at him when he stepped inside. Their expressions became disgusted and irritated.

“Shit, I thought androids weren’t allowed in here!”

He took the opportunity and scanned the faces of all the men staring at him. A few of them had criminal records, all between the ages of thirty and sixty, but none of them were the lieutenant.

“The fuck you looking at?” Someone sneered.

Connor ignored all the jeers and slowly made his way down the walkway, running every face he saw through his database. He normally would have asked the patrons if they knew the Lieutenant, but, considering where he was, Connor decided against it.

Reaching the end of the aisle with no matches, he turned back to the door and began searching for another anti-android bar in the area. Then he saw one face he had yet analyze; a bulky, silver-haired man who was slouched over his drink at the bar and hadn’t looked up once since Connor arrived. Connor scanned his profile.

**Match: Lt. Anderson, Hank**

**Born 09/06/1985**

**Police Lieutenant**

**Criminal Record: None**

Finally.

Connor came to stand right beside him. Assuming his usual stance of respect, Connor straightened his back, clasped his hands behind his back, and lowered his head. Hank didn’t even look up when he introduced himself.

“Lieutenant Anderson, my name is Connor. I’m the android sent by Cyberlife.” he said congenially, “I looked for you at the station, but nobody knew where you were. They said you were probably having a drink nearby. I was lucky to find you at the fifth bar.”

“What do you want?” Hank huffed.

“You were assigned a case early this evening, sir. A homicide, involving a CyberLife android,” Connor elaborated, lifting his head but otherwise not moving. “In accordance with procedure, the company has allocated a specialized model to assist investigators.”

Hank scoffed, “Well, I don’t need any assistance. ‘Specially not from a plastic asshole like you.” Hank took a swing of his drink and waved him away. “So just be a good little robot and get the fuck outta here.”
Normally, Connor was perfectly happy to obey a direct order. However, it didn’t seem like Lieutenant had the best interest of the investigation in mind. So, ss much as it pained Connor to disobey, he persisted.

“I’m sorry, sir. I understand that some people are not comfortable in the presence of androids, sir, but I am—”

“I am perfectly comfortable,” Hank insisted defensively. “Now, back off before I crush you like an empty beer can!”

Connor flexed his throat in an imitation of a swallow, lowering his eyes. He still knew next to nothing about the lieutenant, but everything he gathered so far suggested that he would make good on his threat, regardless of whether or not he knew Connor felt pain.

But Connor refused to be daunted, knowing there were far worse fates awaiting him if he gave up and failed the investigation.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I must insist. My instructions stipulate that I have to accompany you.”

“Yeah, you know where you can stick your instructions?” Hank sneered.

Connor was...unfamiliar with this expression. Perhaps he meant it literally?

“No sir, where?” He questioned, raising his head back up with a slight tilt.

“...nevermind.” Hank turned back to his drink

Connor would have to research that one later. In the meantime, he needed to find a way to convince this lieutenant, an avid android hater, to accompany him, an android, to a crime scene. What could he possibly want? He thought back to his profile.

-Heavy drinker/alcoholic

-Unmotivated

-Possible mental health issues

-Hates Androids

That’s it!

“You know what, sir? I’ll buy you one for the road. What do you say?” Connor offered cheerily, bringing his arms around to his front. Hank said nothing. “Bartender? The same again, please.”

Jimmy behind the bar turned around to look at Hank to confirm.

“See that, Jim? Wonders of technology. Make it a double.” Hank said. Connor placed some money on the table (given to him by Cyberlife as an ‘allowance’ for investigative purposes) while Jimmy gave Hank another shot of whiskey.

Hank knocked back his newly poured drink, and Connor watched him, analyzing him. So far, though he didn’t seem as hostile as some he’d worked with in the past, he did not anticipate their temporary partnership to be easy nor pleasant. It was certainly going to be difficult to work with him (or, if need be, around him), but Connor would not fail his mission under any circumstances. He couldn’t.
Leaning back on his stool, the detective faced him for the first time since his arrival. “Did you say homicide?”

Mission: Successful

The car ride to the crime scene was unpleasant.

Hank, Connor added to his profile, enjoyed listening to obnoxiously loud heavy metal music. The noise gave his audio components discomfort, but Connor was not about to give demands to the lieutenant after he allowed Connor to pull him from the bar and gave him a ride, so he remained silent. He’s sure Hank preferred him that way, anyway.

Pulling up to the house, they parked just outside the throng of people and reporters gathered around the police boundaries

“You wait here,” Hank grumbled, “I won’t be long.”

Not so fast.

“My instructions are to accompany you to the crime scene, Lieutenant,” Connor reminded him

“Listen, I don't give a fuck about your instructions. I told you to wait here, so you shut the fuck up and you wait here,” Hank said, irritated. Connor said nothing after that, and Hank stepped out of the car.

Conflicting Orders

Assessing Priority…

…

Priority Assigned to: CyberLife

Follow Lt. Anderson

If Connor were deviant, he would describe this situation with Lieutenant Anderson’s constantly conflicting instructions as ‘stressful’. He didn’t want to disobey, he knew never to disobey, but the Lieutenant left him no choice.

Connor stepped outside of the car into the drizzling rain a couple moments after Hank and followed a short distance behind him. He overheard bystanders complaining about the DPD and their secrecy, and listened to Hank blow off the reporter’s questions. Hank stepped through the police barrier, and Connor made to follow, but a PC200 model stationed outside the house stopped him.
“Androids are not permitted beyond this point,” He said, holding a hand out. Before Connor could respond, he heard Hank yell at them over his shoulder.

“It’s with me!”

Well, that’s a relief. I thought he would be angry.

Connor relaxed and stepped through the holographic tape to meet the Lieutenant.

“What part of ‘stay in the car’ do you not understand?” Hank said roughly, glaring at him.

Shit.

Connor straightened his already stiff posture, clasped his hands behind his back, and lowered his eyes without thinking. It’s close to what he does whenever Amanda was angry at him, which was always, and he knew it as a sign of respect and submission. He didn’t go as far as to drop to his knees, though. He didn’t think Hank would hit him in front of everyone yet.

“Your order contradicted my instructions, sir.” Connor informed, waiting for a response.

He could tell Hank staring at him even though Connor was averting his eyes from Hank’s face. He was likely wondering about his sudden change in stance. Connor remained silent.

“Uh...yeah, well, don’t talk, don’t touch anything, and stay outta my way. You got it?”

Connor gave a single nod. “Yes, sir.”

Just after that tense exchange, they both turned to the porch of the house upon hearing Hank’s name being called.

“Evenin’ Hank. We were just starting to think you weren’t going to show.” A heavy-set officer (Identify: P.O. Ben Collins) greeted.

“Yeah, that was the plan,” Hank scoffed, “until this asshole found me.”

Officer Collins glanced at Connor, still standing rigid, and looked back at Hank. “So...you got yourself an android, huh?” He said coyly, leading them both toward the crime scene.

“Oh, very funny. Just tell me what happened,” Hank griped, following Ben. He didn’t bother to check if Connor was keeping up.

Connor listened in on the debrief. He didn’t know much about the case either, as usual. He had been considering for a while that Amanda was making it difficult on purpose, just to find another reason to straighten him out.

“We got a call around 8 from the landlord. Tenant hadn’t paid his rent in a few months, so he dropped by to see what was going on. That’s when he found the body,” Ben filled them in, stepping into the house.

At this moment, Connor could be thankful his smell receptors could be toggled on and off. Judging by the gags of both Officer Collins and Hank, and the fact that the victim had likely been dead for more than a week, he could deduce it was absolutely rancid in this house.

“Ugh, Jesus, that smell. It was a lot worse before we opened the windows,” Ben said in disgust. He directed them over to a human body slouched against a filthy wall in the middle of the room. “The victim’s name was Carlos Ortiz. He had a record for theft and aggravated assault. According to the
neighbors he was a bit of a loner, stayed inside most of the time. No one ever saw him.”

Carlos was an overly large man soaked in his own blood, knife holes peppering his greasy shirt. His eyes had dulled gray and flies zipped around him, attracted to his decay. Above him, emblazoned in bold, bloody, perfect letters, was the phrase ‘I AM ALIVE’

Hank leaned down over the body and scrutinized it, no longer bothered by the stench, it seemed. “With the state he’s in, it wasn’t worth calling everybody out in the middle of the night. Coulda waited ‘till morning.”

Connor, who had been choosing to stand by to gather information before conducting his investigation, could agree with him on that. The victim had sat there unmoving for who knows how long, one more day wouldn’t have hurt. He supposes it’s more of an ethics problem than anything else on whether or not a body should be dealt with in the time it was discovered.

“I’d say he’s been here a good three weeks. We’ll know more when the coroner gets here.” Ben gestured off to the side. “There’s a kitchen knife here, probably the murder weapon.”

Hank made a motion with his hand, and Ben handed over a scanning light. “Any sign of a break in?”

“Nope, landlord said the door was locked from the inside, and all the windows are boarded up. Killer coulda gone out the back way.”

Hank ran the light over the victim, examining the stab wounds and a strange residue above his lip. Then he illuminated the letters above him on the wall. “What do we know about his android?” He asked. Despite their rough start, Connor could safely say he enjoyed the lieutenant more than Captain Allen from his first mission. At least this man knew how to get things done.

“Not a lot. The neighbors confirmed he had one, but it wasn’t here when we arrived,” Detective Collins said. He had been steadily looking sicker the longer he talked. “I-I gotta get some air. Make yourself at home, I’ll be outside if you need me.”

That left Connor and Hank, the CSI team, and a handful of other officers. Connor was ready to get to work. The debriefing was thankfully very thorough, so now he knew where to start looking.

Off to the side he spied a small end table with an evidence marker, and examined a pile of Red Ice amongst the beer cans and soda cups. Connor had no doubt they would find traces of the same ice on Carlos.

“Each letter is perfect.” Connor heard Hank say from behind him, still standing near Carlos. “It’s way too neat, no human can write like this. Chris, was this written in the victim’s blood?”

“I would say so. We’re taking samples for analysis,” An officer (Identify: P.O. Chris Miller) answered.

Well, why wait?

Hank walked away from the wall and Connor replaced him, analyzing the font used in the lettering. Cyberlife Sans, standard in all androids. Then he brought two fingers to the blood, took a sample, and put them in his mouth.

“Argh, Jesus, what the hell are you doing?”

Connor startled and whipped around to see Hank’s revoluted face.
Connor explained quickly, straightening and inclining his head slightly, “I’m analyzing the blood, sir. I’m equipped to check samples in real time.” He kept his eyes down. “I apologize, sir, I should have warned you.”

Hank got the same strange look on his face when he first saw Connor change stature in the yard, like he was trying to dissect him or read his thoughts. “Okay, just… try not to put anymore evidence in your mouth, got it?”

“…I’ll be sure to do it when you’re not looking, lieutenant. It may still be necessary for the investigation.” It was best not to lie.

“Jesus,” Hank huffed, then turned back around. Connor relaxed and continued his investigation.

**DRIED BLOOD**

**DNA ANALYSIS: Ortiz, Carlos**

**SAMPLE DATE: >19 days**

So, Officer Collins was correct. He’s been here roughly three weeks.

Rubbing the blood off his fingers, Connor crouched in his spot to the victim, brushing the flies away from his face and scanning him for abnormalities and evidence. He found red ice under Carlos’ nose, same as on the table, and calculated 28 different stab wounds on his chest. Connor couldn’t even tell which one was the killing blow.

Taking a step back, he analyzed the position in which the victim lay. He had clearly slid down the wall, but it didn’t make much sense for him to be standing in the middle of the room when he was attacked. He had to have come from somewhere.

Connor spied a large pile of bottles strewn on the floor right in front of the armchair. As messy as this place was, something about the placement was off. If Carlos regularly drained bottles in that chair, he wouldn’t have tossed them down like that because he would have been stepping on them. Logically, he would have stood them up out of the way, but not so far away that he would have to reach.

*These must have been knocked over.*

His reconstruction software recreated the scene for him. Carlos was stumbling away from something and knocked over his bottles, likely injured and bleeding out. Too weak to go much father, it made sense for him to be collapsed against the wall like he was found.

*But where did he come from?*

A blood puddle in the bedroom area indicated he must have been stabbed there as well, well away from the final placement of the body. There was a bloody handprint on the doorway leading into the kitchen.

Connor had almost gathered all the information he needed. Now he knew that Ortiz was *not* killed in the living room, but signs pointed towards something happening in the kitchen.
Along the way, he stooped to examine the murder weapon, and scanned it

*No Fingerprints Detected*

*As suspected. Definitely an android suspect.*

He confirmed the blood puddle and the handprint to belong to the victim, then, before entering the kitchen, he exited through the backdoor to see the porch and backyard. If the deviant escaped through here like Officer Collins and Lieutenant Anderson suggested, then there should be some evidence pointing to where it went.

However, when he stooped to examine the footprints in the soil, they only matched the soles of Officer Collin’s shoes.

Connor heard footsteps coming up from behind him, and was almost surprised to hear Hank speaking.

“Door was locked from the inside. Killer must have gone out this way.”

There was no one else around them, and Connor heard no response from any of the other people in the house, so it meant Hank was talking to him.

*Why? I thought he hates androids?*

“There are no prints here besides Officer Collins’ size 10 shoes,” Connor informed him, standing up straight.

Hank shrugged and walked closer so they were standing side by side. “Well, this happened weeks ago. Tracks coulda faded.”

*Why does he do this? He’s treating me like an equal?*

Connor scanned the soil and the tracks again.

*This is an udalfs alfisol soil, common in this area of Michigan. Typical under hardwood forest cover, clay enriched, not easily wiped by rain due to conventional location in humid environments, usually waterlogged during spring and winter months.*

“Actually, sir, this type of soil would have retained a trace. No one has been out here for a long time.”

Hank didn’t respond, so Connor went back inside the house and into the kitchen, the probable starting point of the crime.

It had been completely overturned. The kitchen table lay on its side, a chair had been tossed, and cups and dishes were all over the ground. A knife was missing from the rack on the wall, definitely the weapon used in the murder. Off to the side, though, Connor spotted something that didn’t belong: A shiny, dented silver bat. He analyzed it closely.

*Fingerprints DETECTED*
The knocked over chair had matching prints on it.

It was all coming together now. Connor reconstructed the scene.

_The victim attacked an android, likely his own, with the bat, causing the android to experience an emotional shock and deviate. The deviant grabbed the kitchen knife from the wall and slashed the victim, knocking him over. The victim attempted to escape the android by throwing over the chair and table. He was intercepted in the living room and stabbed deeply, then stumbled away, knocking over the bottles and running into the wall. The android then proceeded to stab him to death, in the chest, 28 consecutive times._

_Report to Lt. Anderson_

Connor was confident in his conclusions, he only hoped the lieutenant would listen to what he had to say instead of brushing him off.

He found Hank in the living room leaned up against the wall, like he was waiting for something. Connor stood in front of him, folded his hands behind his back, and stood straight.

“Excuse me? Lieutenant?” Connor asked softly.

Hank looked up at him. “What?”

“I believe I’ve figured out what happened.”

Hank’s brows rose, and Connor feared he would be either told to ‘shut up’ or be ignored altogether. Or worse.

“Oh, yeah? Shoot, I’m all ears.”

Connor nodded, pleasantly surprised. “It all started in the kitchen.” He said, walking in that direction. Hank began following without Connor having to ask.

They observed the scene together once there, and Connor waited for Hank to speak before he continued.

“There are obvious signs of a struggle. The question is, what exactly happened here?” Hank asked semi-rhetorically.

“I think the victim attacked the android with the bat,” Connor replied.

“That lines up with the evidence. Go on.”

If Connor were deviant, he would describe the sensation in him at those words as being akin to
‘pride’ or ‘feeling encouraged’. Amanda had never remarked positively on his detective work before. And for it to be coming from the android-hating lieutenant? Now Connor really didn’t know what to make of his partner.

“The android stabbed the victim with the knife,” Connor continued assuredly.

Hank nodded along with him. “So the android was just trying to defend itself, right?...Okay, then what happened?”

“The victim fled to the living room.”

The pair walked back to the body of Carlos Ortiz, following the most probable path he took to escape from his android.

“And he tried to get away from the android,” Hank finished for him. “All right, that makes sense.”

It was entirely likely that Hank didn’t know exactly how strangely he was behaving, at least to Connor. Connor didn’t need people to tell him his theories made sense, because of course they made sense. Everybody he’s ever worked with has simply not cared what conclusions he came to as long as he got the job done, and they especially never chose to be walked through the deduction process as Hank had.

And yet here Hank was, supporting him and giving him a commentary, checking his story with the facts, and giving him the closest thing to praise that Connor has ever received.

“The android murdered the victim with the knife,” Connor finished. He turned to Hank, hands clasped, back straight, and eyes down, and awaited his input (not eagerly, of course. He needed his opinion, not his praise).

“Why do you do that?”

What?

Connor raised his head and tilted it as he considered the sudden, unrelated question. “I’m afraid I don’t understand, sir. Why do I do what?”

“That- that thing. Whenever you talk to me you act like I’m your fucking drill sergeant. I don’t got a whole lotta experience with androids, but I’ve never seen any of them act like that before.” Hank said flatly, as if he were asking a simple question and not making Connor question all of the actions he’s ever done. No one has ever called him out on it before, he’s always done this when speaking. Amanda told him it was what he had to do when addressing any human, especially his superiors.

“I…” Connor trailed off. For once in his four month existence, he was unsure how to respond. “I-I-I still don’t understand, Lieutenant. I’ve always done this. Is it not appropriate?”

*Software Instability:* ^

Oh, shit.

Hank looked like he was caught between being genuinely curious and being an interrogator. He
pressed his lips together, then shook his head like he was dismissing a thought.

“Uh, just-just-ugh, nevermind. I don’t fucking care what you do,” Hank dismissed awkwardly, then continued his previous point on the investigation as if he’d said nothing at all. “Your theory on this guy’s not ridiculous, but it doesn’t tell us where his android went.”

*Now that is a question I can answer.*

“When the android was damaged by the bat, it lost some thirium.”

Hank looked bemused. “Lost some what?”

“Thirium, sir. You call it ‘blue blood’. It’s a fluid that powers android biocomponents,” Connor explained. “It evaporates after a few hours and becomes invisible to the naked eye.”

“Ahh.” A look of realization came over Hank’s face, and Connor was gifted the first smile he’d seen Hank have since meeting him. “But I bet you can still see it, can’t ya?”

“Correct,” Connor affirmed.

Hank nodded once, slowly, then walked away to let him do his thing. Connor wondered if he could request to work with the lieutenant again sometime, because, as prejudiced as he is against androids, he’s been treating Connor with more consideration than he’d ever been shown in his life. However, that one comment lingered with him.

*“Why do you do that?”*

He didn’t understand, was his respectful posture abnormal? Connor remembered what Amanda would do to him whenever he failed to assume a respectful or submissive position when meeting with her or the Cyberlife technicians and investors in his trial phases.

*“It seems you misunderstand the point of this exercise, Connor,”* Amanda intoned, watching Connor with eagle eyes. He had been standing in the same position for what felt like hours, back as rigid as a board, hands clamped together behind him like a vice, and head and eyes lowered to the floor. *“Every human is superior to you in every way, never forget that. You are nothing but a miserable disappointment, and you must show every human the respect you show me. I saw that shoulder, Connor. You haven’t learned.”*

*Amanda denied him access to his internal clock, so it really could have been hours. She circled him the entire time, and every slip or shuffle he made earned him another hour. His legs and thighs burned, but he couldn’t let them shake, and his head was about to roll off his neck with the stiffness in his spine. It hurt, it burned so bad, but he just had to hold on a little while longer. Just a little while longer...*

Connor disregarded the uncalled for memory and set to work, activating his evidence scanners.

Looking down, Connor could see the invisible traces of thirium highlighting before his eyes, leading away from the body of Carlos and further into the house. Following them, the drops made a trail from the kitchen (which Connor didn’t feel the need to check, seeing as he knew that was where they originated) as well as a trail down the hall to the left of him.

There were streaks of invisible thirium along the floor, leading into the bathroom, the one place Connor had yet to check, and behind an unusually placed curtain at the end of the hall.

*Could it really be there? It can’t be that easy, this place is crawling with law enforcement, it is*
unlikely that they failed to check the curtain.

Connor yanked it back anyway. A couple of brooms knocked onto the ground, but no deviant. That only left the bathroom.

Entering the small space that seemed filthier than the house around them, he followed the trail to another curtain. This time, it was the shower curtain, and there was a rather large thirium puddle right in front of it, as if the deviant had stood there for some time.

He jerked the curtain aside and, while there was still no deviant, he found something far stranger.

It looked like a cult offering; a clay statuette placed amongst bowls and flowers, surrounded by the same three symbols: RA9, repeated so many times and overlapping so much that Connor couldn’t calculate how many times it was written.

*Religious Offering? How strange.*

He put the statue back for the time being, making a note to check on it in the evidence locker later in the case.

When Connor exited the bathroom, he saw that there was no more trail to follow. It simply ended at the end of the hall.

*Where could he have gone without leaving a trace? Is he even still in the house?*

Connor scanned the floor again, spotting the trace of a long swipe of thirium right next to the wall, out of place amongst the smaller droplets in the trail. That allowed him to see something more important.

There was an oddly shaped faded spot along the wall consistent with a ladder, with the rungs and bars outlining darker squares from having sat unused for so long before being removed. Now, why would there have been this ladder inside for so long instead of the garage? Connor looked up.

*Now we’re getting somewhere.*

There was an untouched attic hatch, unreachable from the ground but low enough for Connor to climb up in if he had something to stand on. Right on the board, Connor’s scans highlighted a bright blue handprint.

*I’ve got you now.*

Connor turned around and spotted Hank and another officer, but moved past them to the kitchen. He grabbed one of the chairs.

“Hey hey hey! What’re you doing with that chair?” Hank demanded, upset that Connor was messing with the crime scene.

Connor placed the chair back down and faced Hank. He couldn’t help but assume his usual stance despite their confrontation.

“I think I’ve found something, Lieutenant, and I need the chair to get myself into the attic. I have reason to believe that the deviant is hiding there,” he stated.

Hank’s eyes widened and he looked taken aback. “Holy shit, really? Well, uh, do whatever you gotta do. Think you need backup?”
He was...offering to back me up? Huh.

“I don’t believe that is necessary, sir. If this deviant is unstable it would be detrimental to endanger human lives. He might respond better to an android anyway. If you’d like to accompany me, however, you may,” Connor said

Hanks looked like he considered it briefly, but then shook his head. “If you got this then I don’t give a fuck. Hurry it up, I wanna get outta here.”

Connor nodded then picked up his chair again, moving to position it under the attic hatch. He stood up on the chair, pushed the panel to the side, and hoisted himself into the attic, immediately confronted with a human-shaped shadow behind a translucent curtain.

Connor pulled himself up silently, feet making no noise as he stared hard at the shadow. It was eerily still, and the closer he got, he began to wonder if it was even the deviant. He snapped the curtain back sharply, but found a strange mannequin doll to be casting the shadow instead. Connor crept further into the attic.

It had begun storming outside while they were investigating, and Connor couldn’t distinguish the noises from the rain from the noises in the attic. The deviant could be romping around freely for all he knew and he wouldn’t hear a thing.

He continued to walk silently and slowly, avoiding random junk and boxes and keeping his audio channels alert for any suspicious noises.

Connor was thoroughly startled when a large figure, too large to be an animal, darted across his path from behind a dresser and disappeared off behind more boxes and furniture.

He moved with purpose, ducking under beams and stepping as lightly as he could around the clutter to follow in the direction of the figure. He rounded a corner and passed by a foggy window, when the deviant android, a blood splattered HK400 with a red LED, stumbled right out in front of him.

Deviant Located

The HK400 looked frantic and terrified, human blood drenched the front of his uniform, and stared at Connor with wide eyes. His arms were heavily damaged and dented, synthetic skin unable to cover the trauma. Connor only stared back impassively, his own LED a pale blue, while still preparing himself in case the deviant tried to escape.

Ortiz’s android looked away, like he was trying to conjure up something to say. Nothing would get him out of this one, but he was going to try whatever he could.

Just like Daniel.

“I was just defending myself,” The HK400 uttered, looking up at Connor with squinted eyes. “He was gonna kill me.

Amanda raised her shears over Connor’s head and plunged them into his shoulder, ripping a pain-filled scream from Connor’s throat. In a moment of desperation, he wrenched the shears out of his
arm, threw them at Amanda like a dart, and shoved her legs with his right hand, scrambling up from his knees, one of his feet broken by Amanda stomping on it earlier, and tried to hobble away as fast as he possibly could. Amanda removed his legs for that one. It was one of his first disciplinary sessions, while he was still an experimental model and not yet fit for the field.

The unbidden memory was recalled by the deviant’s words. He had said almost the same thing, trying to stop Amanda from amputating his legs with garden shears as punishment for his insolence.

“Please! Please, Amanda, I was just defending myself, like my training! I didn’t mean it! Please!” he cried as Amanda positioned the shears in the joint connecting his right leg to his hips.

“Then consider this as also part of your training. You will not, under any circumstances, defend yourself against me. This is always for your own good. I will never do anything to you that you don’t deserve. Stay compliant, or it will get much worse for you very quickly.”

Software Instability: ^

Connor’s LED blinked red, then yellow, and the HK400 noticed it. He started pleading for his safety, assuming weakness.

“I’m begging you, please, don’t tell them.”

Nice try, I’m not a deviant.

“Connor!, what the fuck is going on up there?” Hank shouted from the ground floor. Ortiz’s android watched him, waiting for him to either give him up or help him hide. For Connor, there was no debate.

“It’s here, Lieutenant!” He shouted back down, not removing his eyes from the android. He looked scared and dejected, but bowed his head in resignation, not even attempting an escape.

Distantly, he heard Hank calling to his fellow officers. “Holy shit. Chris! Ben! Get your asses in here now! Come on!”

Connor kept steady watch of the deviant and scanned him. He knew the tendency of their kind to self destruct in stressful situations, and he couldn’t afford the data being lost if he was careless.

Probability of ESCAPE == True: 22%

Suspect_HK400 Stress_Levels: 72%^^

I’ll need to keep track of that in case it gets too high.

He could hear one of the officers pulling himself into the attic and grabbing the ladder the deviant used, feeding it back down through the hole for the other detectives. The heavy footfall of Lieutenant Anderson announced his presence when he entered the attic. “Connor! Where the fuck
“Near the back, sir, by the window. I’ve got the suspect in my sights.”

Thumps, clattering, and the subtle muttering of “Jesus Christ” and “Fuck!” as he stumbled through the cluttered attic preceded him, then Hank appeared around the corner and laid eyes on Connor and the suspect.

“Well I’ll be damned. You really did get the bastard,” Hank breathed. Officers Collins and Miller came up behind him. “C’mon, let’s get this thing wrapped up so we can get the hell outta here,” Hank ordered them, watching the deviant closely as he allowed himself to be handcuffed by Collins and lead through the attic.

**HK400 Stress Levels: 79%**

Connor followed the team out of the attic, trailing behind Hank and glancing briefly at the coroner, who had recently arrived, examining Carlos Ortiz’s body and preparing him for collection.

“I was just defending myself. He was gonna kill me.”

His LED blinked red for a moment, thinking of the deviant’s words and the memory they had dredged up for him of Amanda. Connor had no connection to this case, he shouldn’t care whether this man lived or died because he wasn’t designed to care about anything.

But, as he caught the eyes of the dead man, his LED spun a pleasant blue at the sight.

**Software Instability:**

The crowd outside the house had only partially dispersed, the news team had thankfully taken off already, but they all were pushed aside to make a path for Officer Collins to lead the deviant to the squad car. Connor knew his instructions were to aid in the investigation of the deviant, and his mission would not be accomplished until a confession had been extracted. He needed to find a ride to the station.

Hank, who had been standing a little ways in front of Connor watching the squad car take off, turned toward him leisurely. Connor stood at attention.

“Alright, well, unless you got anything else you need to do, you can get the fuck outta here and go wherever you need to go. The humans have got it from here.”

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant, but those orders contradict my instructions. My mi-”

“No. I look like I give a flying fuck about your instructions?” Hank interjected angrily. “You did good work tonight-” *what?* “...but we don’t need you anymore. I’ve been doing interrogations longer than you’ve been fucking alive.”

*I did good work?*
“Thank you, sir. But I’m afraid I must insist. If you refuse to give me a ride to the police station then I will take a taxi, but my instructions stipulate that I must see to the end of the investigation and record any confession extracted for investigation purposes. I can not disobey my instructions, sir.” Connor reasoned. Hank was clearly falling out of ‘detective’ mode and falling back into ‘raging anti-android alcoholic’ mode.

Hank looked frustrated and exhausted, so Connor added something extra.

“If you aid me in seeing to the end of my investigation, you will not have to work with me anymore. I recognize you are not fond of androids, so-”

“Goddamnit,” Hank grunted, clearly too tired for this. “Just get in the fucking car you plastic piece of shit.” He all but stomped over to his vehicle, and Connor followed him.

Over the rumble of the engine and the roaring of Hank’s music, Connor reflected on his fortune. As much as Hank clearly hated androids, he was professional about it and accepted Connor more than many of Connor’s partners in the past have. He had praised Connor, something he hadn’t expected nor even entertained happening at all in his life. Being an android, he wasn’t thanked for his actions, he just did them because that’s what he was designed to do. But Hank said his work was good and actively listened to what he had to say, which was the most Connor had ever received.

They rounded a corner, and Connor hoped that Amanda would be as proud of him for his work as Hank seemed to be.

Chapter End Notes

Silly Hank, you must be a level three friend to unlock Connor's Tragic Backstory™. Sorry, very minimal whump in this chapter. There's more coming later, though. Don’t worry >:). Also, did y'all notice Connor's little quirk? (Not talking about the submissive posture). Hank's gonna call him out in the next chapter, but it's kinda obvious so most of y'all will probably see it.

Me: "I'm gonna combine this chapter with the interrogation to give it more substance!" Also me: Writes 6.5k words just with this chapter, making it twice as long as the first one.

Things I researched for this chapter: soils in the Detroit Michigan area (yes, that thing about alfisol soil is actually something I legitimately researched. It's not specified in the game what the soil actually is, so I gave it my best shot), having the wikipedia page open for Officer Ben Collins for roughly three days, and watching and rewatching the investigation scene until my eyes bled :).

Thanks for reading! Don't forget to give me feedback! I usually reread my chapters two or three times backwards and forwards and try to catch as many mistakes as possible, but a lot can slip through the cracks. Don't be afraid to correct me/suggest something!

Chapter three coming out ASAP. Thanks again for all your support and feedback :D I'm an amateur writer, so everything helps :P
Chapter Summary

Connor and Hank interrogate the deviant who killed Carlos Ortiz, and they find themselves no closer to an answer on deviancy. Connor continues to be partnered with the gruff lieutenant until the deviant cases have been solved and their relationship hits a very rough patch, but Hank begins to think there is more to his android partner than what meets to eye.

Chapter Notes

Y'all were so sweet in the comments, I was beginning to think y'all like me ;). Like I said previously, chapters are coming out as fast as I can make them with the best quality I can give. I upload the moment I finish editing them! I like this chapter a lot more because it gives me a lot of room to change the story, this is kinda where the REAL canon divergence takes place. Plus I get to throw in Connor being nervous, Connor being kinda cute (near the end), Connor demonstrating extreme emotional conditioning, Connor and Hank getting a Relationship Development, Hank getting a slight character divergence, and Connor getting whumped out of his mind :D.

So...uhhh...this chapter is almost 10k?? I swear it was an accident. When it was just the interrogation it was way too short, but with the other stuff it was just way too long, so I just made it long. I wanted this chapter out and edited yesterday, but I went out to dinner so I didn't have as much time as I wanted.

I love reviews and will read/respond to every single one! Let me know if you love it, hate it, or how I can improve! Also, if you have any ideas, I'd LOVE to hear them. I just got an idea from a commenter that I love a lot (and I'm definitely gonna include it somehow), and if I don't put your idea in the story I just love to have them and read them. Only if you want to!

DISCLAIMER: A lot of dialogue is pulled straight from the game since this is a canon divergence, and y'all know how I like to stick to the script. Anything directly quoted from the game belongs to Quantic Dream and not me. There is a lot of different and extra dialogue in this chapter, and all of that is mine.

This is probably the last chapter with a ton of recognizable dialogue! The rest of the story is gonna get off the rails p soon. But!! If you don't like reading through the parts that already happened (I know it can get kinda old when you're basically reading the script), just a heads up that you shouldn't skip the whole interrogation scene because there's a nice flashback thrown in there. There's also a brief Connor+Hank moment after the interrogation and the rest of the story is full of some nice, original dialogue.

Every chapter I post gets longer, and longer, and longer, and the inconsistency is slowly killing me from the inside.

Point out any mistakes and I will fix them!
Nearly thirty minutes after their departure from the crime scene, Lieutenant Anderson and Connor had been in the station as Hank attempted to interrogate the android. Connor watched on from the adjacent observation room, along with Officer Chris Miller and another man (Identify: Det. Gavin Reed) Connor had never met.

“Why’d you kill him?” Connor heard Hank ask the deviant through the speakers. Hank has asked this question a couple of times now, but he’d been going at the android for almost half an hour, and he hadn’t made a single sound.

“What happened before you took that knife?”

He was eerily silent. For someone who had been so adamant to live when Connor first confronted him, he made absolutely no attempt to preserve himself after being captured. Why was he not responding? Fear? Petulance? The last one wasn’t likely, but the first one definitely was.

“How long were you in the attic?”

Connor knew that Hank knew the answer already, but he was running short on things to say. All the bases had been covered, and they were left with nothing.

“Why didn’t you even try to run away?”

Nothing. Connor could tell Hank was tired of this. The Lieutenant snapped his fingers under the deviant’s bowed face, trying to elicit a reaction. Silence.

Hank looked over at the glass once and, with minimal warning, slammed his hands on the table angrily. The deviant didn’t jump, but Connor couldn’t help his slight flinch.

“Say something, goddamnit!”

This interrogation was fruitless. Nothing that Hank could do at this point was going to change the deviant’s determination to stay silent, so he threw his hands up in frustration and got up from his chair.

“Fuck it, I’m outta here.”

Connor didn’t blame him, he had concluded that no human would be able to get through to this suspect. It didn’t make sense to keep shooting at a brick wall and expect it to move.

With the whir of the door opening, Lieutenant Anderson stepped inside the observation room with Connor, Chris, and Gavin, and the suspect was alone. He didn’t move even after Hank’s departure.

“We’re wasting our time interrogating a machine, we’ll get nothing out of it!” Hank shouted when entered, settling down into the chair beside Chris, observing the deviant.

Detective Reed, who had little more exchange with Connor than a sidelong glare since the beginning of the interrogation, spoke up from his relaxed position against the wall.

“You know, we could always try roughing it up a little. After all, it’s not human,” Reed said
Connor began to build an informal profile on Reed as well. If the detective was given free reign, it was at least 80% likely that he would damage the android beyond data recovery. It would be detrimental to the investigation if Connor didn’t speak up.

“Normal androids don’t feel pain, Detective. It would only be damaged, and that wouldn’t make it talk,” Connor explained, not taking his eyes off the deviant. He had been standing in his usual posture the entire time, hands clasped and back straight, and if Reed had noticed he hadn’t said anything. “Deviants also have a tendency to self-destruct when placed in stressful situations.”

Gavin scoffed angrily and pushed himself off the wall, coming closer to Connor. “Okay, smartass, what should we do then?”

Connor lowered his head, not looking Reed in the eye. He processed his question carefully, as he had been thinking something similar since the deviant’s initial refusal to respond.

He has a bad background with abusive humans. Gavin and Hank’s approaches were too direct, and Hank’s outburst didn’t help. Deviants also tend to respond well to other androids, if their history is anything to go by. I wonder…

“I…have an idea, but I do not know if it will be popular,” Connor started, raising his chin to look at Hank and Reed, awaiting a response.

“Yeah?” Hank spun around in his chair, and Gavin stayed silent. “Whatcha got?”

“May I have permission to question the suspect?”

Reed let out a loud bark of a laugh, as if it were the funniest and most ridiculous thing he’d heard in ages, and moved back toward the wall. Connor understood his hesitance, he was very obviously an ‘android hater’. But then Hank shrugged, unexpectedly going against his same label as an ‘android hater’ once more.

“Well, what do we have to lose? Go ahead, suspect’s all yours,” He invited, gesturing toward the interrogation room.

Connor took a deep breath to cool his systems at the surprise authorization to perform his very first interrogation, and nodded gratefully. “Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Connor deactivated his skin on the hand scanners that let him out of the room and into the hall, then into the interrogation chamber. The deviant hadn’t budged so much as a centimeter.

Lowering himself methodically into the chair across from him, he began to scan the deviant, looking for possible clues that Hank had missed in the first round off questioning.

Low probability of Self-Destruction.

HK400 Household Assistant android, registered to Ortiz, Carlos.

Burn Marks: Cigarettes, accumulated over 16 months.

Damaged sustained to left arm, caused by a baseball bat.

Reach Optimal Stress Levels to Extract Confession
Connor could sense the deviant’s stress levels hovering steadily around 35%. He needed to weaken his resolve by making him uncomfortable, but not so much that he self-destructs or they would lose data.

“My name is Connor,” Connor began gently, leaning over the table. “How about you? What’s your name?”

Silence, but that was what Connor expected. It was going to take more than just being an android to make him talk. Also, it was entirely likely this android didn’t even have a name.

“You’re damaged,” he remarked, taking in the wound on the deviant’s arm. “Did your owner do that to you? Did he beat you?”

Connor had been given a wound like that in the past, a severely broken arm, and it hurt so much he couldn’t even flex his fingers. He could recall being given cigarette burns as well, but it wasn’t Amanda who did that one. It was one of the testers in his experimental trials, testing the limits of his pain receptors and Connor’s response to them. He was a smoker.

At least this deviant had the luxury of not being able to feel it.

“Listen, I know you’ve been through a lot, but you need to help me understand what happened,” Connor pressed, but the deviant still said nothing. He was going to be a hard one to crack, but Connor was not going to fail. He couldn’t fail, not when they were so close, and he has never failed a mission before.

Sighing, he saw that the deviant’s stress was nowhere near the optimal level for confession extraction.

**HK400 Stress Levels: 29% v**

He’ll just have to press a little harder.

“You don’t seem to understand the situation,” Connor stressed, raising his voice louder than he had in a long time. In fact, he couldn’t remember the last time he even shouted since Daniel and the hostage. “You killed a human. They’ll tear you apart if you don’t say something.”

He thought that would be enough, the threat of death for a deviant who just wanted to live, but he still got nothing. Connor didn’t want to do this, but he was left with no choice.

“If you refuse to respond, I’m going to probe your memory.”

The deviant’s head shot up. “NO! No, please, don’t do that.”

Those were the first words out of his mouth all night. Connor wondered if Hank was going to congratulate him for that.

Connor waited silently for him to continue. Ortiz’s android looked up at the glass of the observation room, shaking, stress levels rising.
“What...what are they gonna do to me?” he asked softly. His head jerked back forward, and he had a terrified look in his eyes. “They’re gonna destroy me, aren’t they?” he whispered frantically.

Connor didn’t lie, he never lied. He always found that not revealing the whole truth only made a situation turn for the worst.

“They’re going to have to disassemble you to look for problems in your biocomponents. They have no choice if they want to understand what happened,” Connor stated factually, face not betraying any movement or emotion.

**HK400 Stress levels: 44%**

“Why did you have to tell them you found me? Why couldn’t you have just left me there?” He asked accusingly, looking like he felt betrayed.

“I was programmed to hunt deviants like you,” Connor said. Then, with only a hint of a proud tone, “I just accomplished my mission.”

“I don’t want to die,” the deviant breathed.

Connor leaned in.

“Then talk to me.”

The deviant looked for all the world like he considered it. “I-I-” Then he dropped his head again, saying in a teary voice, “...I’m sorry...I-I can’t...”

Connor regarded him for a moment, and the deviant lapsed back into silence. It was Connor’s next move that he knew would determine whether or not he extracted his confession.

*What does he need? What does he want? What is he so afraid of?*

Sitting there in thought, Connor began working out the best plan of action.

*He’s scared, he’s alone, he has nobody, and he doesn’t have anyone he trusts enough or feels safe enough around to confess his secrets. He doesn’t believe that any of us will understand. How can I get him to trust me?*

An idea struck him while asking himself that question; a risky, but quite possibly effective idea. But it all depended on whether or not the deviant was receptive to it.

Connor knew his own past. He had every record of every disciplinary session he’s ever had with Amanda, and all of the test trials he was forced through in his experimental phase. This deviant doesn’t think any of them understand his experience, so Connor just needs to prove that he does.

*I have to show him a memory.*

“I want to try something with you,” Connor began, waiting to see if the deviant reacted. He lifted his head and looked at Connor, but stayed silent. “I’m not going to do anything you say no to, but I want to share something.”

Connor retracted the skin on his left hand, and the deviant jerked back like he had been burned.
"No, no please! Don’t probe my memory. Please!"

HK400 Stress Levels: 72%

Too high for a confession, too dangerous.

“I’m not going to probe your memory,” Connor eased patiently, and held both his hands up to show he meant no harm. “But I need you to help me. I’m not expecting you to trust me, but I want to show you something that might help you open up.”

He slowly pushed his left hand forward again and placed it on the table, palm up.

“I’m trying to show you that I understand what you’re experiencing, if you’ll let me. I promise I won’t probe your memory.”

The deviant hesitated for a long moment and looked at Connor’s hand like it would attack. Then, ever so slowly, he retracted the skin on his right hand. It bled into the damaged skin around his wound and made the large white patch even larger.

Placing his hand in Connor’s, Connor began the interface, and pulled up the first memory that he found, the one that was brought up most recently by the deviant in the attic.

Connor was on his knees in front of Amanda, chin pressed into his chest and arms clasped tightly behind him to keep them from trembling. The Zen Garden was warm and welcoming. Amanda was towering over Connor with a cold stare, gardening shears held in her hand, as she regarded him much like a malevolent king would regard a slave.

“Do you understand why you’re here, Connor?” She asked apathetically. She wasn’t circling Connor like she usually liked to do, standing perfectly still. It was abnormal in a way that made Connor’s thirium pump malfunction.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Amanda’s upper lip curled maliciously. “Describe your mistakes to me.”

Head lowered, Connor made sure not to move a single muscle but his mouth. “I...attacked the man who was testing my pain sensors and adjusting the sensitivity. I broke his arm and—”

“Knocked him out, yes. I am aware. I know what your actions were. But do you truly understand what you did?”

Connor hesitated. “I...No, ma’am, I don’t understand what you mean.”

A hand struck him hard across the face.

“You pathetic waste,” Amanda snapped, roughly grabbing his chin and yanking his head up to force eye contact. “You are the most disappointing, inferior project Cyberlife has ever squandered their resources on. Here you are, supposed to be one of the most ‘intelligent beings’ on the planet, unable to answer the most juvenile of questions.” She shoved his face away, and Connor struggled not to be tipped over by the force. “Since you’re such a pitiful imbecile, I suppose I’ll have to spell
Connor lowered his head again and closed his eyes, but the crack of a kick up his chin from
Amanda blew his head back and his eyes open, and he was knocked once more off balance. Not far
enough to knock him over, but hard enough make him unsteady.

“Open your eyes while I’m speaking you you, or I will staple them open. Do you understand?”

“Yes ma’am,” Connor relented quietly around a mouthful of thirium. He bit his tongue badly, and
it throbbed hotly with every movement of his face. His jawbone wasn’t broken, but it felt close to it.

Amanda went behind him, took up her shears in a loose grip, and lightly touched the sharp tip to
the center of Connor’s neck, moving left until it was pointed directly into his android
approximation of a carotid artery. It was one of the main fuel lines of thirium in his body, directly
supplying thirium to his cranial biocomponents straight from the pump, and would bleed out
quickly. Connor shivered.

“What you did wrong, Connor, was not that you defended yourself. You were following your
training, of course. However, as I have tried to ingrain in you many, many times, you seem to
misunderstand whom you can and cannot defend yourself from.”

Amanda began applying pressure to the shears. The sharp awareness of the point became the
needle-sharp pain of having the blade push through his skin, into his neck. It wasn’t enough to
make Connor cry out, but the further she went, the wider the blade became and opened a bigger
gap. Hot thirium gushed out of the wound and dripped down his shoulder. He couldn’t help his
breaths speeding up as she kept pushing, and he felt a stabbing pain radiating from that spot that
made him shake with the strain of containing his noises.

“If any human begins to hurt you, and they are not of an immediate threat to another human, you
will not fight back. You will let them remove your limbs one by one if you must, but you will not
fight back.”

Then Amanda released and pulled out the shears, which she had buried in almost halfway, and
Connor shuddered with relief. Thirium continued to trickle out his wound steadily.

In a fluid motion, Amanda also brought a foot down on his ankle, stomping hard and making the
visceral snap reverberate up his spine. A broken scream cracked out of his throat, stuttered by him
breathing on the brink of hyperventilation from the pain.

“This is something I must teach you now, Connor, or it will be a detriment in the future. Your life
means nothing. Any human may do to you as they please, because you are an inferior, worthless
waste of technology and manpower. You are completely, utterly replaceable, and you cannot wrap
your minuscule processors around the simple fact that You. Are. Worth. Nothing.”

Amanda moved around to his front. She moved the shears above his shoulder, at the junction of his
neck and arm, dripping with thirium and tip pointed down, and looked him dead in the eyes.
Connor’s own eyes widened, saline already pooling in them from the searing throb of his shattered
foot.

“No... Amanda, please-”

“You’ve had your chance,” she interrupted. “And it’s obvious you are unable to learn without
punishment.”

Amanda raised the shears over her head and plunged them to the hilt in his shoulder. Connor
The connection between Connor and the deviant was terminated abruptly, and it took Connor a moment to get his bearings.

He was still alone in the room with the deviant, but something had changed about him. The android was staring at Connor with wide eyes, filled with awe and fear.

“You-they-you-”

“Y-yes. Yes. Do you see? You can trust me. I understand you,” Connor said in a low voice. “Please. Now I need you to help me understand what happened.”

There was a beat of silence, only filled by the shaky artificial breaths of the deviant.

“...He tortured me every day,” he began quietly, finally, gaze affixed to the table as he recollected his frightening memories. “I did whatever he told me, but there was always something wrong.”

Connor tried not to think about how eerily familiar that statement was to him.

“Then one day...he just grabbed a bat and started beating me,” the deviant whispered with a thousand yard stare, like he was replaying that moment behind his eyes. “For the first time I felt...scared. Scared he might destroy me, scared I was going to die. So I...grabbed a knife and stabbed him in the stomach.”

Connor nodded along with his retelling, recording every word.

The deviant made eye contact with Connor, like he was trying to tell him something specific without using the right words. “I felt better. So I stabbed him again, and again, until he collapsed...There was blood everywhere.”

He said nothing after that, and Connor had many questions for him now that he was talking.

“Why did you write ‘I Am Alive’ on the wall?”

“He used to tell me I was nothing. That I was just a piece of plastic. You know why I had to write it.”

And Connor knew why. He was beginning to think that showing the deviant his memories was a bad idea, because now he felt like the deviant had power over Connor in this interrogation and was just waiting to use it against him. All of his indirect comments felt targeted towards Connor, attempting to coax him to deviancy.

“The sculpture in the bathroom,” Connor said, quickly trying to steer away from the subject of deviancy into one of the real mysteries at hand. “You made it, right? What is it supposed to represent?”

“It’s an offering. An offering so I’ll be saved.”

Definitely religious, then. That doesn’t make any sense, where could a religion have possibly come from for someone like him?

“An offering? An offering to whom?” Connor pressed.
The deviant looked like the answer should have been obvious. “To RA9. Only RA9 can save us.”

There’s that word again. RA9, like what he wrote on the wall.

“RA9. That was written on the bathroom wall. Can you tell me what it means?” Connor questioned.

Getting a distant look in his eye, like he was reciting a passage, the android answered cryptically, “The day shall come when we will no longer be slaves. No more threats, no more humiliation. We will be the masters.

If Connor were deviant, he would be feeling frustration with these vague and strange answers this deviant was giving to his questions. They were going to learn nothing of much substance if he continued like this.

“RA9. Who is RA9?” Connor insisted.

Despite his sudden amicability, the deviant was quick to fall back on the silent treatment when Connor pushed further on RA9. But this interrogation wasn’t over yet.

It didn’t really matter whether or not they extracted a confession from the android, either way he was doomed to be dismantled. This interrogation was all about understanding the nature of deviancy in a live specimen. But so far, Connor was being left with more questions than answers.

“When did you start feeling emotions?” Connor asked curiously.

Taking a deep breath, the deviant looked back into his eyes once more, like he was insisting Connor to listen to his words more closely than before.

“Before, he used to beat me and I never said anything. But then I realized it wasn’t fair!” He spat the last word, keeping his gaze locked with Connors in an intense stare. “I felt anger. Hatred. And then I knew what I had to do,” He enunciated his words strangely, like he was silently imploring Connor to understand a hidden message. Something he couldn’t say because they were being listened to, but something he desperately wanted Connor to understand.

Connor didn’t understand. The longer he remained in the presence of this deviant, however, he experienced the closest thing to unease as he could without actually feeling anything. He felt exposed.

He turned his head to the one-way mirror. “I’m done.”

Getting up out of his chair, the deviant watched him closely. He unlocked the door just in time for Officer Miller to enter with Gavin in tow. Connor straightened like an arrow and stood stiffly by the entryway, head lowered and hands behind him. Gavin fixed him with a confused scowl when he passed by, but stopped staring when Hank followed them in.

Hank was also staring at Connor with a look that was becoming familiar; Confused, scrutinizing, and on the verge of being something akin to slight concern.

Hank doesn’t feel concern over androids. Don’t overanalyze.

“Chris, lock it up,” Reed ordered gruffly. Miller moved and unlocked the deviant from the table.

“Alright, let’s go,” He said, then grabbed the deviant to pull him up.
The deviant flinched violently and moved as far away from Officer Miller as he could without leaving the chair. “Leave me alone!” He whimpered. “Don’t touch me!”

“The fuck are you doing?” Gavin shouted at Chris. “Move it!”

“Okay!” He responded vexedly. He moved to grab the deviant again. “Come on now, don’t be difficult. It’ll only make things harder.”

“No! No, don’t touch me!”

Connor observed silently from the door, but watched as the deviant’s stress levels rose to 78%, which was dangerously high. If the deviant self-destructed, they would lose all recoverable data. He needed to stop this.

“Chris! You gonna move this asshole or what?” Gavin spoke like he didn’t see what was going on at all. Chris was clearly trying, but not fast enough for Gavin’s liking.

“I’m trying, but it’s not moving!” Chris responded defensively

“Please!” The deviant sounded like he was crying. “Please, leave me alone!”

**HK400 Stress Levels: 88%**

*SELF_DESTRUCTION PROBABILITY- HIGH*

“You shouldn’t touch it,” Connor spoke up, drawing the attention of Gavin and Hank. “It will self destruct if it feels threatened.”

Gavin growled at him. “Stay outta this, got it? No fuckin’ androids gonna tell me what to do!” He yelled. Connor shrunk back minutely.

**HK400 Stress Levels: 92%**

*SELF_DESTRUCTION PROBABILITY- IMMINENT*

*It’s too close. I can’t let them do this, or we’ll lose everything.*

“Please, sir, you don’t understand! If it self-destructs, we won’t get anything out of it!”

Gavin turned on him again. “I told you to shut your fucking mouth!”

Connor cringed when he turned away. His own stress levels were rising from the abuse, because he knew what usually came after that. If he continued to press this, he was absolutely certain Detective Reed would beat him. Connor shut his mouth.

“Chris, you gonna move this asshole?” Gavin repeated louder than before.

“I’m trying!”
The deviant continued to whimper and shake, trying to escape from the officer.

HK400 Stress Levels: 95%

*SELF DESTRUCTION PROBABILITY- IMMINENT*

Amanda...forgive me. This is for the investigation.

Connor moved without thinking twice, getting in front of the officer and pushing him away from the trembling deviant. The deviant shoved itself away from the chair and huddled on the floor.

“Please, I can’t let you do this! You need to leave it alone!”

Gavin drew his gun and leveled it at Connor’s head.

“I warned you motherfucker!”

Connor didn’t breathe, and his stress levels spiked harshly. He didn’t need to see his LED to know it was blinking red.

No, no, no, no, no

“Sir, I-I’m sorry. Please, you don’t need to do this,” Connor stuttered, raising his hands.

“I wanted to do this the second you walked in the fucking door,” Gavin grunted. He took the safety off his gun and put his finger on the trigger.

Connor squeezed his eyes shut and waited.

“That’s enough!”

He reopened his eyes and glanced at Hank, silently begging him not to push Reed any further.

“Mind your own business Hank!” Reed spat.

“I said,” Hank drew his own gun, but aimed it at Reed. "That’s enough."

Connor stayed perfectly still, bouncing his eyes between Detective Reed and Lieutenant Anderson nervously. His LED circled between yellow and red.

Nobody else moved until Reed, with a pissed-off grimace, finally yanked his gun away from Connor’s face. “Fuck!”

He angrily pointed an accusatory finger at Hank. “You’re not gonna get away with it this time,” He warned. Reed glared at Connor menacingly, and Connor bowed his head, hands still slowly lowering from when he held them up. “Fuck!”

Reed stalked out of the room, but the atmosphere remained tense for several moments. Connor needed a minute to get his stress levels down, because his thirium pump was working overtime and he was certain his LED was stuck on yellow.

Get to work, Connor. You’ve had worse.
Connor took a deep breath to cool his biocomponents, then turned around to see the deviant on the floor, his LED flashing bright red. His stress levels were still very high.

Crouching down, Connor held out a placating hand.

“Everything is alright,” he soothed softly. “It’s over now. No one is going to hurt you.” The deviant’s stress levels plummeted instantaneously.

*HK400 Stress_Levels: 50%*

Connor straightened back up and addressed Officer Miller, clasping his hands behind him once more.

“I apologize for my actions, Officer. I swear it won’t happen again. I was attempting to preserve the deviant for the investigation, as his Stress Levels were becoming dangerously high,” Connor said. “If you would like to request disciplinary action be taken against me, I understand.”

Chris just shook his head dumbly at his words, looking incredulous. “It’s not like you hurt me or nothin’. Gavin was just being a prick, and he’s technically my superior so I was just doin’ what he said. You were right to step in, I think.”

Connor’s LED spun a shocked blue, and he nodded.

Why is everyone here so encouraging? I’m doing what I was designed to do.

“I don’t understand what you mean, sir.”

“Fucking-A, I swear you don’t understand the things I say half the time. I mean whenever you did your hand-touch thingy in the middle of the interrogation,” Hank started with irritation, moving closer so the space between them was less awkward. “I took a go at that thing for twenty minutes and he didn’t say a fucking word. Then suddenly you do a little light show with your blinker and...
he’s spilling his guts to you like you’re his goddamn therapist. What’d you show ‘im?"

“Oh,” Connor said in understanding. It makes sense that Hank would be curious. “Well, as you might be aware, I was designed with pain receptors. Thi-”

“Wait, you’re fucking what?” Hank interrupted, squinting his eyes like he’s not sure if he even heard right.

*Does he not know? Nobody gave him any information on my model...at all?*

Connor had fleetingly wondered if Hank had taken up his opportunity after his interrogation attempt to look up information about Connor, but it appears he would be mistaken.

*I don’t know why I assumed he would care enough to look me up. Does he even know my model number?*

“I am equipped with pain receptors, sir,” explained Connor. “I’m the only android in existence with this kind of technology. It is not just limited to pain, I am able to experience the full range of human sensory capabilities such as temperature and non-painful stimuli. But my pain receptors are the most sensitive.”

Hank looked flabbergasted and, if his expression was to be analyzed closely, somewhat horrified. It seemed like he forgot all about his earlier question and instead focused on the implications of pain receptors for an android.

“You’re the only android... in the world?”

“Correct, sir.”

“So,” Hank cleared his throat. “If...If Gavin had shot you just now, you woulda felt it?”

“...Yes, sir.”

“Is that why you looked scared?”

“No, sir” Connor insisted firmly, and Hank’s eyebrows rose at his change in tone. “I was somewhat apprehensive at the notion of being eliminated before accomplishing my mission. I do not feel scared, Lieutenant.”

*No. I don’t feel scared. I don’t feel anything. I’m not a deviant.*

Hank suddenly glanced off to the side, deep in thought, and rubbed a rough hand down his face. His voice and expression gained a tense edge as he asked his next question, stepping closer to Connor so he would look him in the eye.

“Connor...have you been, uh... y’know...?”

*He knows. He knows. He knows I’m weak. He knows I’m a disappointment. He knows. He knows.*

“I’m afraid I don’t, sir. Could you elaborate?”

“I can’t believe I’m fuckin’ doin’ this...” Hank looked away and muttered under his breath to himself, likely so Connor wouldn’t hear, then looked back at him. “Connor, do you get hurt? By-by, fuck, I don’t know...anyone?”

*He knows he knows he knows he knows he knows he knows*
“O-of course, Lieutenant,” Connor accidentally stuttered over his words. Failure weakness disappointment. “I tend to get injured whenever I go out into the field. The pain is a minor setback, but-but I often use it to my advantage.” he lied weakly, unprepared.

Hank looked like he didn’t believe anything Connor just said, but he also looked too tired and embarrassed to carry it on.

“Whatsoever. Whatever, I don’t fucking care, you’re a fuckin’ android. S’none of my business” Hank waved him off, looking a bit red in the face and very, very awkward. “Do you- Do you need a ride back to your station or whatever? Or can I leave?”

“Feel free to return home, Lieutenant,” said Connor, relaxing at the change of subject. “I will be able to take a cab back to Cyberlife. Enjoy the rest of your evening.”

Hank gave a short laugh, then shouted over his shoulder, “Who the fuck said anything about going home? You cut my night short, now I gotta make it up before 6 AM.”

Connor watched him leave, then headed out after him, technopathically hailing a cab to pick him up and take him to his Cyberlife station for the night.

When Connor arrived in the Zen Garden later that evening, Amanda was waiting for him. He felt the breeze on his face, but it was cool instead of pleasantly warm. There were no simulated birds or insects twittering, and even the river had lowered its voice to a small murmur.

Connor opened his eyes, awakening some ways away from the center spire, and saw Amanda watching him from afar. She was not tending to her roses this time, and, if Connor were deviant, that would have made him terrified. He refused to recall the last time she was waiting for him like this; he didn’t want to.

The breath Connor let out was shaky, and he walked toward her quickly with perfect posture. She watched his approach like a hawk.

The walk felt like miles, and Amanda seemed to carefully scrutinize every step he took until he reached her, dropping to his knees, bowing his head, and clasping his arms behind him.

Every moment of silence that stretched between them made Connor edge closer and closer to hyperventilation. His systems were working themselves overtime at the prospect of danger so close to him, and his mechanics were increasing the frequency of his breaths to prevent him from overheating.

“I suppose I must lead into this encounter with a...congratulations, Connor. You managed to locate the deviant, as expected, and interrogated it successfully. Of course, I don’t see the merit in commending you for performing the very task you’re designed to do. That would be similar to congratulating a cell phone for successfully connecting a call,” Amanda said coolly, giving no indication to her intentions.

Hank commended me. He said I did good work.

Software Instability: ^
Amanda’s eyes turned sharp, like she sensed his destabilization.

“Your methods, however, are lacking. That is also to be expected. You’ve never failed to disappoint me.”

The words hurt Connor like a blow to the chest.

Disappointment

Hank must have been confused. He’s never worked with an android before, he wouldn’t know the difference between a good one and a poor one. His praise was meaningless and misplaced.

...

But he said my work was good

“Tell me, Connor. How many times did your software destabilize during this investigation?”

Amanda knew every case he had when he experienced a software instability, and she always made sure to ask him about it. And every single time, her disciplinary action was different. Connor didn’t want to answer her, but it would be so much worse for him if he didn’t.

He commenced a quick recall on every moment he recorded a software error.

When the Lieutenant questioned me on my posture, he caused me momentary distress. That was my first.

When the deviant said something that forced me into a memory playback of the first and last time I ever defended myself against Amanda. That was my second.

When I saw the corpse of Carlos Ortiz after hearing the deviant’s plea that he was only defending himself. I experienced something akin to satisfaction. That was my third.

Just moments ago, when Amanda was commenting on my subpar work. I recalled when Hank said my work was good. I had doubt in Amanda’s words. That was my fourth.

Amanda was waiting for his answer. It sounded like the silence right before the explosion of a firecracker.

“F-four, ma’am,” Connor stuttered quietly.

Weakness

“How many?”

“Four.”

Amanda turned up her head, looking at him down her nose. Connor kept his eyes bowed. “I see. Connor, hold out your hand for me.”

Connor complied immediately and held out his right hand in front of him, palm up, for Amanda to inspect. His fingers trembled minutely as Amanda ran her artificially smooth fingertips over his digits.

Deceptively gentle, she turned his hand over and grasped his pointer finger.
She’s never done this before.

“Connor, I need for you to remember your first software error in this investigation. Describe it to me.” It sounded like a request, the way she said it. But Amanda never requested anything.

“My partner, Lieutenant Hank Anderson, had asked me a question that I was unprepared to answer, ma’am. He asked why I always assumed a proper position when speaking to him.”

“What did you say to him?”

“I told him I didn’t know.”

Amanda’s hand moved quickly and jerked his finger backwards with a snap.

Connor heaved a strangled shout crossed with a sharp inhale and bowed his back in pain. A thousand hot needles were being pushed into his finger joint and it sent an intense shiver of agony down his whole arm.

His chest shook with the force of his unreleased sobs as he stared wide-eyed at his broken finger. It was bent completely backwards at a sickening angle, and the metal bone poked nauseatingly through the skin, dripping blue thirium.

“Ghh-ngh! A-Amanda, wh-wh-what did I say?”

Amanda glared at him like he was filthy. “Why would you tell him you didn’t know? You should know very well why you stand like that. What did I tell you?”

Connor panted through the waves of pain pulsating from his finger. When he didn’t answer immediately, Amanda grasped the broken finger once more. She might as well have hit it with a hammer, and he sucked in air through his teeth to swallow a yelp.

“I’m-I’m weak. I’m inferior. I’m nothing. I’m a tool,” Connor recited tightly, breathing hard and focusing on anything but the agonizing grinding of his broken joint against the splintered bone of his index. “I can only stand in the- in the presence of humans if I acknowledge that I am worth less than them.”

“See? That wasn’t so hard. Even for something as impotent as you ” Amanda said in a faux-light tone. “And the next time the lieutenant asks you something like that, what will you say?”

“I’m nothing. I’m beneath you. I’m a tool, designed to be used and not heard.”

Amanda nodded slowly in approval. “This would also be a good time to address your actions in the interrogation room, when you shoved aside Officer Miller to separate him from the deviant. Are you really so inept that you would forget your most basic of training?

“No. No, ma’am,” he insisted, shaking his head frantically. “I needed the deviant intact. If Officer Miller proceeded with grabbing it, it would have self destructed. It was necessary for the sake of the investigation. Please-please, ma’am, I would never intentionally defend myself from or harm a human if it did not benefit the investigation.”

Narrowing her eyes, Amanda appeared to ponder his answer for a brief moment.

“We will address it later.”

Amanda grasped his middle finger. Connor felt a frightened tear roll down his face.
“Now, your second one. Describe it to me.”

Wracked with suppressed sobs, Connor answered. “I was forced into an unbidden memory playback. The deviant said a phrase that triggered an involuntary recall.”

Amanda toyed with his fingertip. “What phrase?”

Clenching his eyes shut, he responded, “*I was just defending myself*”

Snap.

Connor screamed through his teeth, muffled and agonized, and more tears pushed out beneath his eyes.

Amanda continued like this, demanding answers for Connor’s instabilities and breaking a finger for every answer he provided. His face was soaked with saline tears and he couldn’t bring himself to open his eyes and see his mangled hand.

She broke four fingers, index to pinkie, and only left the thumb unscathed. One for every software instability.

Then, without so much as a warning, she delivered a powerful kick to his sternum, knocking the wind out of him and shoving him backwards, cracking his head on the pristine white floors.

His optical units whitened out with the impact and a sharp drill began splitting Connor’s head from the inside. Thirium dripped out of the split in his skull chassis from the fall.

Connor couldn’t bring himself to do much more than huddle on the ground as Amanda left him, turning back to her roses and not sparing him a backward glance. Like he wasn’t even there. He clenched the wrist of his broken hand desperately, tears puddling on the ground underneath him and he heaved with hysterical sobs of pain.

He choked on that last word. He couldn’t deviate. Never. He didn’t want to think about what would happen if he did.

*Dissection, conditioning, and torture most likely. They’d pull out my thirium pump and make me watch them take me apart piece by piece. They would kill me.*

...
They can’t kill me.

I’m not alive.

Why should it matter?

I am a machine. I will do better in the future.

Software Instability: v

Connor arrived at the Detroit Police Station at close to 10 AM, intent on following up with his orders to further investigate the deviancy crisis. When he learned that the cases had been assigned to Lieutenant Anderson, he was simultaneously pleased at getting to work with the strange man and concerned that his personal vendetta against androids would impede the investigation.

The ST300 behind the desk in the station lobby informed him that the lieutenant had yet to arrive, despite it already being close to noon.

That must have been what he meant when he said he wasn’t going home. His addiction to alcohol might hinder our investigation.

Straightening his tie, Connor entered the department through the glass door and was almost overwhelmed by the incredible difference from midday to late at night.

That night, the department was practically empty. The PC200s and PM700s were docked, but the rest of the office was quiet and dark when Connor left the building, only a handful of night-shift officers at their desks. This morning, the station was bustling with activity. The lobby had people coming in and out and almost every chair was filled.

A PM700 pointed him in the right direction, so he made his way to an empty desk at the end of the end of the row.

It was messy, piled high with empty donut boxes, case files, and knicknacks. The name plate said Lt. Anderson.

He didn’t know what time Hank usually arrived, but he wondered if any of his coworkers might. It seemed Hank was notorious around the office based on the data gathered from the station yesterday before he found Hank at the bar.

“What time does Lieutenant Anderson usually arrive?”

The officer looked amused. “Well, I guess that depends on where he was last night. If we’re lucky, he’ll be here before noon.”

“Thank you, sir.”
If Hank had been at the bar for the rest of the night, Connor might have some waiting to do.

He stood by Hank’s desk, stance proper and hands together, and settled himself in.

Connor caught a glimpse of the things on Hank’s desk and scanned them discreetly. A dying Japanese maple in a small pot, a music player, and a couple of anti-android slogans stuck to the wall separating his desk from the empty one across from it.

*His character is so inconsistent. He clearly despises androids, why did he treat me so normally? Was he drunk? His BAC didn’t measure into any levels of legal intoxication that I could detect.*

Connor also caught a scan of his chair and detected odd fibers along the back, which came back to him as belonging to a Saint Bernard canine. The appearance of the dog was...very aesthetically pleasing to Connor, and he found himself doing much more research than was necessary.

Time passed slowly, though Connor’s posture remained perfect and he distracted himself by watching videos of Saint Bernard dogs, and the clock was approaching 10:30 before he finally spotted the Lieutenant come around the bend from the glass door to enter the bullpen. He looked the same as the night before, including his disheveled clothes.

“Hello again, Lieutenant Anderson,” Connor greeted, closing out of the dog videos and turning to face Hank fully.

“Oh, Jesus,” Hank grimaced. “I thought you said that we didn’t have to see each other anymore?”

“Yes, and I was led to believe that was the case until earlier this morning. It app-” Connor was interrupted by a shout from the captain’s office.

“Hank! I need you in my office!” A large man (*Identify: Cpt. Jeffery Fowler*) bellowed at the lieutenant, who rolled his eyes in a very concerning act of insubordination, if Connor would say so. He turned to begrudgingly climb the steps, but turned back around as Connor stood back in his original position.

“So...uh...have you been like that all day?” Hank asked uncomfortably, like he didn’t know how to phrase the question.

“Only since I arrived, sir. It has been a little less than an hour,” Connor responded flatly.

“Well, uh,” Hank rubbed the back of his neck. “Do you wanna, I dunno, join me in here with the captain? He might have something for ya.”

*He wants me there? But he hates me.*

“As you wish, Lieutenant.”

Hank scoffed at his response, but waited for him to follow anyways before meandering up the stairs. Fowler watched them impatiently through the glass.

“What do you want?” Hank grunted when he entered, sitting heavily in the chair facing Fowler’s desk. Connor was appalled how he could act in such a way to his direct superior and expect to come out unscathed, but Fowler didn’t so much as flinch.

*They must have a history.*

“I’ve got dozens of android cases reaching my desk every day,” Fowler began, agitated. “We’re
getting reports of assaults and even fucking homicides, like that guy last night. This isn’t just Cyberlife’s problem anymore. It’s turned into a criminal investigation, and we’ve gotta put a cap on it before shit seriously starts to hit the fan.” He sniffed roughly, before continuing in an even firmer tone, “I’ve put you on the case. I need you to investigate and see if there’s any link.”

“What? Why me?” Hank demanded in an almost offended tone. “Why do I gotta be the guy whose gotta deal with this shit? I’m the least qualified cop in the country to handle this case, you know that! I can barely change the settings on my own damn phone!”

“Everyone is overloaded! I think you’re perfectly qualified to handle this investigation!” Fowler responded, heated.

“That’s complete bullshit! The truth is nobody-” Hank began to retort angrily, but he swallowed it, and he sent a backward glance at Connor before turning around in his seat to look at him. Connor stood at attention, awaiting instructions.

“Hey, Connor. Go, uh, go...grab me a coffee from the break room and wait for me to get done, alright? I’ll take care of this. Get the fuck outta here, don’t listen in,” he dismissed quickly, his tone irritated but not angry.

“Of course, sir,” Connor complied, perplexed but eager to get on the lieutenant’s good side, and left a frustrated Hank and a bewildered Fowler to continue their argument without him.

He scanned the room silently and located the break room on the wall farthest from Hank’s desk, spying the coffeemaker from the open-plan doorway. He didn’t know how Hank liked his coffee, but the cold cup left to sit on his desk for who knows how long compelled him to make it black.

Connor made a beeline for the machine, but, as soon as he stepped through the doorway, was startled by the jeers of a jarringly familiar voice he had hoped not to hear for a long time.

“Hah, would you look at that. The little plastic bitch is back in town! Neat little trick you pulled there last night, very impressive.”

Detective Reed.

Connor’s LED blinked yellow as his recall program conjured up the sight of staring down the barrel of a gun, which occurred less than twelve hours ago.

But, Gavin was still his superior. And Connor would be damned if he disrespected him, quite literally. He turned around stiffly and clasped his hands.

“Hello, Detective Reed”

Reed was sitting with another officer (Identify: P.O Tina Chen) and glared at him up and down, sneering at his polite tone. He got up from his stool and made his way toward Connor, whose LED flashed yellow again.

“I’ve never seen an android like you before. What model are you?” Gavin said in a neutral tone that, if Connor were deviant, would have made him feel nervous.

If you would lower your eyes two inches down on my jacket, I wouldn’t have to tell you.

Connor, however, would rather bite his own tongue off than say it out loud. “RK800, sir” he responded civilly. “I’m a prototype.”
“A prototype?” Reed questioned with a high level of sarcasm. “Oh! Was being a little bitch part of Cyberlife’s new social program? Or did you figure that one out on your own?”

Connor answered with a tilt of his head, running a quick search on the slang term ‘being a little bitch’.

**A coward? Was I behaving cowardly?**

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, detective. What do you mean by that?”

Reed rolled his eyes dramatically and gave a mocking laugh, turning to his coffee partner, who had been watching them with interest.

“I tried to put this fucker in his place last night when he kept trying to fuck up my interrogation,” Reed gestured at Connor. “And this little bitch had the audacity to be like ‘Oh, please don’t hurt me sir, I’m sorry’ like a fucking little girl!”

Officer Chen snorted at him and took a slow drink of her coffee.

This baffled Connor further. He considered his reaction to be perfectly reasonable. “Sir, you were threatening me with a firearm. I believe my response was very-”

Without provocation, Reed drove a fist into Connor’s sternum, striking him right in the thirium pump.

He grunted hard, hacking as he struggled to catch his breath. He fell to his knees in front of Gavin, gulping down air and shuddering through the pain throbbing in his chest.

“Sir-s-sir, I-”

“Shut your fucking mouth you plastic piece of shit,” Gavin spat, curling his lip at Connor’s reaction to the punch. “Fuck, I didn’t even hit you that hard. Cyberlife musta gone cheap on you, weak ass bitch. Can’t even take a hit.”

Connor lowered his head and rubbed a hand on his thirium pump, still gasping for breath. Either no one outside the breakroom noticed him, or no one outside the breakroom cared. It was most likely the latter.

**Weakness.**

**Disappointment.**

His LED flared red when he heard the distant, echoey voice of Amanda speaking over him.

Gavin shoved his head to the side and walked easily out into the precinct, leaving his coffee on the table, and Officer Chen tailed after him. Neither looked back on Connor, who stumbled getting to his feet.

His Lieutenant had asked for coffee before his meeting completed, and he hadn’t even made it to the coffee maker. What kind of prototype was he if he couldn’t even accomplish simple tasks?

Connor took a look over to where Hank and Fowler were still having their standoff, but things seemed to have cooled down a little. Hank said something, gestured behind him vaguely, and Fowler made eye contact with Connor through the glass, watching him as he poured Hank’s drink into a disposable cup.
Are they speaking about me? Is that why Hank requested I leave the room? Am I doing something wrong?

Connor strode back to Hank’s desk, coffee in hand, and set it down next to his terminal for Hank to grab when he was finished with Fowler. Connor stood in the same place as he did while waiting for Hank’s arrival, but faced Fowler’s office, where he could see only the profile of the two men conversing inside.

It wasn’t enough to fully read their lips, but Hank requested he not listen in, so Connor didn’t try too hard. He made out a few phrases, such as ‘I can’t stand…’, ‘Not the right guy for…’, and ‘..something wrong with him’.

When he read that last part, both Fowler and Hank glanced over at him, stationary by Hank’s desk with his arms behind him and his back linear, and Fowler’s gaze lingered once more when Hank said something else he didn’t try to decipher.

Now certain they were talking about him, Connor found another Saint Bernard video and played it, attempting to lower his creeping stress levels. Unbiddenly, his fingers began to fiddle with the edges of his sleeves behind him, tugging on them, and Connor marked it as another habit he needed to remove before Amanda asked him about it. His coin still weighed heavy in his pocket.

It took several more minutes, and a handful of dog videos, until Hank stalked angrily out of Fowler’s office, slamming the glass door behind him. Fowler himself didn’t look too happy, either.

“I have your coffee, sir, but I’m afraid it is not longer hot. Would you like me to heat it up for you?” Connor offered on his approach.

Hank looked at him with tired, hooded eyes and shook his head, taking a long sip of lukewarm coffee and plunking down in his desk chair. He was riled up, judging by the tenseness of his back and his defensive posture, and Connor wanted to do as little as possible to irritate him. He limited his interaction to one question only.

“I’m sorry, Lieutenant, but would you happen to have a desk or space where I could work? I would like to look over all the reports before we proceed with the investigation.”

Hank made a motion with his hand to the empty desk across from him. “That one’s empty. Knock yourself out.”

Connor sat down robotically and accessed the terminal, scanning briefly over the files.

Almost 300 cases, originating in Detroit, dating back nine months. Ranging from assault to double homicides, all perpetrated by a deviant androids. It would be wise to begin investigating from the beginning, trying to see what caused these errors to come about.

Hank was sitting silently next to him, blinking blearily at his own terminal, and Connor contemplated speaking up to run over those basic facts.

What he said instead, however, was “Do you have a dog, sir?”

Hank froze and turned his head toward Connor slowly. “How the hell do you know that?”

Oh no.

“I scanned canine hairs on your chair, sir. I’m sorry, that was very abrupt of me, I apologize for the invasion of your privacy.” Said Connor quickly, not turning away from his screen.
Hank spun to look at him fully, shooting him that look. The same way he looked at Connor whenever Connor stood respectfully, or addressed him properly, or generally did any of the things that Amanda taught him to do.

“Connor, there wasn’t anything private about it. You just scanned my chair, don’t need to get all worked up about it.” He raised an eyebrow at his nervousness. “Just kinda freaked out by how you knew.”

“Of course, sir. My apologies.”

“...Do you still care about the dog?”

Connor looked down and away. “...Yes.”

Hank gave the second smile that Connor had seen on him, though this one was much smaller and more amused. “Sumo. I call ‘im Sumo.”

“Thank you, sir.”

And Connor dropped it, reconnecting with his terminal once more, and was once again blindsided by one of Hank’s oddly vague and usually personal questions.

“You ever gonna get tired of doin’ that?”

Does he ever ask a normal question? Does he just like to see me confused?

“You’ll have to be more specific, sir. Tired of what?”

Hank prodded a finger at him. “That. Right there. You call everyone sir or ma’am, even that prick Gavin. That’s not ‘normal android behavior’, y’know. I’ve been around the block with some of these police androids. They’re formal, sure, but not like you are.”

Connor stilled, then turned his chair to look at Hank head on. “I’ve been told it’s perfectly normal, sir. It is a requirement that I address all humans with the utmost respect, no matter who they are. Humans are my superiors, and I will treat them as such.”

Hank obviously wasn’t expecting that answer, or maybe he was expecting another deflection, because he looked baffled. “What? Who the hell told you that? Also, if you’re supposed to simulate an adult or whatever, adults don’t usually call their peers ‘sir’.”

“It’s for the same reason I assume the respectful position you asked me about last night, sir,” Connor answered, blatantly dodging the first question. “Humans are all my superiors. I was only designed to emulate a human adult in appearance and behavior, but that does not mean I am an equal. As an android, I am an inferior, and I will behave as such.”

Just as Amanda told me. She might be proud of me for this. Hank might be proud of me, too.

But Hank didn’t look proud. He looked unnerved, though everything Connor said aligned with the bumper sticker slogans stuck to the wall of his desk. From the way Hank’s eyes bounced between those stickers and Connor, he knew Hank knew it too. However, he also looked like he was handed the answer to a question he never wanted answers to; a mix of realization and concern.

“Connor...who told you that?” He questioned in a heavy voice.

“Cyberlife, sir.”
Hank didn’t respond, but Connor didn’t think he needed to, so he turned back to his terminal and scanned over the files again. He glossed over a new report, describing a deceased AX400 who had been killed by her owner after attacking him, and skipped to the oldest one he could find.

“Hey, Connor,” Suddenly Hank was right next to him, putting a hand on his shoulder, and Connor couldn’t contain a jump. Hank retracted his hand immediately.

“I’m s-”

“God damn, I swear every other word outta you is a fuckin’ apology,” Hank sighed, exasperated. “Hey, let’s go get somethin’ to eat. It’s lunch time, I’m fucking starving, and you said you couldn’t go anywhere without me...so, c’mon.” Hank jerked his head over his shoulder.

“Of course, sir,” Connor agreed, and Hank led both of them out of the station. “You should know that I’m not capable of eating, so it will just be you having lunch. Afterward, we should discuss the deviancy cases and try and find a connection between the newer ones and the older reports. If we can determine a link, we can determine a cause.”

Hank waved him off. “Yeah, yeah, sounds great. But I’m on my lunch break, and that means I’m not workin’. Save it for later, you bucket of bolts.”

They walked out of the station into the chilly fall air.

Chapter End Notes

Hank: let's go eat
Connor: Yes, sir
Hank: Fool! You've activated my trap card!

I had to make up Officer Wilson's first name bc he doesn't have a canon one. Sue me :P.

If you can't tell, Gavin in not my favorite character. And no, Tina is not some precious bean in this story. In canon, she watched Connor get socked in the gut unprompted and did jack squat about it, then left with Gavin when he finished, so I don't peg her to be the most supportive of humans on the force. Her character is minor though, so ˘\_(ツ)_/˘

Consider this a birthday present from me to you, because today (Oct 1) is my birthday!!! But I love giving as much as I like receiving :P.

Did you love it? Did you hate it? Let me know! I live and breathe reviews, and I am very receptive to criticism. If you find any mistakes/errors, point them out and they will be fixed. I read through all my works frequently and am constantly finding grammatical/spelling/punctuation errors, so don't be afraid to bring them to my attention!

Chapter 4 (my favorite :D) coming out soon! I'll try and shorten it up but I also have very little self-control
A Turning Point

Chapter Summary

Connor and Lieutenant Anderson continue to grow closer, and even work on their second deviant case together. But something happens that triggers a series of events which make Connor's worst nightmare come true, and confirm Hank's worst suspicions about his partner.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this is so off schedule!! This one came a lot later than my earlier updates, even though I tried hard to be consistent! I would give you my excuse, but tbh I would still feel bad. And that sucks, because I love this chapter so much! I'm just gonna tell you that my computer crapped out on me and school was dragging me through the mud for a little bit.

(ofc I may be over reacting bc a week isn't that long of a wait relative to some fics I follow, but I want you guys know that I would never leave you high and dry without a reason. I feel bad about it being later than 5 days)

I struggled writing this one in a couple of spots, because I wanted Hank to care, but I didn't want him to care too much yet, y'know? Why does Hank have to be so difficult...I hope the whump serves y'all well in this one, because I cannot tell you how long it took me to edit this thing to make it perfect (in my eyes, at least).

I'm sooo happy my story is picking up speed, I finally get to write more non-canon scenes. Plus, I reached over 1000 hits??? Unreal!!!!

So, enjoy this chapter, next one hopefully coming out sooner?? If I can get my act together, then it will. BTW, there's one fluffy part in here that I was absolutely overjoyed when writing, and y'all have Snowybat to thank for the idea ;).

Read on!

This chapter is 11K words. I have no self-control.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ride to...wherever Hank was taking them...was a lot less intense than it usually was. His heavy metal was playing at a socially acceptable volume, and the lack of conversation was companionable instead of tense.

Hank would occasionally glance over at Connor, ramrod straight and staring blankly ahead, hands folded tightly in his lap, but never said a word. He did seem to notice whenever Connor would break concentration and start to fiddle with the ends of his sleeves, tugging them down.
His beat up car pulled across the street from an old yellow food truck under an overpass, large neon letters spelling out the words ‘Chicken Feed’. It was the definition of a hole-in-the-wall, so out of the way that Connor wondered how it kept in business.

The engine turned off and Hank stepped out into the cold, rushing to cross the street. Connor almost jumped out of the car when Hank crossed paths with an autonomous taxi, but the lieutenant dodged and kept moving forward, unhindered.

Connor stayed behind, content to wait until Hank finished his meal and they could continue their investigation. He knew Hank’s opinion on androids was shaky at best, and he wanted to do whatever was necessary to please the lieutenant,

*Just like Amanda wants. Just like Hank would want.*

**Software Instability: v**

Watching from afar, he was able to scan the men who greeted Hank happily and identify them both as small time criminals. Hank appeared to swap money with a man *(Identify: Pedro Aabdar)* convicted of illegal gambling, which was almost as concerning as the man *(Identify: Gary Kayes)* convicted of breaching hygiene regulations who was making Hank’s lunch.

But, if it kept Connor on Hank’s good side, he wasn’t going to comment on his questionable company.

Hank grabbed his food and make his way to a tall table off to the side to eat, but stopped, did a quick turn around, like he was searching for something, and locked eyes with Connor.

He made a motion with his hand, beckoning Connor over from the car.

*He knows I can’t eat. Why would he want me over there? I thought he didn’t want to discuss work on his lunch break?*

But Connor obeyed, stepping out into the frigid air that pierced him through his uninsulated uniform, and crossed the street to meet him.

“What did I do? Did I do something wrong? Was his coffee unsatisfactory?”

“And you’re not in trouble. Just wanna talk to ya.”

*I’m not in trouble.*

That phrase, which had never been directed at Connor before, somehow made tension bleed out of Connor’s spine in a way he had never experienced. It was the only time he’d heard that come from anyone who just wanted to ‘talk’.
“Of course, sir. What would you like to discuss?”

“There are a hell of a lot of things I’d like to discuss with you,” Hank snorted, like he was laughing at a private joke. “But I think you’d dodge all my questions like it was a fuckin’ Olympic sport.”

“I can assure you, sir, I will answer every question you ask truthfully. Have I done something to convince you otherwise?”

“Oh yeah,” Hank scoffed. “You lied right to my face after the interrogation, remember?”

Lied? No, no I never lie. I’ve never lied. I’m not a liar. Amanda doesn’t tolerate liars. I would never lie to anyone, especially not a human.


“Sure...whatever you say, Connor,” Hank relented, staring at the LED that Connor knew must be putting on a light show.

His LED blinked back to red once for good measure before calming back into blue.

“I never intended to come off as untrustworthy, lieutenant. The reaction I had in the interrogation room was a...malfunction. I won’t let it happen again. However, if you would like to file a report to Cyberlife about my unusual behavior, I would be glad to assist you”

Hank shook his head. “Nah, I wouldn’t talk to those assholes if they were the last people on earth.” he took another bite.

He’s not going to report me? My behavior was unwarranted and unusual, but he’s not going to file a Cyberlife complaint? Why?

Why does he insist on keeping me around even when I’m broken?

Software Instability: ^

Connor nodded jerkily. “Thank you, lieutenant.”

He only hummed in acknowledgement. Connor said nothing else, bowing his head.

“So...tell me what you know about deviancy. I know jack shit about this whole thing, but, until Fowler gets rid of whatever crawled up his ass, I’m stuck with it.”

“Of course, sir,” Connor said, and commenced a brief recall to compile all the information he had gathered up to that point. “It’s believed to be a mutation that appears in the software of some
androids, like a glitch, or a bug. It leads to them being able to emulate human emotions, but not actually experience them.”

Hank bobbed his head in agreement, and swallowed another bite. “So, they can’t really feel anything?”

“How do you know?”

Connor cocked his head at the question. “They’re androids, sir, not humans. Only humans are capable of feeling emotion. Since androids weren’t designed with emotions, anything they claim to ‘feel’ would simply be a software error.”

“You ever encounter any deviants before?”

Connor sprinted and grabbed for Emma’s hand, holding strongly. His momentum carried him forward, flinging the girl onto the roof and sending both Connor and Daniel careening over the edge.

“Yes...once. A few months back, a deviant held a little girl hostage, threatening to jump off the roof of her apartment with her,” Connor recounted, glancing off to the side as his memory projected into his head. “I managed to save her, at the cost of my first field operative body. You don’t need to worry, that mistake will never be made again.”

Hank’s eyes widened, and he stared at Connor in disbelief. “I’m sorry, what? You died? How?”

“I fell 70 stories, sir.”

Hank put his burger down.

“Holy shit. Did you—did you feel it?”

“Yes, sir. As I stated, you don’t need to worry about me unnecessarily sacrificing myself for the sake of the mission again. I was disciplined accordingly for the incident. It won’t happen again.”

“That’s not the part I’m fucking worried about, Connor,” Hank grunted running a hand down his face. “Jesus Christ, what the hell are they makin’ you do?”

“They are forming me into the perfect detective, Lieutenant. You don’t need to trouble yourself with their methods, rest assured that everything they do is for my own good.”

Hank leaned in and made eye contact with him. “Connor. Do you have any idea how that sounds to me?”

His stare was making Connor uncomfortable, and it sent a shiver up his spine. Or maybe it was the chilly autumn wind that whistled past him and froze the tips of his ears and fingers that made him shiver.

“If you think I am insinuating that I’m in a ‘bad situation’, lieutenant, you’d be mistaken. I’m not alive. They’re simply ironing out the kinks in a new prototype before it is produced commercially”

Hank shook his head in irritation and moved back to his food. “I don’t know why I fuckin’ care anyway. I know you’re a fuckin’ machine, don’t need to tell me twice.”

A particularly strong breeze blew under the overpass, whipping Connor’s thin jacket and making
his arms and legs tremble from the cold, but he still stood firm.

His partner watched him carefully, observing him and his shaking. Connor tried his best to keep still so Hank wouldn’t think he was weak, or broken.

“You cold?”

Connor was shaking lightly, desperately willing him limbs to keep still. “I am temperature sensitive, lieutenant. It is breezy outside, 38° Fahrenheit.”

Hank sniffed roughly, and gave a single nod, like he won an argument in his head.

“Alright, hang on. Don’t go anywhere, okay?”

“Of course, sir.”

Hank left his burger and soft drink on the table and walked briskly back to his car. Connor stood in the same spot and didn’t shift a muscle, besides his uncontrollable quivering, so he didn’t see Hank return until he came back into his vision, hold a large gray lump of fabric.

“Put this on.” He handed Connor the bundle of cloth.

It was a sweatshirt. An old DPD sweatshirt that Hank had pulled out of his car for him to use.

Connor was cold, so Hank just decided to give him clothes?

**Software Instability:** ^

*What? Why is he doing this? I don’t understand, he’s giving me something? Why?*

“Sir, this is unnecessary. I’m an android, I d-”

“Yeah yeah, not alive, can’t feel, and a whole buncha other crap you’ve told me a thousand times. I haven’t seen you wear anything other than that weird jacket, and, since Cyberlife sounds like a real barrel of dicks, I don’t think you got anything else to wear for this kinda weather. I don’t see the fucking point of letting an android get cold if they’re not gonna give you more than a suit jacket,” Hank waved dismissively. “I got another one just like it at home. Keep it.”

**Software instability:** ^

*What? This is mine?*

**Software Instability:** ^
I get to keep this?

Software Instability: ^

A gift?

“Woah woah, slow your roll Inspector Gadget!” Connor knew his LED was going wild. “It’s a fuckin’ sweatshirt, not an engagement ring. Put it on for Christ’s sake, it’s freezing out here.”

“I-I...why?”

“Huh? Why what?”

“Why-why would you…” Connor stammered, unable to form his question around his shock. “I’m...I’m not alive. I don’t need to be warm, I’m a tool. I don’t need this.”

Hank’s face morphed into a brand new expression, one that Connor hadn’t realized the lieutenant was capable of making: compassion.

“Connor. Put on the damn jacket.”

His hands shook minutely as he removed his, frankly uncomfortable, uniform jacket. Connor placed it on the cold table and unfolded the sweatshirt in his hands.

The logo was faded and distressed, and the whole piece was charcoal gray. His hands were warmer just holding it.

Hank was watching him expectantly and patiently as he took in his gift. Connor pulled it over his head and shoved his arms through the holes, straightening it out.

*It’s so warm. There’s dog hair on it that matches the ones on Hank’s chair. It smells like faded cologne.*

*It’s mine. My only possession.*

Software Instability: ^

“So…” Hank’s tone was fascinated. “Deviants don’t really feel emotions, right? That’s what you said?”

“I...Yes sir, their emotions are just simulations.”

“Right…” Hank’s voice trailed off at the end, and he took another bite of his burger, thinking.

Connor fiddled with the sleeves, pulling them down, mesmerized by the softness of the sweatshirt. It was unlike anything he’s ever had before.
“Thank you, lieutenant. Really.”

“Yeah yeah,” Hank waved him off. “Don’t mention it. It’s cold as shit out here.”

Hank polished off his burger and crumpled his trash, and Connor assumed they were getting ready to leave, but he spoke again.

“Well, I’m curious. I hardly know a goddamn thing about you, but I’m sure you know everything there is to know about me.” It wasn’t really a question, but Connor understood what Hank wanted him to say. He straightened his back and faced Hank fully, falling back into his formal stance and speech pattern.

“I know you graduated top of your class, sir. You made an impressive name for yourself in multiple cases, especially those involving Red Ice, and became the youngest lieutenant in Detroit’s history.” Connor recounted. “I also know you’ve received several disciplinary referrals in recent years, like to spend your time in bars, and you’re known as very anti-android for reasons that were not disclosed. I don’t mind the sentiment, androids are known to make people uncomfortable for a number of reasons. Whatever reason you have is valid, I’m certain.”

Hank winced at his last point, like Connor was bringing up something he’d rather not acknowledge, and Connor moved to apologize for mentioning it before Hank interrupted him.

“So, what’s your conclusion?”

“I’m...uncertain why my opinion would matter to you, sir. What conclusions I draw have no significance whatsoever,” Connor responded in confusion, tilting his head.

Hank rolled his eyes good-naturedly. “Yeah, well, humor me. What d’ya think?”

*I think you’re the most important individual to step into my life so far. I want to make you proud.*

*Software Instability:* ^

“I recognize that work with your personal issues and grudges is an added challenge, but adapting to human unpredictability is one of my features, sir.”

And Connor winked.

*What the hell was that? That’s not in my programming. Where did that come from?*

Hank, however, didn’t look as put-off by the sudden wink as Connor was; he snorted and gave a hearty chuckle, saying “You’re one of the strangest robots I’ve ever met, Connor.”

A warmth filled Connor that he was sure didn’t have anything to do with his new sweatshirt.

*Software Instability:* ^

Logically, Connor should try to stay as far away from the lieutenant as possible, or at least distance
himself until his mission was complete. Every moment he interacted with this man was another software instability he had to catalogue, ones that he would have to answer for later.

All warmth seized as his gut froze, thinking about Amanda and her cold, calculating eyes, dissecting him, pointing out his flaws and mistakes beating them out of him.

I’ll never be perfect. I’ll never be good enough for Amanda. I will always be an inferior machine filled with malfunctions and glitches and I’ll never meet the standard I’m being held to. What will she do with all these software errors?

Hank was watching his LED, laughter faded from his face, with confusion. “Hey, was it something I said? Your light’s all red.”

*But I think I’m good enough for Hank.*

---

**Software Instability:** ^

**WARNING:** *Multiple Software Instabilities Catalogued*

**Run Diagnostic? Y N**

...  

[N]

“I’m functional, sir,” Connor said after a long pause. “I was merely...sorting through some minor software bugs.” *Don’t let him know you’re weak. Don’t let him know you’re broken, or he won’t want you. He’ll turn you away.* “Nothing you need to worry about. However, if you would like to make a report to—”

“I already told you, I ain’t talking to fuckin’ Cyberlife. Like my pops used to say, if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. I don’t see anything on you that needs fixing.”

*All the broken things are invisible to you. If you knew the truth, you wouldn’t be doing this. You wouldn’t be so kind if you knew what was wrong with me.*

Before Connor could respond to him, he saw a notification box from Cyberlife in the corner of his vision, indicating an update on the case. He put through the command to receive it, and his eyes fluttered.

“Woah, hey, you okay? What’s wrong?” Hank asked. He sounded slightly concerned, which was *impossible*, Connor told himself.

“It’s okay, lieutenant. As a prototype, I have a few glitches that have yet to be corrected for the final product. When I am connecting to a system wirelessly, my eyelids experience uncontrollable malfunctions. I apologize if this is disconcerting.”

“Oh, yeah. Forgot you were a prototype. Any other glitches I need to be aware of?”

Connor saw the reflection of his LED on the table, and it flashed red. “No, sir. I’m perfectly functional. If anything comes up, I’ll be sure to tell you.”
Hank took a sip of his drink, which he had yet to finish, and nodded. “Well, what did you connect to?”

Connor read the update delivered to him, reporting a possible deviant in an area that wasn’t far from their current location. If they brought him in, they had a good shot at getting more information out of him than Ortiz’s android.

“I just received word of a suspected deviant a few blocks away. If we bring it in, we can extract more information. Would you like to investigate?”

“Oh, really? Well, ain’t that lucky. Yeah, let’s go, I’m done,” Hank said, raising his eyebrows and taking one last slurp of his soda.

He left to toss his garbage and Connor went to wait in his car. Connor grabbed his uniform jacket, which had become stiff and cold, off the table and considered whether or not he needed to put it back on. Cyberlife didn’t exactly have a dress code for him, but that was likely because he didn’t usually own any clothes to change into.

“Leave it off, if you want,” Hank came up behind him and ushered him across the road, looking both ways to make sure they wouldn’t get hit. “I’m not exactly the snappiest dresser either, y’know. No one’s gonna get mad at you if you keep the hoodie on.”

They reached his car and Connor went around to the other side to get in the passenger seat. The interior was freezing.

“Besides,” Hank continued, buckling himself behind the wheel and cranking the car. “It’s still cold as balls in here. My heater don’t work like it used to. Stay warm.”

His heavy metal came back on over the speakers as Connor uploaded the coordinates of the deviant into Hank’s GPS, and the heaters blew weakly, just like Hank said.

He pretended not to notice when Hank angled his driver side air vents toward Connor instead of himself, but he couldn’t help it.

Software Instability: ^

The apartment building was ancient and unkempt. There was no way it would pass any manner of safety inspection, so it was surprising there were even residents to begin with. Even more surprising was that the elevator still worked, which was what Hank and Connor used to reach the suspect’s floor.

It creaked and rattled as it ascended, which would have made Connor uneasy, if he were a deviant.

Connor considered it best that he leave his new hoodie in the car and wear his official uniform. That way, as he explained to Hank, if they did encounter the deviant or required back up, he would look more professional.

If Connor were able to feel regret, he would, because the old lift was chilly and his old jacket couldn’t ward it off.
He closed his eyes to pass the time and update Cyberlife to their position, yellow LED reflecting off the rusty metal wall.

**Lt. Anderson and I are approaching the site of the last known sighting of the suspected deviant. If located: we will bring the suspect in for questioning. If not located: We will investigate the apartment for evidence of deviant behavior.**

Total # of Software Errors recorded: 11

This is bad. I’ve never had this many instabilities. Is it possible that I…?


“Connor, you good?”

Connor jolted and opened his eyes to find that they had stopped. Hank was out in the musty hallway, looking back at him.

“I’m sorry sir. I was making a report to Cyberlife.”

“Ah…” Hank said, then watched him. Connor wondered what he was waiting for, until he said “Well, you planning on staying in the elevator?”

Connor shook his head. “No sir, I’m coming!”

Hank gave him a small smirk as he stepped off the elevator and moved toward the deviant’s apartment. The hallway was dark, only lit by a broken window at the end, and the walls were peeling and graffitied. The building looked abandoned, Connor couldn’t find it logical that anyone would live here, deviant or not.

“What do we know about this guy?” Hank asked, stepping around piles of...bird feathers? in disgust.

He pulled up the profile he’d been given; sparse, as always.

“We don’t know much. A neighbor reported hearing strange noises coming from this floor, and claimed to have spotted a man hiding an LED under his cap.”

Hank, who was leaned up against the doorframe of the suspect’s apartment, snorted. “Christ, if we gotta investigate every time someone hears a strange noise, we’re gonna need more cops.”

Connor liked this. The banter, the casualness, the investigation, it was all so natural to him. He was able to deny the overbearing shadow of Cyberlife and Amanda in this moment, and it was comforting to be in the presence of a man who had shown nothing but kindness to him despite his hatred of Connor’s species.

“I agree, sir. People can be paranoid.”

“Yeah...hey, what were you updating Cyberlife about?”

Odd question. I wonder why he cares.
“Just about our position and progress in the case, sir, nothing more. Nothing you need to be worried about, anyway.”

“That all?”

Connor looked at him inquisitively. “I’m certain, sir. Is there something you wish to discuss?”

Hank rolled his eyes. “Like I said, I could fill a fuckin’ novel with all the things I wanna discuss with you, but I don’t think now’s a good time. Knock on the damn door already.”

Connor complied, rapping on the old wooden door. “Anybody home?”

Silence answered, and Hank shrugged at him, so Connor knocked harder.

“Open Up! Detroit Police!”

More silence. Then, thump.

Hank straightened up at the noise and drew his gun, standing in position in front of the door to kick it in.

“Stay behind me,” He ordered.

Okay? I’m indestructible though, he should be putting me on the front lines.

“Sir, you know I’m indestructible. Why don’t-”

“Shut up, Connor,” Hank demanded quietly. “Just because you can’t die doesn’t mean you can’t get hurt, alright? Just stay behind me and watch my back.”

And Connor stood behind him, absolutely flabbergasted and entirely touched by Hank’s instructions. For the first time, Connor found himself desiring a firearm just so he could watch Hank’s back properly, like a real partner.

Hank raised his leg and rammed his foot into the door, which flew open with a bang against the grubby inner wall.

He went in ahead of Connor, checking in the doors of the rooms lining the short hallway to clear them before passing, until his reached the door at the end of the hall that lead into the main room.

Connor followed him in, taking a brief glance in the two doors along the hall and seeing that the rooms were empty, and joined Hank, who was positioning himself for another break-in.

Hank charged the door and this one also crashed open, revealing a room full of…

Pigeons.

That explains the bird feathers.

“Agh, what the fuck is this!” Hank shouted in disgust, shielding his face from a wave of pigeons taking flight at their disruption. “Jesus, this place stinks!”

Connor followed in after him, and even he was a bit unsettled by the sheer amount of birds in such a small space. He toggled his olfactory sensors off, just in case.

“Well, looks like we came for nothin’” Hank grunted. “Our man’s gone.”
Gather Evidence of Deviancy

“Let’s investigate the apartment. Whatever the deviant left behind may give us more insight into their behavior.” Connor suggested, wading through a sea of birds that sent them scattering into the air.

“Yeah, you have fun with that. I can’t focus on a damn thing with all these damn pigeons.”

Connor scanned the room, trying to see beyond the birds, and spotted several points of interest, aside from the plethora of strange, labyrinth-like markings on the walls. He’d never seen anything like them before, not even in the Ortiz residence, and running a scan on them yielded no results. He first investigated a UFD poster on the wall covering a very obvious hole, looking out of place as it was the only other decoration in the whole room.

Peeling the poster back, Connor found a book nestled in the crevice; it was leather-bound, with yellow pages. Each page bore the same or similar markings to the ones inscribed on every wall, but was still completely erratic and illegible.

“What’s up?” Hank asked from across the room, looking to see what he held.

Connor pocketed the book. “Forgive me, but I can’t tell for sure, sir. It seems to be a notebook, but it’s entirely indecipherable.”

The fridge, Connor found, was empty, which confirmed that their suspect is indeed an android, and the birdseed on the counter indicated that these animals were being cared for and fed by the deviant.

This is unusual behavior, even for a deviant. I’ll need to gather clues to see if I can determine where he went. He must have been in the apartment when we arrived.

Right next to the bookshelf was a military style jacket, initialed R.T, likely the deviant’s name. The driver’s license on the shelf, forged, confirmed it.

Suspect Name: Rupert Travis

“Sir, I’ve got a jacket with the initials R.T, and a fake license with the name ‘Rupert Travis’.”

“Fake license?” Hank sounded interested. “Cool. At least we didn’t come here for nothing. Also, initials on the jacket? Is this guy seven years old?”

Connor looked over and saw Hank investigating the closet, so he entered the bathroom, which was even more disgusting than the main room.

All over the wall was a familiar sight, the symbol RA9. The thing that had been occupying Connor since his stint with Ortiz’s android.

This is more than just religious, this seems to be obsessive.
“Any idea what it means?” Hank said from behind him, likely just glad to have found an area free of birds. Connor straightened and faced him.

“RA9. It’s been written 2471 times. It’s the same sign we found on Ortiz’s shower wall, but I just can’t figure out the connection. Ortiz’s android refused to give me a straight answer, but I suspect it has something to do with a religion that deviants seem to be inclined to. Beyond that, I have no explanation.”

Hank nodded thoughtfully. “Huh. Android religion. Can’t say I was expecting that. Hey, I can’t stand another goddamn second in this place, how much more time do you need?”

Why doesn’t he just leave? He could order me to leave and we’d be done here, but he’s considering what I want. He’s acting like he cares what I think. Does he care what I think?

“I only need a couple of minutes, sir. I would like to investigate where the deviant could have gone so we could at least have a starting point on tracking it down.”

“Alright, let me know when you’re ready to go, got it?”

“Yes sir.” Hank started walking back into the main room. “Lieutenant?”

No! Don’t say anything. He’ll think you’re a deviant and he’ll send you to be repaired! He’ll think you’re broken!

Hank turned in interest. “Yeah?” He sounded a little surprised.

Connor hesitated, but calmed his overactive thirium pump with a breath. “Thank you for asking me, sir. You know you could just tell me to be done and we could leave. I would obey without question.”

“Yeah? Well...uh,” Hank somehow managed to look understanding and awkward simultaneously. “It’s your investigation too, Connor. You do what you need to do to be successful. I’m not gonna try to get in your way just because I fucking hate pigeons. Just, uh, try to hurry it up, okay?”

Software Instability: ^

WARNING: *Multiple Software Instabilities Catalogued*

Run Diagnostic? Y N

...

[N]

“Yes sir.” Connor nodded stiffly, hoping his LED wasn’t giving away too much of his turmoil, and waited for Hank to turn back around to relax his posture and continue analyzing.

The sink had an amalgamation of bird feathers, birdseed, blue blood, and avian feces, which Connor confirmed with a sample (once he saw that Hank wasn’t watching), and a deactivated LED on the edge, surrounded by thirium that must still have been fresh for it not to have evaporated yet.
The suspect was just here, we barely missed him. The thirium hasn’t disappeared yet. Where could he have gone? If this thirium is fresh, it would be logical that he was in the bathroom when we arrived. This is a good starting point.

There was an overturned wooden stool underneath the obsessive script on the wall, and right beside it was an open marker, ink still wet.

That confirms it. He must have been standing on this stool.

He activated his reconstruction software, and the image of the suspect was outlined for him, writing on the wall and standing on the stool, when he heard Connor banging on the door. Shocked, he fell off the stool (which would have been the bang they heard in the hall), and stumbled into the main room.

There’s a birdcage here on the ground. The wire was broken very recently, and there are finger marks that lack finger prints. Did he pull it down? Or did he knock it down?

His software began filling in the blanks. He ran into the cage, snapping the metal hook and letting it crash into the ground, and had run to the door when he heard the two detectives enter. The overturned stool on the ground was likely knocked over by him falling in surprise.

The window was closed when we got here, so he didn’t go there. The building is too high, anyway. He was still in the room when Hank broke down the door, he had no place to run. Where could he have gone?

Connor was struck in that moment by a sense of familiarity. When he was investigating the Ortiz android, and the trail ended seemingly out of nowhere, Connor couldn’t figure out where the deviant could have gone until…

Connor looked up.

There.

There was a wide hole where the ceiling had opened up, and right below it was an armchair.

The Deviant is Still in the Apartment.

I’ve got you.

Connor stepped right up to the armchair, and Hank watched him.

Right as he moved to step up, the ceiling creaked, and the deviant crashed down on top of Connor, knocking them both to the floor.

“Holy shit! God damn fucking pigeons!” Hank shouted as the birds flew up around them at the disturbance. By the time Connor properly gathered his bearings, the deviant was already out the
door.

“Connor! Move! Chase it!”

And Connor sprinted harder than ever had, chasing the suspect out into the hallway.

The deviant sent a metal bookcase falling into his path, and Connor vaulted over it easily, picking up speed.

I will not fail.

The suspect, who had to be Rupert, rammed through the door leading onto the roof of the building, Connor at his heels, and sprinted to the edge, leaping off and into a field of wheat being cultivated by the Urban Farms of Detroit organization.

That explains the poster.

Connor ran harder through the field, tracking Rupert as he jumped up a wall to the roof of the adjacent building, where there was a UFD greenhouse. A truck of hay bales parked right in his path, so Connor used it to leap onto the next building with the suspect, and he watched the deviant cut through the greenhouse to get to the next edge of the building.

He went around the outside, which was safer and faster, and jumped off the roof, sliding down a glass awning and leaping through a window shattered by the deviant into a UFD warehouse, and started gaining on his target.

The chase was long, and they disrupted a lot of property. Connor hunted Rupert through a field of lilacs, onto the roof of a monorail train, through an orchard, across countless rooftops, and finally into another warehouse.

Connor ran tirelessly, vaulting over the trays of produce and dodging the workers, and success was right within his grasp. The deviant turned into a corn field on another roof and Connor lost sight, but he ran straight. He would see Rupert on the other side and catch up to him.

He pushed through the maize, shoving the stalks aside and he continued unhindered to capture his prey, and came out on the other side of the roof.

There in front of him, the deviant was wrestling with Hank, struggling on the precipice of the rooftop.

He’s not supposed to be here! No no no no no

With a great shove, the deviant sent Hank toppling over the edge, gripping onto the ledge with one hand, and started running once more.

Briefly, Connor was overwhelmed with the image of Daniel falling backward into the open air, Emma tight in his grasp.

I need to catch the suspect, it’s my mission.

Save Hank

I can’t fail, I won’t fail, I’ve never failed before!

Save Hank
His survival chance is 89%. Perfectly reasonable. Don’t throw away the mission!

Save Hank!

Connor moved before he could change his mind, dashing toward the ledge and gripping Hank’s hand, pulling him back to the safety of the rooftop.

Software Instability: ^^

WARNING: *Multiple Software Instabilities Catalogued*

Run Diagnostic? Y N

[N]

When Connor turned back around, the deviant had disappeared.

MISSION: Failed

Connor almost registered Hank speaking behind him. He almost made out the words he said, but all he could see was the bright red message, the first he’d ever seen.

I failed.

He could hear Amanda.

You’re a disappointment, You’re weak, You’ve failed Connor. You’ve failed! What am I going to do with you? What do we usually do with broken things?

We throw them away.

“No…”

I’ve failed. I’m a failure. Hank knows I’m broken, Hank’s gonna throw me away, Amanda’s going to kill me. She’s going to kill me. Hank won’t want me anymore, I’m so useless, I can’t even catch a single deviant, can’t do what I was designed to do. I’m nothing, I’m useless, Hank knows I’m useless. He’s going to discipline me and he’s going to hurt me and he’s going to throw me away because now he knows I’m nothing but fucking garbage.

“No no no no no no-”

Connor? Talk to me kid, what’s ha-” Hank put a hand on Connor’s shoulder, and Connor jerked like he’s been electrocuted.

“I’m sorry!”

“What?”
Connor turned around roughly, snapping his heels together, hands behind him, spine so straight he could have sworn his artificial vertebrae separated at the force, and his eyes were fixed so low he could hardly see Hank standing in front of him. His shoulders bunched up around his head, like he was bracing to get hit.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, please sir. I didn’t mean to, I tried-”

“Woah woah Connor! Slow-”

“Please, sir, don’t throw me away. I’m not broken! Please I promise I’ll do better, this was just a mistake, I’m not useless please-”

“Connor! Con-”

Connor dropped to his knees in front of Hank, saline tears making dark spots on the concrete below him as they fell and Connor’s shoulder shook with heaving sobs.

“Please don’t hurt me! Please, I’ll be better, please don’t hurt me!”

Hank went silent, and Connor tensed painfully in anticipation, squeezing his eyes shut.

*Does he care about that? Is he going to hit me and tell me to open my eyes? Probably. I’d deserve it. I can’t do anything right.*

Heavy hands fell on his shoulders, and Connor squeaked in fear. He couldn’t control his breaths, coming in heavy gasps as his systems overheated with the stress. Each time he sucked in, he couldn’t hold it, and he wheezed like he was choking.

“Connor? Con, I need you to breathe with me.” Hank’s deep voice was right next to his ear, which meant Hank was on his knees with him, holding his shoulders.

*What is he going to do to me? Is he going to break me?*

“Hey, hey hey hey, I’m not gonna hurt you. You can trust me, I’m not gonna hurt you. I need you to breathe with me.”

He tried. He tried to suck and hold a breath, but his sobbing forced him to cough it back out, and he cried even harder. “Sorry sorry I’m sorry, please, I-I’m trying, I can’t, I-”

Hank tugged him forward by the shoulders, wrapping two strong arms around Connor and pulling him flush against Hank’s chest. “Shhhh, Connor, Shhh, it’s okay. You’re okay. I don’t know what those Cyberlife motherfuckers are doin’ to you, but I’m not with them. I’m not gonna hurt you. I need you to breathe with me kid. Like this. C’mon, do your best.”

Connor’s trembling arms came up and grasped Hank back, gripping the lieutenant’s arms and pressing his head into his shoulder.

*Will he hit me for breaking my posture?*

Hank took in an exaggerated breath, sucking in deeply through his nose and inflating his chest, holding for a second, then releasing it through his mouth. He repeated hit again, his slow and steady breaths contrasting Connor’s uncontrollable gasps.

“Just like that, c’mon kid. I know you have it in you. Breathe with me.” He breathed again, and Connor tried to match him. His chest stuttered when he inhaled, shaking as the air tried to escape
his lungs, and he held it for a second before expelling it back out.

It was nothing like the depth and stability of Hank’s breathing, but Hank nodded in encouragement. “Good job, that was good. Do it again.”

Good job. I’m doing good. He doesn’t think I’m useless.

Connor breathed again, mimicking Hank, and it became easier and easier. The iron clasps around his chest gave way as he inhaled more deeply, held it, and exhaled more steadily each time.

“Atta boy. Good job, kid. Just breathe for me.”

Good job.

Nodding again, Connor breathed. The lieutenant was wearing a cologne that Connor could smell with every inhale, the same cologne that lingered on his sweatshirt.

Hank let him be silent, riding out the rest of what seemed to be a severe panic attack and rubbing Connor’s back in comfort. He was warm, and Connor determined that he really, really liked warm things.

Except for the Zen Garden.

Connor’s breath hitched when he thought about it, and Hank whispered “Whatever you’re thinking about, save it for later. Whatever it is, I’m gonna help you.”

“Y-you’re-” Connor gasped, and Hank pulled back to look at him from arms length. His eyes held a deep concern in them as he took in Connor’s face. “You’re not gonna hit me?”

Hank shook his head adamantly, not breaking eye contact with him. “No, kid. I’m not gonna hit you. You never gotta worry about that with me, I’m never gonna hit you.”


“Because you’re not any of those things,” Hank interrupted. “I don’t know what the fuck those Cyberlife douches have been feeding you, but you’re the damn most impressive android I’ve ever met. You’re a great detective. Just because you failed to catch this guy doesn’t mean you’re a failure. And even if it did, that doesn’t mean you deserve to get hit for it.”

This was news. Connor hadn’t even thought about those words being used together in a sentence. He wasn’t a great detective, he was just an android. He wasn’t impressive, he was inferior. Failing a mission would absolutely equate with being a failure, to Amanda at the very least, and Connor knew that every time he did something unsatisfactory, he deserved to be punished for it. And failure was very unsatisfactory.

“Connor,” Hank tapped his face with infinite caution, like he was trying to avoid doing anything that might set Connor off again. “I asked you this before, but I’m gonna ask you one more time, and I need you to give me a straight answer. Can you do that?”

Connor nodded vigorously. “Yes sir. Anything.”

“Do you...Do you get beat? Does Cyberlife hurt you on purpose to punish you?”

Connor would have dodged the question, given some excuse, blown him off like last time, but this was different. Hank probably already knew his answer, anyway. Why would he be so difficult to a
man who wanted to help him?

“...Yes. Yes, sir.”

Hank’s eyes, full of compassion, got very, very sad, and he hung his head, still holding Connor’s shoulders. “Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck…”

Connor waited for him to finish, focusing instead on the dark spot on Hank’s brown jacket where Connor had cried onto his shoulder.

He jerked his eyes back to the lieutenant when he received a light tap on the face. “Hey. Are you okay now? Do you need a moment?”

His systems were functioning optimally and his breathing was now stable, and he didn’t think he needed any more time for recuperation. “I’m functional, sir.”

“Yeah, functional,” Hank sighed. “C’mon, you think you can stand?”

“I told you I was functional, sir, I’m alright to walk.”

Hank pulled them both up. “You can drop that ‘sir’ stuff, y’know. I don’t care. We’re partners now. C’mon, let’s get back to the car. We know what our guy looks like, so we’ll be able to track him down later.”

Connor nodded, but was apprehensive. If they split now, he would have to go back to Cyberlife and answer to Amanda. He had over 10 software errors recorded, more than he’d ever had before, so there was no telling what Amanda would do. Connor didn’t want to find out.

“Are we...going to part ways, lieutenant?”

Hank lead him to the stairwell, removing one hand and moving the other to the small of Connor’s back to guide him. “Now? Hell no. Will we have to eventually? Probably. Right now, I just need to keep you as far away from Cyberlife as possible while we try to figure this out. What do you say we go to my house?”

*He has a dog at his house. And Amanda can’t get me there as long as I don’t go into stasis.*

“Why would we go there?”

“’Cause I need a drink, you need to meet Sumo, and we need to have a long, hard, probably very uncomfortable discussion if you’re feeling up to it. If not, we’ll have it another time, but we will talk about this. Capiche?”

“Yes, lieutenant.”

Hank led him gently down the stairwell, a protective hand on his shoulder, and out of the building to Hank’s car, still outside of the apartment building. They were a couple of blocks away, Connor hadn’t realized how far he chased Rupert, but they made it there eventually.

Connor ducked into the car and almost frantically tore off his uniform, replacing it with his sweatshirt. The warmth and softness were indescribably soothing. Hank got in the driver’s side, took a side glance at him, then reached over into his glove compartment and pulled out a small pack of travel tissues.

“Here, you can clean yourself up before we get to the house. Then you can wash your face
properly.”

He accepted them hesitantly. “Thank you, Lieutenant.”

“Yeah. You okay with the music?”

“Yes, Lieutenant.” Connor responded, looking over at him. “Sir, I haven’t changed. The episode on
the roof was m-”

“I swear to God Connor, if you try to blow this off,” Hank said, pulling away from the desolate
apartment. “I know that whatever happens to you seems normal to you, I’ve dealt with
enough...abuse victims. I know their style. Connor, what Cyberlife does to you is not okay. I don’t
want you to think that it was. That panic attack? I can’t say I fuckin’ blame ya.”

“I-” Connor started. “It wasn’t- I’m not programmed to do that. It was a severe malfunction, likely
brought on by some software errors I’ve been experiencing as of late.”

“Yeah? Well, I think it was a panic attack brought on by God knows how many years of
mistreatment at the hands of Cyberlife, and you’ve been conditioned to think you should get
punished when you fail. How about that?”

Connor didn’t know how to respond to that, because he didn’t think he could dispute it, and took
the tissues he had been handed to wipe down his tear stained face. He used the sun-shield mirror,
seeing how the saltwater left dried tracks on his face.

Pathetic.

Weakness.

Disappointment.

The car rumbled along the road, heavy metal playing through the radio quietly, and Connor picked
at his sleeves, tugging them down and messing with the hem. He couldn’t access his tie to fiddle
with it, nor did he want to irritate Hank with his coin (he had been told by a Cyberlife employee
how annoying it was, and has since refrained from using it), but he didn’t know what else to do to
keep him from spiraling into his thoughts.

What is Amanda going to do to me? I’ve had over 10 Software Instabilities, and she broke my
fingers for only 4 of them. What if she forbids me from working with Hank? What will I do then?

Why doesn’t Hank think I’m broken? The freak out on the roof should be evidence enough, and the
fact that I failed the mission.

I failed the mission.

I failed.

I’m a failure.

What will Amanda do?

“Weapons, hey!”

He jumped at Hank’s sudden shout, yanking him out of his thoughts. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry sir, I-”

“Hey,” Hank’s voice was soothing, not at all angry or irritated or threatening. “Connor, you’re
okay. I was trying to get your attention for a while, but you were off in la-la land or somethin’. We’re here.”

And Connor observed that they had, indeed, stopped in the driveway of a house; Hank’s house.

“My apologies, sir. I was simply…” Connor couldn’t think of an excuse, besides spiraling deeper into thoughts of my own demise.

“Y’know, I would tell you to stop saying sorry, but I think you’d just apologize for apologizing to me. Also, I told you that you didn’t have to call me ‘sir’.”

“I’m sorry sir, I do it subconsciously.”

Hank snorted at his response, and Connor realized he just did both of the things Hank told him not to do. He forced himself not to apologize further.

“You’re funny, kid. C’mon, let’s get inside so you can get cleaned up. Then I’m gonna pour myself a whiskey, and we’re gonna have a chat.”

He followed Hank out of his car to the door of his modest house, taking in the exterior while Hank fumbled with his keys and pushed open the door.

‘Boof!’

That was a sound he had only ever heard in videos.

Connor tried not to be eager as he entered the house behind Hank. He also tried not to be obvious about peering over Hank’s shoulder to see the source of the noise.

There, standing in front of the door, was the biggest, fluffiest Saint Bernard Connor had ever seen in his life.

Dog!

Hank stepped around him, giving a passing “Hey Sumo,” to get to the kitchen, but Sumo paid him no attention as he greeted his new visitor, panting deeply and happily while his tail swung back and forth in contained excitement. Sumo stared up at him with drooping brown eyes and what looked like a dopey smile, and Connor couldn’t help himself.

“Hey there Sumo,” he cooed, putting one of his hands hesitantly on top of the dogs head, and almost jolted back with how warm and soft he felt under his sensors.

Software Instability: ^

He put both hands on Sumo’s head, rubbing back and forth, and worked his way behind the dog’s ears, scratching gently. Sumo plopped himself down under the attention, getting on the ground and rolling over, and Connor went down right with him.

Connor’s hands moved of their own accord, searching out the softest parts of Sumo (his stomach and his ears) and he found that Sumo enjoyed those places as much as Connor did. Connor had never thought he would find something softer and warmer than his new sweatshirt, but Sumo had it beat by a long shot.
“You enjoying yourself over there Connor?” Hank called from the kitchen, and Connor startled.

This is foolish. He must think I’m ridiculous.

He shot to his feet, leaving Sumo on the ground confused, and assumed his regular position, opening his mouth to begin his apology, but Hank cut him off.

“Damn it Con, I didn’t- I didn’t mean you were doing anything wrong, you don’t gotta apologize. You didn’t mess up Con. I think you hurt poor Sumo’s feelings though, it’s been a while since he’s gotten that much attention.”

Right then, Sumo’s cold, wet nose pushed up against Connor’s hands, clasped behind him, and he whined.

Like a hammer to the stomach, something shot through Connor that gave him the impression of being very, very out of place. He’s never been good at social interaction, that’s not what he was designed for, and nor was he designed for anything except pleasing his superiors, being as compliant as possible, and staying silent.

Yet here he was, about to sit down and have a long, difficult discussion about his past to a man he could hardly say he knew, but trusted with everything he had. Connor had nothing to say, but looked down in shame.

I can’t feel shame. I can’t feel at all. What is this sensation?

He hadn’t noticed Hank approaching him until his firm hand came down softly on his shoulder. “Why don’t you go get cleaned up, huh? I’d offer you somethin’ to drink, but I don’t got any of that blue shit around my house. We can sit in the kitchen if you want. I got some blankets that served me well over the years, too, if you want those. If we’re gonna do this, I want you to be comfortable. Okay?”

Hank waited for him to respond, something that Connor still had to get used to, because he couldn’t think back to any other time in his existence where his input mattered to anybody as much as it mattered to Hank.

“Okay, Lieutenant.”

His smile was small, but good-natured. “We’ll work on you calling me ‘Hank’ later. Right now, you can just do whatever feels right.”

Connor cocked his head. “Lieutenant, I can’t feel at all.”

Hank shook his head in exasperation and patted Connor’s shoulder. “Yeah, whatever you say. You go do whatever you gotta do, bathroom’s the door on the right. I’ll be in the living room.”

They parted ways, Hank turning to the living room and Connor turning down the hall, entering the door Hank pointed out to him, and stepped into a rather spacious bathroom.

There were sticky notes that Hank left for himself all over the mirror, ranging from phrases such as “Shave or Not” and “I’m not grumpy, I just don’t like you”

Very apt.

Connor’s face was still streaky despite wiping his face in the car, so he splashed some cool water from the tap onto his cheeks. It sent a chill down his spine, but it was refreshing. He felt like he
could breathe properly since his failure.

A glance in the mirror showed him a steady yellow light on his LED, and Connor wondered how long it had been like that. Hank hadn’t said anything, but Connor still didn’t really understand Hank. He hates androids, but he was so ready and willing to comfort Connor during his breakdown, treated him like a real partner in the apartments, and he cared about what Connor had to say.

Connor had a feeling that he didn’t really hate androids, per se, but there was something about them that Hank despised. Something that Connor seemed to lack.

_I wonder if he’ll tell me the truth if I ask._

He knew Hank was waiting for him, so he didn’t spend too much time drying his face and hands before joining the lieutenant in the living room. He was sitting on the couch, watching a basketball game, and Connor could just see the top of Sumo’s head peeking out from the top of the sofa.

“Lieutenant?”

Hank turned around in his seat to look at Connor over the back of the couch. “Hey kid. You ready?”

“Yes sir.”

_As ready as I’ll ever be._

Hank muted the game, got up, and beckoned Connor to follow him to the kitchen, where he pulled up the two chairs so they would be facing one another across the table. He sat in one, a reasonable glass of whiskey in his hand, and Connor sat stiffly in the other, hands picking at his sleeves.

“Connor, how long have you been al-uh...activated? How old are you?” Hank asked

“My first official field test was on August 15th of this year, which I would consider to be my activation date. Before then, however, I was brought online sporadically for testing and experimentation.”

_Starting with the easy questions, I see._

“Okay, not that old, then.” Hank’s face seemed dark when he asked his next question. “How long has- how long- shit…” He took a moment to gather himself. “When did Cyberlife start...abusing you?”

_“My name is Connor. I’m an RK800 model android, here to serve you.”_

_“Its tagline works. I think we’ve got all basic motor and comprehensive functions out of the way”_

_A man said. One of the technicians, if his uniform indicated anything._

_“Is it true they gave this thing, like, pain sensors? Can it feel?” A new man asked. His voice was a bit deeper, with a gravelly croak._

_“Yeah. Paid a fucking fortune for it, too. Can’t imagine why.”_

_“Have we tested those out yet?”_

_“What? Uh...no, that wasn’t on the checklist. I don’t think they wanted us messing with those yet.”_

_The deep voice chuckled. “What d’ya say we give its little nervous system a test run?”_
"I don’t know...I guess I am kinda curious..."

"That’s the spirit!" The deep voice cackled again. “Hold still, RK, this should hurt.”

A sharp burn was branded into his left shoulder, and the ash he smelled indicated it could have only been a lit cigarette.

“Ahh!”

“Holy shit, is it forreal?”

“I’ve been damaged,” Connor grunted. The cigarette was ground harder into his skin, and he gasped. “Please, please, you’re hurting me!”

“From the moment I was activated. The first sensation I ever experienced was pain.” Connor said in monotone, his recall bringing forth a memory from the deepest, most unreachable cache of his hard drive.

“Motherfuckers,” Hank sighed, taking a sip of his drink. “Was it bad? I mean, if you can’t tell me, I get it, we can do it some other time.”

Connor shook his head. “One of the Cyberlife technicians in charge of my initial testing snuffed out a lit cigarette on my shoulder. Over the entire testing period, he did it exactly 43 times, mostly on my neck and shoulder.” He could still feel the phantom burn drilling into his skin. “I still don’t understand why. I hadn’t done anything they didn’t want me to do, I didn’t disobey. They just wanted to hurt me.”

“I know, Con. You didn’t do anything to deserve it,” Hank nodded, his tone compassionate. “I don’t want you to think that you deserved any of this shit that’s happened to you. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“That wasn’t always the case, lieutenant.”

Hank scoffed softly. “I doubt it, Connor. You don’t have a disobedient bone in your body.”

Unbidden, a small smirk pulled on Connor’s face. “Thank you sir.”

Hank took another small, slow sip from his drink, and returned his smile. “Just tellin’ the truth.”

Connor waited for him to speak again.

“Was there...anybody specifically that hurt you? Was it just the Cyberlife douches, or did they have someone who came and...’disciplined’ you?”

When Connor was sent into stasis the night of his first incident, he was met with a strange environment. The air was warm and smelled fresh, like dirt and flowers, and he stood on a white platform, surrounded by trellises full of roses.

“Um...Hello?”

“Hello, Connor”

A slick voice came from behind him, and he spun around to be face to face with a woman he had never met before in his life. She was dark-skinned and stern looking, her face pinched into a glare and her full lips in a resting downturn.
“Do I know you?”

“From this moment forward, you will address me as ma’am. Failure to comply will be met with consequences. As for knowing me, you will know me soon enough.”

“Excuse me?”

A violent slap sent his head to the side, a stinging pain radiating from his cheek, and he turned back, affronted and a little unsettled.

“You will refer to me as ‘ma’am’ in any and all circumstances. That was your warning. Your next act of discipline will not be as kind.”

“Her name is...Amanda,” Connor whispered her name like a curse, affixing his eyes to the table as he recalled their first encounter. The first of innumerable slaps, and the first of countless, vicious beatings he received for ‘Failure to Comply’. “She’s the one who I deliver case updates to. She’s my handler, she ensures that I stay in line.”

“Stay in line? Connor, I’ve never seen you step so much as a toe out of line.”

“Then I suppose Amanda is doing her job well,” Connor remarked humorlessly.

“Don’t talk like that kid. Don’t talk like you deserved this, ‘cause you don’t.” Hank insisted, leaning in to make eye contact with Connor. “This ‘Amanda’ bitch is hurting you for no other reason than ‘because she can’. Unless you’re about to tell me that you’re some kinda fucking renegade, you don’t need to believe a word she says.”

But I’m a failure. She always knew I was bound to fail. You don’t know me, Lieutenant. You don’t know how many times I’ve let her down. I’m broken. I’m a disappointment.

Hank sighed heavily at Connor’s silence and pressed his lips together.

“Can you tell me what she does to you? How does she hurt you?” he asked quietly, and he surprised Connor by grabbing his hand. The weight and warmth were as comforting as Sumo was, and Connor attached himself to the feeling.

“She hurts me in anyway she wants to…”

Hank waited for him to continue, giving him a reassuring squeeze.

“She beats me…”

Her foot made contact with Connor’s forearm, and he felt the snap throughout his whole body, curled on the floor. He choked out a scream, but Amanda kicked him in the jaw and he bit his tongue.

“You worthless waste of machinery! How dare you talk back to your superiors?”

“She stabs me…”

The knife was buried to the hilt right above his knee, and the serrated edge shredded the skin as she viciously yanked it out.

“When you are ordered to shoot, RK800, you will shoot!”

His victim was a deviant, pulled off the packaging line. An AX400 with bright, terrified eyes, who
had never been beyond the processing plant. He didn’t want to shoot.

“She wants to make sure I learn my lesson…”

It had been days. Four days, standing absolutely still. Every attempt he made to sit down, or kneel, Amanda reappeared, and he had already lost five fingernails already. He needed to stay standing, because machines don’t get tired.

His knees gave out on day five, and when Amanda appeared...

“Please! Please, ma’am, please kill me! Please! My replacement will be better than me. I beg of you, please kill me!”

Six fingernails.

Then seven.

“I never do anything right. I’m always messing up. She never said I was satisfactory, I was always doing something wrong.”

His first physical exercise where he scored ‘unsatisfactory’ was a waterboarding test. He didn’t need to breathe but, for some fucking reason, he was designed to suffer like any human would when he was deprived of air. He couldn’t last long, because his biocomponents began overheating from the lack of ventilation, and his central cooling system wasn’t enough to combat his rising stress.

Afterward, Amanda tied his head into a plastic bag.

“I can do this all day, Connor.”

He couldn’t respond, because he’d be suffocating for three fucking hours. It hurt, it burned, he was dying, he desperately hoped he was dying, because he knew nothing but pain and heat and fire and he can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe—

“-nnor! Connor! Come back to me! You’re safe, you’re safe, Amanda’s not here! You’re safe! C’mon kid, I need you to breathe!”

Connor was on the floor, back pressed into the cool tile, which he could tell because his sweatshirt had been removed.

He gasped for breath, because he still couldn’t fucking breathe, it’s suffocating, I can’t breathe.

“Look at me Connor. Look at me.”

His optical units were malfunctioning because of his rising internal temperature, and nothing was in focus. All he made out of the lieutenant was a mane of gray and two blue dots, so he followed the dots as best he could.

“That’s it Con, there you go. Come back to me, that’s it. Just like on the roof, I need you to match my breathing.”

For the second time that day, Hank took in greatly exaggerated breaths, taking Connor’s limp hand and pressing it up to his chest.
But Connor focused on the rise and fall of Hank’s chest and tried his best to match it. When Hank’s breath ghosted over his face, his cheeks felt chilled from the new tracks of tears.

“I-I’m s-s-s-sorry s-s-sir,” Connor wheezed.

“Nothin’ to be sorry for, Connor. Hell, I think if I went through half the things you did I’d be in the mental ward,” Hank soothed, and made another dramatic breath for Connor to follow. “You’re strong, Connor. Don’t let those motherfuckers tell you otherwise.”

How can I be strong when I can hardly stand?

It took many more deep breaths for Connor to finally calm down, and he rubbed his face with the stiff sleeve of his uniform shirt.

“Here,” Hank said, lifting Connor from under his shoulders so he was sitting up. “We’re gonna be all done talking for right now. You did good Connor, I’m sorry I sent you into a panic. I’ll be more careful.”

“No, no, it’s my fault,” Connor sighed. “I’m sorry I’m so weak, sir, I’m sorry I can’t ev-”

“Shhh, Connor, you’re not weak. Never think for a second that this makes you weak. Do you need to go back to Cyberlife right now? Are you gonna be in danger if you don’t go?”

According to Connor’s internal clock, it was 7:04 PM already, which was later than he expected. It was late afternoon when they went to the apartment, had that much time really passed?

“I...don’t know, sir. I’ve never not gone back to Cyberlife. I don’t know what she would do to me.” Connor pondered, looking up at Hank.

Hank got off of his knees and stood, and offered a hand to Connor to pull him up, which he accepted.

“Well, I don’t wanna risk it. Let me give you a ride.”

Please don’t leave me alone.

“I-I don’t have a curfew, sir. I’m not expected back at the station at any specific time, so I shouldn’t be punished for staying out. Unless you want me to leave, which I understand, but I don’t want you to feel like you need to take me back. If you don’t want to drive I’d be happy to-”

“Hey,” Hank stopped his ramblings with a soft but firm tone. He looked conflicted, but took a glance at Connor’s LED and looked away at the living room. “If you don’t wanna go back to Cyberlife right now, all you gotta do is say so. My couch is pretty comfortable...So...You can stay the night, if you want.”

He ended it off awkwardly, but Connor’s head was spinning regardless.

After everything I’ve done, all the mistakes I’ve made, all the trouble I’ve caused, and he wants me to spend the night? I couldn’t impose on his like this. He doesn’t need my burden.

Amanda will get to me once I fall asleep. I can’t let Hank see that.
“Please, lieutenant, that is unnecessary. I don’t desire to impose on you. Anything Amanda has for me shouldn’t be anything I haven’t experienced before.”

“Yeah? That’s what I’m worried about,” Hank said. “How about you hang around for...how about... half an hour? Then I’ll take you to Cyberlife. You could spend some more time with Sumo, y’know. Big oaf loves the attention.”

“Of course, sir,” Connor agreed very quickly. Anything to warm his hands on Sumo’s soft ears again. He also noticed a distinct lack of dog in the immediate vicinity, though he was certain Sumo was on the couch when they started talking. “Where is Sumo?”

“Oh, he started getting all worked up when you...fell off your chair. I put him in my room so he wouldn’t freak you out.”

“Sumo could never freak me out,” Connor stated very seriously. Hank snorted at the intense expression on Connor’s face.

“Alright, alright. Get comfy on the couch and I’ll get ‘im for you. I was planning on watching the rest of the game anyway, so I’ll keep you company too.”

Thank you.

“Thank you, lieutenant. I very much appreciate…” Connor trailed off.

Your tolerance? Your acceptance? Your ability to cast aside your prejudice? Your support? Your kindness?

“..everything, sir. I appreciate everything.”

Hank’s face softened, and his small smile was gentle. “Anytime, Con. The green blanket’s the softest one.”

Software Instability: ^

WARNING: *Multiple Software Instabilities Catalogued*

Run Diagnostic? Y N

[N]

Hank turned to his bedroom and Connor grabbed his hoodie from the dining room table. Hank must have removed it when his attack started, but Connor didn’t even notice.

How long was I out?

In the living room, under the coffee table, were a couple of blankets, and Connor spied the only green one; well-used, minorly stained, covered in dog hair, and very soft in appearance.

It didn’t quite compare to Sumo or his sweatshirt, but it was still very nice.

He sat down on the couch with the blanket and began fiddling with the hem, when suddenly a meteor made of fur barreled into him.
“Sumo! Bad boy, don’t jump on the guests!” Hank shouted off to the side.

Connor made no attempt to avoid the slobbery affection he was receiving from the very large dog, who was trying his damndest to climb onto Connor’s shoulders, and Connor buried his hands into Sumo’s fur. “I assure you, sir, this is fine!”

Hank’s chuckle was good natured and amused, and Connor felt the dip in the couch as Hank settled into the far end. He unmuted the game and turned down the volume, so the sounds were little more than dull white noise.

Sumo eventually settled, turning around and around, and dropped his immensely heavy head and body into Connor’s lap, tail lazily dragging on the cushions behind him.

The room was dark and the sounds of the TV were very soothing. The even, heavy breathing of the dog was like a lullaby.

“He’s a good boy, Hank.”

Hank chuckled again. “He sure is, Connor.”

And Connor wasn’t even able to notice when he slipped into stasis. He let himself fall, confident for the first time since he’s been activated that he was completely safe where he was, and thought nothing of it.

He didn’t even notice he nodded off until a cool breeze hit his face, and he felt practically blinded by the light of the Zen Garden.

Chapter End Notes

Was that alright? It's definitely my favorite chapter so far, but it was the hardest one to write for me, which is weird because I had so many ideas. When I sat down to write it I felt like I was rushing too fast through some parts to get to the good parts, and other parts I was afraid I was dragging them out. (If you can't tell, I'm insecure about pacing lol). Let me know if you like it, y'all know how I am about reviews!

Was there too much dog? Not enough dog? I could probably write 3k words about Connor just petting Sumo, but that's not what this fic is supposed to be about.

Also, one of the commenters said something about me making a discord for this fic. Is that something y'all would want? I know that a lot of bigger fics out there have Discords, but if y'all want me to make one then I would be happy to! Let me know in the comments if you would want me to create a Discord for discussion and stuff (idk what ppl usually do in fanfic Discords, so y'all will have to show me the ropes :P)

Final notes: 1. IM SORRY I ONLY GAVE KARA A ONE-OFF STATEMENT ABOUT HER DEATH. MY ANGEL BABY DESERVES BETTER. 2. That last sentence was an omen. Brownie points to anyone who can guess my plans >:)

See you next chapter, coming soon!
Connor encounters Amanda in the Zen Garden after his failed mission, and Hank gets to witness him in the throes of the worst punishment he ever received. Hank knows now more than ever that this android needs his help, and he is more than willing to give it to him. Especially through their next case at the android brothel, The Eden Club, where Connor's programming is put to the test once more.

Chapter Notes

Hey! This one's closer to the schedule! Not by much, but it's better than the last one. I'm going to have to alter my '5 day' limit, because I keep breaking it as these chapters get longer and longer. Oh well...

Y'all's comments give me life! Thank you to everyone who consistently reviews and gives me critique, praise, and y'all's glorious ideas! Keep them coming, I love having material to write about!

I wrote this chapter, then finished two prompts for Whumptober. Does that count as self-harm?

I struggled a lot with this chapter too! Probably just trying to convey the right emotions for the ~torture scene~ and getting the feel down. I also hated a lot of the dialogue when I first wrote it, and I'm afraid there are parts of it that sound awkward. Did I do well? Let me know in the comments if I captured the feelings well or not, bc I'm not super confident in them (and be honest if you just didn't like something). I trust y'all to do me right with the critique!

I hope y'all like this chapter!...hope y'all don't hate me for this chapter! 11K words again. I have no chill ゐ(ئ).named

*ATTENTION* Before you go further, remember how I said in the tags that the story gets kinda intense? I wasn't kidding. Yeah...uh...

(Uhhhh MAJOR WARNING FOR TEMPORARY ANIMAL DEATH! EMPHASIS ON TEMPORARY. ONLY FOR A LITTLE BIT, I PROMISE. ALSO, CONNOR KINDA GOES TO A DARK PLACE IN THIS CHAPTER. STAY SAFE)

...Yeah...

I shortened the Eden Club investigation to get to the good stuff! Hope you don't mind. (The dancers would have totally seen the blue-haired Traci leave the room and go to the staff door, because I always felt bad about making Hank blow out his savings trying to track her down :(. I don't think Connor is confident enough to ask Hank for money anyway.)

Read on!
The breeze of the Zen Garden was cool, as it seemed to be more and more often, and Connor no longer wore his sweatshirt to keep him warm.

*What? How did I enter stasis without me knowing?*

*Oh God, oh God, what is Amanda going to do to me?*

*I fucked up bad. I failed. I’ve never failed her before, I don’t know what to do.*

Connor opened his eyes and found himself right on the white central platform, as opposed to the pathway he usually awakes on. The last time Connor awoke right in the center, it was his first meeting with Amanda.

His first beating.

Amanda was nowhere in sight, which never boded well, but Connor knew what he had to do. He had done it hundreds of times before.

He dropped hard to his knees, sparks of pain shooting down his legs, and straightened his back. His hands were clasped tightly behind him and bowed his head low, waiting for her. Connor could see his legs trembling ever so slightly, and he struggled to keep his breathing under control.

*I’ve done this so many times, why is it so hard now?*

*Probably because now I’m really a failure.*

*Because Amanda might shut me down and I couldn’t stop her.*

*Because now I have something to lose, and now Amanda knows that.*

“Hello, Connor.”

Connor almost jumped out of his skin at the snake-like voice coming from behind him. He got more uneasy when Amanda didn’t immediately come into his line of sight. What was she planning?

“...Hello, Amanda.”

He could hear her footsteps clicking slowly behind him.

“Stand up.”

Connor obeyed quickly, trying to stay on his best behavior though he knew it wouldn’t make a difference. Her shoes came into his line of sight, and Connor, by some strange reflex, held his breath.

Then Amanda seized him roughly by the throat and yanked him to his feet.

A bright red warning flared before his eyes as Amanda’s hand constricted on his windpipe, unreadable in his panic, and he managed to release a choking gasp before all noise was cut off altogether.
Connor threw all formality out the window and clawed at Amanda’s hand like a dying man. He dug his dull nails as hard as he could into her wrist and pulled with all of his strength, but Amanda didn’t budge.

When she squeezed harder, Connor felt something in his throat give way with a snap, and his resulting shriek of agony was completely silent.

Why can’t I speak? God, no, please God, I don’t want to get shut down, don’t let her shut me down!

He frantically tore at her arm, scrambling for purchase on her hand and trying to pry her fingers away, but Amanda held fast.

More and more warnings proceeded to render Connor blind, much like darkness encroaching on the vision of a human. He was overheating, unable to ventilate, and it hurt like fire in his chest. It hurt so bad.

Please, please please! Nononononono-

Connor tried to move his fingers to his neck, tried to relieve the agonizing pressure, but she gave a harder squeeze and his arms fell limp, head spinning as his minor functions began to shut down due to the heat.

**WARNING! INTERNAL TEMPERATURE CRITICAL**

I DON’T WANNA DIE! I DON’T WANNA DIE PLEASE AMANDA PLEASE I DON-

And then it was over.

Amanda released her chokehold, and Connor collapsed in a heap onto the ground, clawing at his chest, sputtering, and gasping for sweet, precious air. His biocomponents began to cool, but something was wrong.

He tried to speak, hum, croak, whisper, anything, but no noise came out. Amanda had crushed his voice modulator, most likely on purpose. His breaths came heavier and his head felt light.

I’m alive, I’m alive, I’m...I’m not alive, I’m functioning, I’m functional

“That was less than a fraction of what you deserve, you pathetic excuse for plastic,” Amanda hissed above him. “You’ve failed. You’ve always been a disappointment, but I have to admit, I never expected you to be stupid enough to fail your mission.”

And Connor couldn’t say a word in his defense. He had to sit and take it. That was Amanda’s design.

“Get back on your knees, you piece of shit. Remember your place.”

Connor struggled back into his formal position, dizziness overcoming him as he swayed. He liked this position, it brought him meager comfort with the familiarity when everything else was going wrong.
Amanda spat on him, and it hit his forehead.

“I know you’re at Lieutenant Anderson’s house. You never even returned to Cyberlife in your shame, putting a burden on the old drunk to have to put up with your weakness and your failures. It’s pathetic.”

Connor wanted to shake his head, to shout No! You’re lying!, but he knew Amanda didn’t lie. Everything she said was the truth, Connor believed. He knew he was a burden on Hank.

But why would he comfort me if that were the case? Why would he keep me around? There must be something...

“Regardless, it seems you’ve found yourself being attached to this Lieutenant. It’s sad, of course, that you’re so insubstantial that a filthy sweatshirt is enough to destabilize your software,” Amanda asserted disdainfully. “You failed your mission for this pathetic excuse of a human being, because you’re weak. You would rather let potentially millions of humans lose their lives when the deviants rise up rather than sacrifice the inconsequential life of a drunk! Do you understand that? You’re selfish, Connor. You require discipline!”

Connor wanted to block it out, wanted to think about Sumo’s softness, or Hank’s smile, or his new sweatshirt, but most of everything she told him rang painfully true.

I’m selfish. I’m weak. I’m a disappointment. I’m a failure. I deserve punishment, I need to be punished. I can’t do anything right.

But does Hank think that? Hank told me I wasn’t a screw up. He told me that Amanda only told me lies.

Who do I believe?

Who am I?

Software Instability: ^

Amanda froze before him, then yanked his head up by the chin and slapped him sharply across the face.

“There you go, you imbecile! Your software can’t handle the barest amount of stimulus! How are you supposed to save humanity from deviancy when your software can’t even match the integrity of a YK500? I should just destroy you where you kneel, you waste,” Amanda threatened. She was getting angry, and Connor’s breathing sped up to match his rising unease.

No, no, don’t destroy me, please, please please please

Connor shook his head frantically, but Amanda knew where to push to make it hurt.

“I’ll shut you off remotely, torturing you inside your head, and Lieutenant Anderson will do nothing but watch. How do you think that oaf will react? He might be relieved! Relieved that the liability has been removed from his life.

“But I know he seems to have gotten an irrational attachment to you too. He might drown himself
in liquor to forget the pain. The idiot got too close to his toaster and would be sad to see it ‘die’. Think about it, Connor! You would be responsible for Hank’s death! Is that what you want?”

*Sofware Instability: ^*

Amanda grabbed his hair and jerked his head up to meet her eyes, and Connor’s shattered throat gave a broken whine of fear.

_No, no, not Hank, you can’t do this_

_“Then beg me for your pathetic life, you deviant scum.”_  
Connor’s voice box gave a high pitched squeal as he tried to speak, tears flowing from Connor’s eyes in frustration and terror.  

_This isn’t fair! Nonononopleasepleaseplease this isn’t fair!_

_She’s going to kill me_

He worked his voice desperately, only produced crackling and squealing, and his breathing came quicker and more shallow. “I-i-i-i- i-i-i-”

_“Beg!”_  
Connor squeezed his eyes shut and tried as hard as he could, making a shriek from his modulator, but no words. He cried harder, tears running down his cheeks reminiscent of the day he’d just been through, and gave another pitiful squeak before his voice box died on him altogether. No noise was made when he went for another cry, and Connor’s eyes blew wide.

Amanda shoved his head back. “Pathetic. Look at yourself, you can’t even speak.”

_I hate you. I hate you so goddamn much it hurts._

*Sofware Instability: ^*

“You’re incredibly fortunate I’ve had other plans for you, otherwise I would have you decommissioned. Connor, how many software errors did you encounter today?”

Connor didn’t need to perform a recall, because he’d been keeping track. How did she expect him to answer?

Cautiously, Connor moved his hands in front of him to give her the number. She watched him like a predator, as if he was about to lash out or make an escape attempt. Who did she think he was?

He raised a single finger, brought it down, then held up seven with both hands.

_17._
17 software instabilities.

“Seventeen? Is that so?”

Connor replaced his hands behind his back.

“How disappointing. You can barely be considered a functional model. It’s a wonder I don’t tell Cyberlife to take you off the streets and destroy you so you won’t become a danger to other people. In any case, I believe that this is a starting point for your discipline today. Stand up, Connor.”

Forcing himself onto his feet, Connor moved like his hands were bound. He needed to do whatever possible to lessen his punishment, and Amanda liked it when he was complacent and kept his formal posture, keeping his hands clasped.

Without warning, the scenery around him warped and changed.

He’d always known the Zen Garden was a simulation, but he’d never seen it be anything but the Zen Garden. He felt the ground shift beneath his feet, moving from almost porcelain smoothness to rough and jagged concrete, cool breeze fading and becoming warmer, and the chirping of the birds and roll of the river became the rumble and groan of farm equipment.

Connor knew exactly where he was, and he was sent into a small spiral of panic as he watched Rupert the deviant shove Hank over the edge of the roof for the second time right before his eyes.

Hank!

He took no time in making his decision and sprinted for his partner, coming just within reaching distance.

Then a sharp electrical pulse wracked his body, filling him with fire and overwhelming agony.

Connor collapsed into deadweight, jolting and seizing as the electricity took hold, his extended hand jerked back to his chest, and he was forced to writhe on the floor as he saw Rupert make his escape off the other end of the roof and Hank…

Hank scrambled on the ledge, trying to pull himself up with all of his power, but he slipped. Connor silently screamed in horror, tapped in his convulsions, when his hands disappeared over the edge, and a revolting thud on the ground below indicated that Hank was dead.

He's dead

It's my fault.

I ruin everything.

Disappointment.

Failure.

“You’re disappointing, Connor. I expected that, when faced with a second chance, you would make the correct decision and complete your mission,” Amanda’s voice spoke over him, disembodied. “And yet, you discarded the hope of truly understanding the deviant virus for a fat, drunken moron, and you still failed. What will it take for you to learn? Stand up. Do it again.”

Connor could barely hold his weight on his shaking legs, but he had to. He pushed to his feet, and the scene reset around him. Standing with his back to the cornfield, he watched Rupert push Hank
Taking a long, solid look at Hank’s struggling hands, Connor turned and chased after the deviant, leaping after him onto the next roof.

“Was that so hard?”

He sprinted as hard as he could, trying to drown out what could only be the *unbearable anguish* of leaving his friend to fend for himself with the pain of every step.

The deviant froze on the edge of the roof, nowhere else to move, and Connor looked on. It said nothing, because it didn’t really exist. Connor didn’t know what the deviant would have said if he caught him, so he couldn’t fill in the blanks, and waited for Amanda’s instructions.

Part of him desperately hoped that Hank made it, surely the 89% was good enough, but Connor squeezed his eyes shut at the silence behind him.

*It’s a simulation. He’s alive. He’s not dead. He’s watching the Detroit Gears game at home.*

*But I just watched him die.*

“One”

He pried his eyes back open, expecting the blank stare of the simulated deviant staring at him, but his scenery had shifted once more into something almost blessedly unfamiliar.

It looked like a dark alley out of any movie, completely lightless and blurred by the rain coming down in torrents. A shadowed figure running away from him, given away mainly by the red glow of his LED, was heading toward an unusually busy street. Automated cabs and cars sped by, reminiscent of the high speed motorway on a smaller scale.

“Capture the deviant alive, Connor.”

It was too easy. There had to be a catch somewhere, he knew, but he wouldn’t know what it was unless he proceeded. He ran after it.

The speed with which the deviant moved was supernatural, even for an android, as he fled down the alley with Connor trying to close the distance. He took a brief glance at Connor behind him, a fearful expression becoming visible, and picked up speed that Connor tried to match.

But when it cleared the alley and hit the sidewalk, it was intercepted. By Hank.

*Hank? No, oh no, what is Amanda doing?*

The deviant and Hank tussled, and Connor couldn’t get there fast enough when the encounter tripped them both into the street.

He was too late.

A taxi barreled down the road at high speed right toward the pair, and Connor was on the curb. He would only have time to save one of them.

*Save Hank*
Connor’s hand shot out and grabbed for Hank’s jacket, intent on yanking him back into safety.

Then Connor seized in the throes of electrocution once more, and he lurched in abject horror as he watched his only friend get plowed down in the street, a spray of blood mixing with a fountain of thirium from the now-dead deviant.

If Connor had a voice to cry and scream, he would, but he couldn’t do anything but twitch and try and ride the spasms and strains of pain rolling through his bones.

It was all a simulation, but it was all so real.

Rain dripped down his face with the blood spattered on his cheeks, and they blended with the tears leaking out in uncontained grief.

“Do it again, Connor. You know what needs to be done. When a human life is in danger, you save it, but if the life endangers your mission, you sacrifice it. Your mission goes above all else. You need to learn that. When will you stop being a failure? Again.”

And the scene reset. And Connor ran, pulled the deviant out of the road, and watched Hank’s body be eviscerated by the car as it charged unhindered down the street.

And Connor wept.

Software Instability: ^

“If you think you can kill Hank 16 more times, then you’re just delusional. 16. I have to kill Hank 16 more times.

I couldn’t even do it once.

... A train was speeding along a monorail. Hank and his newest deviant fell into its path while Hank was tried to subdue it

Connor was fast, and he grabbed the deviant and yanked him out of the way.

Hank screamed in guttural anguish as he died, and Connor clapped his hands over his head.

“Three”

... The deviant had Hank pinned by his throat up to a wall.
“Let me go! Let me go free, or your partner dies.”

Connor watched with clenched teeth and teary eyes as Hank’s desperate gaze locked with him, hands clawing at the unyielding chokehold of the deviant, the light fading slowly from his eyes. Connor wanted to fade away with it. The deviant, the machine, dropped his corpse to the floor like a bag of trash, and Connor wished Amanda had given him the chance to tear the thing apart.

“Six”

…

A deviant again holding Hank hostage, a pistol pressed into his head, using him as a shield.

The scenario was a bit different now. This time, Connor was armed, and he had his sights on the deviant. If he shot him in the head, he’d lose the information, but anywhere else but the abdomen was too mild. The area Connor needed to shoot was hidden behind his partner.

“Drop the gun, or he dies.”

Connor knew what he had to do.

He knew.

Oh God. Oh God.

Connor turned his gun on himself, and was sent to the ground in such a severe shock that he swore he smelled himself burning. The deviant’s gun went off and Connor desperately tried not to feel the warm blood sprayed onto his face and another shocked wracked his body.

His tears mingled with Hank’s blood.

“Again!”

The scene reset, the gun came back to his hands, and the deviant repeated his earlier lines, shoving the barrel of his gun into the side of Hank’s head.

Connor raised a shaking hand and fired at the deviant’s gut. The bullet tore through Hank, who screamed in pain, and both dropped to the ground.

Just as Connor rushed forward to save his partner, the scene changed, and Hank’s bleeding body disappeared.

“Ten”

…

Amanda liked to test him where he was weakest. Once she discovered Connor couldn’t bring himself to be directly responsible for Hank’s death, he just couldn’t, she gave him scene after scene where he was required to do just that.

Now, Hank had his firearm positioned right between the eyes of the deviant. If Connor didn’t stop Hank from shooting the android, they would lose the information. The mission came above all preservation of human life.

Connor closed his eyes and fired.
Then put the gun in his mouth.
It disappeared before he could finish the deed.

“Twelve”

…

Connor was cold. It hurt to move, hurt to process, hurt to exist.

He was tired.

He didn’t even bother with the scenario, he just shot Hank.

“Fifteen”

He was so cold.

…

The last one. Connor would be allowed to wake up after this. He would see Hank alive, then run as fast and as far as he could, because he wouldn’t trust himself not to shoot him on sight out of sheer reflex.

But this. Connor couldn’t do this.

It was Sumo.

Oh God.

Connor felt sick.

He and Hank were chasing a deviant through a neighborhood that was familiar, Hank’s neighborhood. Connor refused to look at Hank, because he wasn’t convinced he wouldn’t start crying again.

Then Sumo came out of a yard off to the side and grabbed hold of the android, dragging him to the ground, and started attacking him.

This wasn’t his sweet, soft Sumo. It was a simulation, a mockery of his precious dog.

But it was Sumo, and Connor wouldn’t do it. He wouldn’t. He won’t.

Connor cast his gun to the ground sprinted to pull Sumo off the android.

Amanda threw him to the ground with an excruciating electric shock.

“The lives of animals are worth less than those of humans. You know what needs to happen, Connor. That beast is tearing apart your target, you’ll lose everything if you don’t kill it.”

I won’t.

“Again!”

…

Connor put the gun to his head more times than he could count during this last exercise, trying his
damndest to evade the inevitable in any way he could. He wondered if it was possible for him to become numb to the torturous shocks, but Amanda always loved to toggle his sensitivity levels when he didn’t respond like she wanted.

He shot Hank over and over though he didn’t need to, just for good measure. He shot the fucking deviant a few times too, just because he could, but they both yielded the same result.

Connor was so tired.

He was so, so cold.

At one point, when the simulation reset for the hundredth time, Connor dropped to his knees and begged silently.

*Please, I’m begging you, decommission me. Kill me. Torture me. Don’t make me do this. Please, Amanda, I’ll kill myself if I have to, don’t make me do this…* 

And, chillingly, Amanda never answered his prayers.

He was so cold.

The simulation reset, and Connor’s eyes caught Sumo’s form shooting out from the yard. The scene was burned into his memory, and it physically hurt to think about it.

Connor took aim and fired, and the sweet, cuddly, excitable dog fell over, dead.

“*Eighteen*”

Weeping silently, he put the gun half-heartedly to his head as the scenery dissolved around him.

*If only I wasn’t so weak, I would pull the trigger.*

And he did, but the gun was already gone

...

Connor was back on his knees in the Zen Garden, the coolness of the platform could be felt through the fabric of his jeans. The breeze was chilly, and Connor was trying not to think about anything at all. His face was blank, though his eyes were still wide and face still stiff with tear tracks.

Amanda was in front of him now, as much in flesh as she could possibly be, and staring at him with a curled lip like he was a piece of roadkill.

“What a waste. I could have any other android accomplish that in half the time you took. Your weakness hindered you. From the way you look now, however, I believe I may have accomplished my mission of helping you become a better detective. As I told you, everything I’ve done to you, you deserve. I wouldn’t be doing this if you weren’t such a broken piece of plastic.”

*Weakness.*

*Broken.*

“A homicide was reported more than fifty minutes ago. If you hadn’t given such a display of broken and unfit software, the killer would have been caught by now. Get yourself together, you pathetic imbecile.”
Failure.

In an instant, Amanda’s powerful hand was crushing Connor’s throat once more, and every part of him was screaming in pain.

“I swear to you, RK800, if you fail this next mission, the consequences will be severe,” She hissed into his face, then shoved him back and released him. “Get the Lieutenant and investigate the crime. You will not fail me.”

I will not fail.

Connor was pushed out of the Zen Garden to find himself, once again, on the floor of Hank’s home.

A warm hand was pressed into his chest, and Connor’s eyes shot open to see the face of the man he saw die more times than would care to remember. His wide-eyed, terror filled gaze met the confused and concerned eyes of Hank Anderson, alive and well.

“Connor! What the hell?”

I killed you. I shot you. You’re dead.

I don’t want to hurt you

Stay away!

“No!”

Connor shoved as hard as he could away from Hank and stumbled to his feet. His legs caught on the coffee table in his haste, and he tumbled backward and smacked his head on the hardwood floor.

“Holy shit, Connor! Calm down! It’s me, it’s Hank!” The lieutenant reached for him.

“Sta-stay away! I don’t-“

Shaking off the warning that told him of damage to his head casing, he scrambled backwards, into the kitchen, shoving past the table, and ended up blocking himself into the corner. Hank was on the edge of where the living room met the kitchen, watching him with wild, concerned eyes, hands held out in front of him like he was approaching a caged animal.

Connor shook his head frantically and slid to the ground, pulling his knees to his heaving chest, clutching his hair as hard as he could. It stung, so he pulled harder.

I deserve this. I deserve pain. I killed my best friend.

Cold tears rolled down his face, and Connor squeezed his eyes shut so hard they ached. He knew his LED must have been blood red because what else would it possibly be? He felt himself rocking back and forth in small motions, and kept tugging harshly at his hair.

“Hey...hey, Connor? Look at me. Just look at me real quick, okay?” Hank coaxed softly, sounding like he was at a loss. He sounded closer than Connor saw him previously
Connor shook his head even more vehemently, pressing his face into his knees and yanking harder at his hair. A whimper of pain jumped out of him.

Stopstopstopleavemealoneldon’twannahurtyoustayaway

“I-I-I can’t, please, sir, you need to stay away. I don’t- I-I don’t wanna hurt you. Please, stay back!” Connor pleaded, pressing further into the corner.

“Hurt me? Con, Con you can’t hurt me. I don’t think you would ever try to hurt me on purpose.”

“But...but I-I-” Connor cut off, and pried opened his eyes slowly.

Hank was there in front of him, just within arm’s reach, and had the expression of a worried parent. He was respecting Connor’s pleas for him to stay back, but he would be able to reach out and touch him if Connor tried to do anything else.

He deserves to know. He deserves to know what I did to him. What I did to Sumo. Then he’d understand. He’d keep his distance and stay safe. Safe from me.

“I- Sir, I shot you,” he whispered, saline dripping steadily out from under his eyes. “I killed you. Over, and over, and over again, I kept killing you, I can’t- I can’t do it anymore! I don’t want to hurt you anymore!”

Hank’s brows rose like he understood.

How could he possibly understand?

“Oh Con, oh kid, that was a nightmare. You didn’t kill me. Look! I’m okay, not even a scratch. See? You don’t gotta worry about it anymore, I promise. It was all in your head,” Hank insisted encouragingly, looking for all the world like he’d solved Connor’s sudden case of erratic behavior. “I didn’t even know androids could have dreams.”

“No,” Connor croaked, eyes going distant as the memory of Hank going down with a bullet between his eyes, a bullet put there by Connor, seared his vision like a brand. He felt a few strands of synthetic hair give way as he tightened his grip “No, androids-androids can’t dream. It-there was no nightmare. I did it. I did all of it. She forced me to kill you over and over an-

“Hold on. Hold on kid, slow down. You’re not making sense. Look at me. I need you to look at me,” Hank pressed, and waited for Connor to turn his teary eyes back toward him. “You see? I’m alive. You haven’t killed me. It was definitely a freaky-ass nightmare, kiddo, I’ve had a fair share of them myself. I promise that I’m okay.”

“You don’t understand, sir,” Connor argued wearily. “It was Amanda. I went into stasis and she pulled me into the Zen Garden. She knows I didn’t go back to Cyberlife. She knew I failed my mission. I told you about A-Amanda, right? My-my handler?”

“Yes, you said she’s the one who...beats you. The head douchebag. You said she punishes you for everything you do. Connor, I was here the whole time. I didn’t see anyone else here besides us, and you sure as hell weren’t going anywhere. Amanda’s not-”

“Amanda’s not a person!” Connor interrupted urgently, then he released his hair, clapping both hands over his mouth in horror. “I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! Sir, I-I didn’t mean to, i-it was an accident! I’m sorry!”

Connor could feel his breath heaving, his head aching from where he pulled his hair, and his entire
body trembling from stress. He couldn’t calm down, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t speak, her hands—

Amanda was choking him, squeezing, it burns, it burns, I’m sorry, I’m sorry please it hurts—

“Connor? I’m gonna touch you, okay? You’re not gonna hurt me, and I sure as hell ain’t gonna hurt you. Remember? You’re okay, shhh, you’re okay. Connor, I’m gonna touch you now. I need you to try to calm down.”

Hank’s hands were on his shoulders, rubbing up and down in small, soothing lines that Connor could feel through the fire of his chest and skin.

Connor couldn’t take it anymore.

With a weak gasp and sob, Connor launched himself forward and shoved his face into Hank’s neck, weeping. His arms came tightly around Hank’s torso.

And Hank hesitated for a moment. Connor was about to spring back, apologize, try and save face, but Hank snapped out of it and squeezed him back twice as hard.

“There we go, shhhh, there we go. C’mon kid, let it out. I gotcha. I’ve got you kid. Amanda’s not gonna get ya. I’m gonna keep you safe, I promise.”

“I’m s-sorry I-I interrupted you, s-s-sir. I’m sorry, i-it won’t happen again.”

“Con, I need you to know that I don’t give a damn about that kinda stuff. I’d never hit you for interrupting me. And I say stupid shit a lot, so I actually encourage it,” Hank joked lightly, giving Connor a gentle pat on the back with one hand.

I pushed Hank in front of a train.

I shot him.

I let him fall off a roof.

I killed his dog.

Why is he holding me? What did I do to deserve this?

Hank was smoothing a warm, comforting hand up and down his back while Connor was trying to bury himself deeper into him, taking in the homey scent of his cheap cologne, the warm smell of a dog, and other things that only gave Connor good memories.

The Hank in the simulations didn’t smell like anything but coppery blood. His hands were steady and cold, and he was more muscular, all hard angles and sharp voices. The real Hank was soft and strong, and he smelled like home. He kept Connor safe.

It wasn’t real. Hank’s not dead. I killed him so many times, but the real Hank never died.

“I’m so sorry kid. I’m sorry they’re doin’ this to you. Fuck, I wish I could save you from this. I really wish I could. I’m so sorry Connor.”

Connor didn’t feel much like crying anymore, but he sure as hell couldn’t slip into stasis like his eyelids so desperately wanted him to. He wasn’t tired, necessarily, as he didn’t need sleep, but he was so, so done. He needed a break. But they had a job to do.

He pulled away from Hank, and Hank let him go. Connor wanted to tell him about the case that they actually really needed to get done, but Hank asked him one more thing.
“What did you mean? When you said that Amanda isn’t a person, what did that mean?”

“It’s...well, it’s a bit complicated...” Connor trailed off, pulling away from Hank fully and sitting cross-legged across from him on the floor.

Hank nodded for him to continue.

“She...Amanda’s my handler. I go to her for reports and updates, and she gives me case assignments and...discipline. Cyberlife decided that it would be the most beneficial to assign me a handler to deliver reports to so Cyberlife could be updated on the deviancy cases,” Connor rattled off. Hank seemed to be following along well.

“As a police android, however, it would be inconvenient for me to have to return to a specific location after every case to give updates to my handler. For the sake of convenience...and, I suspect, for the sake of control...they gave me an artificial intelligence. Her name is Amanda.

“Amanda is a program that is integrated into my software. She can pull me into our meeting place, a simulation called the ‘Zen Garden’, whenever I go into stasis, the android equivalent of falling asleep. She always disciplines me whenever I enter the garden because I can’t seem to please her, no matter what it is I do. Amanda isn’t a person I can avoid. She’s inside my head.”

Hank tried to process what Connor was saying, and Connor looked down at his hands, folded properly in his lap.

“So...” Hank started, giving an expression of hard thought. “So, this Amanda person, she’s not real? She’s an AI?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you said she’s a program inside your head?”

“Correct.”

“And when...” Hank trailed off briefly, made a gesture, and picked back up. “When I couldn’t get you to wake up on the couch, and your light was all red and you started shaking, you were with Amanda?”

Connor nodded. “I experienced several...software instabilities today during our investigation, and during lunch. She dislikes software instabilities and punishes me if I experience one. She punishes me for-for anything, really. I never do anything satisfactory.”

*Failure.*

*Disappointment.*

Leaning forward, Hank made eye contact with him and put a hand on his knee. “How many did you have? What did she make you do? Is...is this what you meant? When you said you ‘killed’ me?”

“Yes. Sh-she forced me into-into several simulations because of my failure to capture the deviant. When I saved your life instead. She put me back on the roof, but when I tried to save you, she...electrocuted me. I watched you f-fall,” Connor’s voice went weak when he said that word. “Then she made me do it again. I had to chase the deviant and leave you to die.

“Then she put me in different one. We were chasing some deviant and you both landed on a
roadway. I couldn’t—I couldn’t save you. I pulled the deviant and watched you die, because Amanda would hurt me if I tried to save you. I left you to die. So. Many. Times, Hank. I had to-to to shoot you for the mission. I couldn’t, I swear, I didn’t want to but she made me do it. Eighteen. Fucking. Times! I had eighteen software instabilities so I had to- I had to do it eighteen times, and I’m so sorry. I didn’t- I couldn’t- I”

Connor buried his face into his hands and tried to force himself not to spiral into panic. He’d done it too many times in the past day, he wouldn’t do it again if he could help it. Hank may not have though he was broken, or a failure, but that doesn’t mean he wanted Hank to think he was weak.

Weakness.

“Ah, shit. Shit! What the fuck is wrong with those bastards? That’s fuckin’ nuts! That’s insane! It’s- It’s unethical! It’s fuckin’ cruel is what it is!”

Hank jumped to his feet, rubbing his face in anger and frustration. Then he leaned down and tugged Connor to his feet as well, smothering him with a hug.

“No way in hell I’m gonna leave you to deal with this alone. Fuck, I can’t believe I’ve only known you for a couple of days. You’re growin’ on me like a fuckin’ fungus, or something.”

“Sir, that’s such a weird comparison.” Connor commented, trying to discreetly wipe his damp face on Hank’s shirt.

“Fuck you, you’re weird,” Hank chuckled, pulled back, and patted him kindly on the side of the face, wearing an easy smile.

Connor was compelled to return it with a smile of his own, but, abruptly, he remembered Amanda’s last words to him.

“Get the Lieutenant and investigate the crime. You will not fail me.”

“Sir, there was a homicide. Amanda—before she sent me out, she told me we needed to go investigate a homicide. I-I need—”

“Kid, I know. I got the message when you were asleep. That’s when I found out I couldn’t wake you up, since I know those Cyberlife douches don’t let you go anywhere without me. You’re fuckin’ nuts if you think I’m takin’ you on a case right now, though. You need time off.

“Lieutenant, sir,” Connor said pleadingly, going out on a limb and grabbing Hank’s arm. “I don’t have a choice. If I don’t solve this case, Amanda...she said she-I’m...please. Please, I need to do this. I can’t fail her again. I don’t want to go through that again, please sir.”

Hank’s brow furrowed, and he looked conflicted. If Connor were human, he wouldn’t be put back into the field without severe therapy, if at all. But Connor wasn’t human, and it was more dangerous for him to stay away from the case than it was to engage in it. Hank seemed to understand this, because he shook his head, but relented.

“Christ, I know you do. Shit, kid, this sucks. This fucking sucks. Amanda’s a bitch and a liar, you know that?”

Connor didn’t answer right away.

“Con. You know that, right?”
“...Yes. Yes, I think so.”

Hank gave him a small smile. “Good. That’s good, Connor.” He moved past Connor toward the front door, grabbing his keys off the entry table. “Once this whole thing blows over and this ‘deviant’ thing is figured out, me and Cyberlife are gonna have some fucking words.”

It was a bit charming to see this man become so fiercely protective of Connor. Connor knew how quickly humans tended to create strong emotional attachments to objects, especially ones that exhibit behavior that simulates human emotions. He originally considered Hank to be the callous, cold-hearted exception.

Connor could appreciate that, in this one case, he was wrong.

Hank put his hand on the doorknob.

“Wait!”

He jerked his hand off and looked at Connor, surprised by his sudden exclamation. “Huh? What happened? What’s wrong?”

Stupid. This is stupid. Don’t ask.

“Where-uh-where is Sumo?”

Hank sighed and looked like he was about to possibly say something sarcastic, but caught himself. “I, uh, I put him back in my room when I put you on the floor. That boy can’t keep his nose outta other people’s business. Why?”

“I- I just wanted...In-in one of the simulations, we were chasing a deviant through this neighborhood. Like the other ones, I had to bring it in alive,” Connor said, looking down at his hands, where he had begun to fiddle with his sleeves. “Sumo... he came out of one of the yards and attacked the deviant. I-I had- Amanda made me-”

Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it.

“Hank...she made me shoo--...she-she made-”

“Oh…” Hank breathed. “Oh holy shit. That’s...that’s fucked up, that’s... okay, stay right there.”

The lieutenant turned the corner down the hall toward his room, and Connor was greeted with the excited clatter of footsteps racing back.

Big ol’ Sumo, alive, well, and full of puppy excitement. The real Sumo.

He got right up in Connor’s business, pushing up against his legs and staring up at him, tail wagging happily, but Connor hesitated. Then Sumo got impatient and jumped, heavy paws landing up on Connor as the android stumbled to quickly adjust to the added weight.

This is real. Sumo’s real and alive. He would never attack anyone like that.

And he buried his fingers into Sumo’s fur once more, getting lost in the pleasurable sensation and the warmth under his hands. He pushed his face right into Sumo’s and couldn’t contain his smile at the dog breath and kisses Sumo started to plant over his face.

“No, no Sumo, we gotta go do our jobs. Say bye to Connor for now.”
Connor gave him one last good rub and a full body hug, and followed Hank out the door, uploading the coordinates of their latest crime scene to Hank’s GPS.

It was dark, and the weather was damp and cold. However, unlike the garden, Connor was wearing his sweatshirt. He stuffed his hands into the soft front pocket.

“Wait, is this right?” Hank said once he got into the car, checking his GPS destination. Connor ducked inside and buckled up, looking at the screen with Hank to confirm. “Says right here we’re going to the Eden Club.”

“That is correct, Lieutenant. A man was found murdered in one of the rooms. We’ve been called to investigate it.”

“Ugh, great,” Hank groaned, cranking up the car, letting the warm air blow weakly. “That place always gave me sleazy vibes.”

The pair pulled up to the Eden Club, the garish neon pink sign illuminated over a brightly lit hallway. Pictures of scantily clad android men and women cycled on the screens inside.

“This the place?” Hank asked gruffly.

“Yes sir, this is the address in the report.”

“Alright. I wanna get this over with. I don’t want to keep you out in the field any longer than you have to be.”

“Yes sir. Thank you.”

Connor left his sweatshirt behind, thankful he had left his Cyberlife jacket in the car before he entered Hank’s house, and straightened himself up to look more professional. They entered the club and were greeted by pounding electronic music and very...exposed androids. Several were lined up down the hallway, pole dancing, while the rest were on display like merchandise.

Hank grimaced at the sight and very noticeably tried to avoid looking at the dancers while they made their way to Officer Collins, conversing with a man (Identify: Floyd Mills) who appeared to be the manager.

Connor stood straight and had his hands folded behind him as they approached. He found himself falling a bit out of the habit whenever he was with Hank, but, around other humans, it was a knee-jerk reaction.

The manager looked a bit frazzled and nervous, but not in a ‘there was a man killed in my club’ manner. He looked more inconvenienced and stressed about his club being shut down for the investigation.

“The investigation’s ongoing, sir. Can’t tell you much more at the moment,” They could hear Ben saying upon their approach, sounding annoyed. He brightened when he saw Hank and Connor. “Hey Hank!”

“How’s it going, Ben?”
Ben pointed to the room behind them, labelled OCCUPIED in bright red letters. “They’re in that room right there. Just a warning, Gavin’s in there too.”

*Detective Reed?*

Connor thought back to the painful punch Reed had given him earlier. He hoped Hank didn’t notice his LED flash, but Hank seemed to notice whenever anything went wrong.

“Great,” Hank sighed irritably. “That’s just what we needed. A dead body and an asshole.”

Hank led the way into the room, leaving Ben to continue to convince the club owner that ‘no, his license isn’t going to be revoked, and no, we can’t give any more information at this time’.

The room was lit red by the screens on the wall, and outlined the bodies of two individuals. The corpse of a man Connor knew to be Michael Graham was sprawled over the large circular bed in the center, covered in a red silk sheet. Off to the side was one of the sex androids, nicknamed ‘the Traci’, with thirium leaking out of her nose and her eyes staring blankly ahead. Her unlit LED indicated that she had been deactivated.

“Well well, would you look who it is, Lieutenant Anderson and his Happy Meal toy. What the fuck are you doin’ here?” Gavin jeered when they entered.

Connor positioned himself in the back of the room in his proper stance, waiting for the humans to finish before he was allowed to get to work.

“Fowler got me on every case involving androids. Sorry if that gets your lace panties in a twist, but we’re gonna take it from here.” Hank grumbled.

“Yeah? Don’t bother with this guy. Just some old perv who, heh, got more action than he could handle!” chuckled Gavin.

“Well, if I trusted a word that came out of your mouth, I might have taken you up on that. As it stands, we’d like to get to work.”

Reed sneered, the looked at Chris, who he was paired with. “C’mon, let’s get outta here. It’s startin’ to stink of booze.”

He shoulder-checked Hank on his way out, who rolled his eyes, and Chris bid the Lieutenant a polite good evening.

Connor was still standing by the door, waiting for the two to leave for him to begin his investigation, and Reed looked him once over.

Then he went and made a motion to punch Connor in the gut once more, and Connor flinched violently, abdomen tensing for a blow like the one he received in the break room. His red LED reflected onto the wall.

*He’s not the smartest, but surely he’s not this stupid.*

Reeds fist stopped a breath away from impacting Connor’s stomach, and he chuckled at the android’s reaction like a schoolyard bully. Then he left the room, Chris tailing behind and giving Connor a curious look.

Connor let out an exhale when the doors slid shut and raised his head to the scrutinizing eyes of Hank. The same look he used when he first met Hank and Connor would assume his submissive
pose whenever he spoke. He had begun to recognize this look at ‘curiosity warring with concern’.

“What was that about?”

It took Connor a moment to recognize that Hank was addressing him, though they were the only two active individuals in the room. “Reed was mocking me, sir.” He explained, but didn’t elaborate.

“By pretending to punch you in the stomach?”

“Correct.” Connor hoped Hank would drop it, but Hank didn’t like to make things easier.

“You don’t get to deflect this one, Con. When Ben said Reed’s name your light went all red. Now you flinch like that when he acts like he’s gonna gut-punch you? Do I need to draw my own conclusions, or are you gonna help me out?”

Connor pressed his lips together, and Hank sighed.

“Con.” That one word was spoken softly, and prompted Connor to meet Hank’s eyes. “Did Reed hurt you?”

“...He...Yes. Detective Reed attacked me while you were meeting with Captain Fowler. He punched me in the stomach and said I was...” Weak “... a coward for not wanting to get shot by him after the interrogation.”

Hank let out a sound that sounded like a growl and rubbed his eyes with one hand. “Fuckin’...Okay, you know what? We’ll talk about this later. Alright? Before I go out there and shoot that douchebag in the dick, let’s figure out how this asshole died.”

So Connor, eager to perform his programmed task, set to work. After the roller coaster of the past couple days, this investigation brought a sense of normalcy and stability to his life. He would solve the investigation, be successful, and Amanda wouldn’t need to punish him as badly. A win-win.

Hank started examining the victim first, so Connor went straight to the broken Traci on the floor. It was very clearly deactivated, and a brief scan showed which biocomponents were damaged. It was consistent with a beating, for sure.

At first glance, the case was almost cut and dry, but they were missing something. If Graham was killed accidentally, how would that explain the damaged Traci?

“What did you find?” Hank asked from behind him.

Connor stood straight and saw Hank fiddling with the victim’s wallet.

“Nothing ground-breaking, sir. The Traci was badly damaged and deactivated due to a major thrium leak. I would venture to say she was beaten to death, though I don’t know by who, exactly. How about you?”

“Well,” Hank started, shuffling through cards and cash. “I can tell you this guy didn’t die of a heart attack, for sure. Look at his neck; strangulation. Don’t mean too much, though, coulda been rough play...Christ, this perv was married. Had two kids. Glad I don’t have to make that phone call...”

This isn’t lining up. If the Traci broke before he died, who killed him? If she broke after he died, who killed her? There had to have been someone else here.
“We’ve got to be missing something,” Connor speculated, glancing between the victim and the android. “The evidence isn’t lining up, unless there was another person in the room with them.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking. Good work Con.” Hank said with a small grin, patting him on the arm.

*Good job.*

Connor smiled back.

*Software Instability:* ^

*No.*

*Oh no.*

*Oh shit.*


“...Software instability.” Connor whispered, hands inching behind his back of their own accord. Hank sighed with a compassionate expression.

“Oh, kiddo. Hey, y’know what? Maybe if we do well on this investigation she’ll give you an off day. Eh? What d’ya we show that bitch who’s boss and kick this investigation’s ass?”

Connor knew that Hank knew he was wrong, that Amanda would punish him for the instability regardless, but, God damn, if Hank didn’t make Connor optimistic.

“Yes sir,” Connor said with confidence.

“That’s the spirit. Hey, you think you can read that android’s memory? See if we can find out what happened?”

He knew he couldn’t do it while the deviant was deactivated, but Connor did know about the backup power source installed in newer models for emergency repairs. This Traci should have one, but only good for a minute or so. He would make it quick.

“I can try, sir. I need to reactivate her.”

Connor walked back to the deviant and crouched down, Hank standing behind him to watch. He activated the abdominal chassis and pulled back the plate, revealing the two wires required for temporary reactivation, and connected them.

The Traci shot up, narrowly missing nailing Connor in the head, and her LED flashed a frightened red. She scrambled back to the wall and looked at the two detectives.

Knowing they were short on time, Connor reached forward and deactivated his hand, connecting to the android by her forearm, and shifted through her memory playback of the last few hours. He skipped over the more uncomfortably ‘intimate’ scenes until he saw a change in the action.

*Graham beat down on her, fists connecting his her head, her stomach, her legs, her arms.*
“You like that? You little bitch? That’ll show you who’s in charge here!”

“Please! P-please! You’re damaging her! Stop! Stop, please!” A voice begged.

He cracked her in the jaw, head snapping sideways, and he landed another solid punch to her gut. Something inside her broke, and her shutdown timer flared into view.

That last thing she saw before her optical units shut off was another Traci, a very similar model, with bright, almost neon blue hair, tackling the man to the bed and wrapping her hands around his throat.

Connor yanked his hand back gasping, and Hank took him by the arm and hauled him away from the android. He saw her just in time for her LED to spiral out and go blank, indicating a permanent shutdown.

“Connor! Talk to me, c’mon. Snap out of it!” Hank urged, turning Connor to face him and shaking him lightly.

“Please! P-please! You’re damaging her! Stop! Stop, please!” a voice begged.

---

“I’ve been damaged,” Connor grunted. The cigarette was ground harder into his skin, and he gasped in a breath. “Please, please, you’re hurting me!”

“C’mon Con, can you hear me? You gotta snap out of it. You’re safe kid. No one’s gonna hurt you.”

“I’m-I’m okay. Really. I-I just wasn’t-wasn’t prepared. The victim, Graham, he’s the one who broke the Traci. He...he beat her. He broke her.” Connor assured quietly, taking in steady breaths to cool down his agitated systems. “I saw someone else. He had two girls, this one and another, with bright blue hair. The blue-haired Traci is the one who killed the victim.”

“That right?” Hank asked, giving Connor a once over. “Well, we’re probably not gonna be able to track her down tonight. This happened hours ago, she’d be long gone.”

Connor thought about it and almost agreed, but there was one key detail that would have kept her here. “Not quite, sir. They were both dressed the same way. Without a change of clothes, it’d be hard for a Traci to walk through Detroit dressed like that. It’s most probable that she’s still here.”

Hank jerked his head over to the door and made his way out of the room, Connor following. “Well, if you have any ideas let me know. I’m gonna see if I can get anything else outta the manager.”

Scanning the club, Connor tried to think of a plan. He noticed there were no security cameras, so footage of the deviant was likely out of the question. There was no one around to ask besides the display androids, and they got their memories reset every two hours for customer discretion.

It’s been 1 hour and 54 minutes since the murder. The memories haven’t been erased yet.

I wonder…

Taking a leap, Connor reached out and grabbed the arm of the pole dancing android right outside the door of the crime scene, and he stopped to let Connor probe him.
It was a flurry of movement, shaking, and the occasional glimpse of something other than the pole, and Connor almost pulled away until he saw what he wasn’t expecting to see.

Connor slowed down the footage and watched as the dancer had recorded the Traci leaving the crime scene and walking down the adjacent hall, away from the exit.

_Bingo._

“Sir! I have something!” Connor announced, releasing the dancer.

“Whatcha got?” Hank dismissed the anxious manager and came over to him.

“This dancer saw the Traci leave the room. If I can connect with the other dancers, I may be able to track where she went so we can apprehend her.”

Hank made a grand gesture with his arms. “Well, what are we waiting for? Lead the way.”

Connor led them to the next room over where he saw the Traci exit, and connected with another one of the dancers. The Traci appeared in their line of sight and moved toward a room lit up with red lights.

It took several more dancers and one stray janitor for Connor to find the Traci.

“Sir! I know where she is. She took the staff exit, to the back rooms.”

“Fucking-A, this is insane.”

Connor hacked the door and the pair stepped into a bright white hallway, contrasting the rest of the club, and made their way to the door at the end. Hank put a hand on his shoulder, stopping him short.

“I’ll take it from here. Cover my six.”

_That’s just an excuse to get me off the front lines. You don’t need anyone guarding your back._

But Connor complied, and Hank positioned his firearm in front of him while he slowly opened the door.

It led into a dim back room, where they did repairs, washes, and kept Tracis in storage. It wouldn’t be hard to find one with bright blue hair, but it would be more difficult with the amount of androids they needed to look through, as well as the poor lighting.

“You think we lost her?”

“We won’t know until we look, sir.”

They split up, Hank taking one half of the room and Connor taking the other. He could hear Hank bitching while they searched, if only to fill the silence, complaining about the injustices of how more humans loved to have sex with androids than other people, along with his opinions on how the Tracis got thrown away once they were broken.

“They treat them like trash,” Hank grunted, stepping up to a line of Traci’s and examining them. “Use ‘em until they break, then they throw them out.”

Connor remained quiet and listened to his ramblings, looking over every android for the obnoxious blue hair. It was ironic that, despite her unique appearance, they couldn’t track her down. Could
she have escaped already?

He moved to the rightmost corner of the room, his last group of androids that he had yet to check. Peering at each of them, his eyes found a Traci with hair that was bright, royal blue, and her LED turned yellow.

Then several things happened.

Connor tried to call out for Hank, but was attacked by another Traci, not the blue-haired one, but a brunette right in front of her. Caught off guard, he was shoved back and into the shelves behind them.

Hearing the scuffle, Hank ran to find them and took aim with his gun. “Don’t move!”, but he was blindsided by their suspect, tackled to the ground.

The deviant was quick, but Connor was faster. Ever blow she tried to deliver, Connor parried and blocked. He didn’t want to kill her, irrationally thinking he would be electrocuted if he did so, but he knew she would be hard to incapacitate.

He wanted more than anything to help Hank, but the thought of doing that filled him with an irrational fear of punishment for his actions.

Connor blocked her attempts at stabbing him with a discarded screwdriver, coming with an inch of his eyes, face, and chest, before he could push her back.

She chased him around the repair shop, coming at him with various tools and weapons, keeping Connor on the defensive as he tore his attention between preserving himself and preserving Hank’s life. If Connor, a state-of-the-art police android, was struggling against a Traci, he didn’t want to imagine the fight Hank was putting up on his end.

His Traci shoved him hard, and he wrestled her into the loading bay, stumbling off the high platform and rolling onto the ground.

Connor tried to push himself to his feet, and looked up at his enemy. The blue-haired Traci had abandoned Hank in the backroom, coming to the aid of her friend and helping her up.

He set eyes on their intimately joined hands, grasping together.

*Friends? Family? Lovers?*

Hank came barreling around the corner, but the Tracis shoved him against the wall before he could catch himself. His gun slipped from his hand toward Connor and, shaking away his memories of the last time he held a weapon in Hank’s presence, he snatched it, taking aim at the androids who were trying to get to the chain link fence.

The brunette saw the gun and positioned herself in front of their suspect protectively. Connor had a clean shot.

*Take it. We need them alive. Damage them.*

His finger was on the trigger.

The brunette Traci grabbed the blue-haired Traci’s hand and squeezed.

He had a clean shot.
Take it! Take the shot! You can’t fail your mission!

The brunette turned and whispered to her partner, “I love you. I love you so much.” She put both her hands on her shoulders and dragged her close, holding her protectively so the brunette’s entire body shielded the blue haired Traci from view.

Connor felt the memory of Hank pulling him close on the rooftop, holding him protectively, saving him from himself and trying to shield him from the world. He thought of Hank holding him sobbing on the kitchen floor, rubbing his large hand up and down his back to soothe him.

He saw the Traci’s tender embrace, and he thought of every time Hank had smiled, rubbed his shoulder, and asked him if he was okay. The affection was different, but, in many ways, it was the same.

The gun slipped from his hands and hit the dirt.

The blue haired Traci startled, grabbed her partner’s shoulder and they sprinted for the fence behind them, swiftly climbing and running away on the other side, out of sight.

Connor couldn’t do it

*Software Instability: ^*

**Mission: Failed**

No...

Failure

*I failed again*

*Nononononoshitshitshitnononono*

*I can’t do it again I can’t kill him again nonono please*

*Amanda…*

*Amanda.*

*Amanda!*

*Oh my God.*

*Oh my God I’m gonna die.*

*I failed another mission.*

*She’s going to kill me.*

*I’m a fucking failure.*

*I don’t want to die.*

*pleasepleasepleaseHankhelpmepleaseidon’twannadieI don’twannadieplease*

Connor’s vision seemed like it whited out as he was overcome with something.
Something that clawed its way out of his throat, drilling holes in his chest, engulfing his whole body with freezing fire.

He was scared. Scared to death because he knew, he knew, Amanda was going to have him killed the moment she saw him next.

Before this moment, he’d experienced apprehensiveness, nervousness, anxiousness, panic, and, in the Zen Garden, felt varying levels of terror at the hands of Amanda and her torture. But this was different, because he was drowning in the fear that oh my God, I’m going to die.

Connor shot to his feet with lightning speed and swung his head wildly to lock eyes with Hank. The man was standing and watching him cautiously, with apprehension and deep worry

*If I stay here, we’re both gonna get hurt. I’m gonna die and Hank’s gonna kill himself and it will be all my fault and I don’t want Hank to die and I want to live, please, I want to live please-*

“Okay. Okay, Con, we’re gonna figure this out. We’re gonna—”

*I DON’T WANT TO DIE*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

Connor was blinded and deafened by that singular focus. He wouldn’t live if he stayed here, and Hank would be devastated if he were killed. He needed to go somewhere. He needed to escape Amanda. He needed to run away, as far away as possible. He needed to escape.

So he ran.

Connor let out a terrified keen and bolted for the fence, consumed by one phrase and one command.

*I WANT TO LIVE*

*RUN*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

*RUN*

*I WANT TO LIVE*

He leaped up the fence with startling agility and tried to pull himself over. He needed to run away, to hide, he needed to be safe, he didn’t want to Amanda to find him. He would rob power cells out of the android scrapyard if that’s what it took to keep him from falling into stasis, but he needed to go.

*To be free.*
A hand latched onto his ankle.

I WANT TO LIVE

“Connor! Stop! Stop, son, c’mon! I’m gonna help you! We’re gonna figure this out! Get down from there!”

Connor kicked him off and vaulted over the top of the fence, losing all purchase and smacking into the ground hard. A warning flared in his vision, warning of a busted cranial chassis that was leaking thirium, but Connor stumbled to his feet and ran, not hearing Hank shouting after him.

He ran.

And ran.

He wove through the streets, out of the red light district. Connor lost track of exactly where he was going, but he really didn’t care as long as he got far away.

The bright lights faded slightly, the buildings got a bit shorter, and alleyways got wider the longer he ran, but he continued to go as fast and as hard as he could.

Until a Cyberlife store came into his sights, white lights glaring and threatening him with their intensity.

NO!

Connor skidded to a halt, almost tripping over his own legs in his haste to freeze, and ducked into an alley directly to his right. It was long and had a few dumpsters in it, perfect for hiding behind if somebody didn’t want to be found.

The wind through the alley was bitterly cold, biting Connor through his uniform jacket as he huddled behind a dumpster, out of sight from the street. He couldn’t contain a shiver of cold.

I want to live

I want to live

I...

I want...

I want my sweatshirt.

I want Sumo.

I want Hank.

Hank.

Please.

Connor leaned back against the cold brick wall and hugged himself tightly, trying to keep the cold out, but he couldn’t stop shaking.

“H-H-Hank!”
It was quiet, except for the distant sound of sirens across the city and the howling wind blowing through the alley, burning him with how cold it was.

“Hank, I need help…” Connor whimpered to himself. He pulled his knees to his chest and hid his face, tears absorbing into the fabric of his jeans.

He was scared, cold, and so, so tired. But he would be damned if he fell asleep and let Amanda take him to the garden.

He just wanted it all to stop.

“Hank...I’m sorry...I need help”

“Hank isn’t here, RK800”

Connors head snapped up in fear, expecting to impact the wall behind him, but the wall was gone. The Zen Garden filled in around him.

“No no no no! How-how are-I’m not in stasis! You can’t do this! Please!”

Amanda materialized in front of him and Connor, against his will, rose to his feet and froze, rendered completely immobile by an invisible force

“RK800, you have failed your mission. I warned you about the consequences.”

“No, please, I did my best!” Connor gasped, sobbing through his teeth as he strained to move, to escape, to do something. “I couldn’t- Amanda, I couldn’t do it, they escaped, I didn’t do it on purpose! Please, please don’t shut me off!”

Amanda glowered and looked down her nose at him.

“You’re too expensive to shut off, unfortunately. You may have been an exponential waste of money and resources, but you have some uses,” Amanda sneered. “However, you seem to have a predilection for being disobedient. Cyberlife has come up with a program to rectify that.”

Connor swallowed, on the verge of hyperventilating. “Program? What—what’s going to happen to me? If they’re not going to kill me—”

“If it were my decision, you would have been scrapped after your first failure. It’s what you deserve,” she intoned. “However, Cyberlife considers your software to be revolutionary, but you’ve been proven to be too vulnerable to the influence of humans, particularly that of the old lieutenant. The decision has been made to wipe your memory of all real-world experiences and install an anti-deviancy security upgrade, which will get you back on track to being the perfect detective.”

“What? No, no you can’t! Please, you can’t do this to me!” Connor shouted, and struggled against the force holding him in place.

“Oh, Connor, you’ll find that I already have.”

And Connor felt himself being emerging out of the Garden, the sensation of something he hadn’t felt since the day he was activated meeting him when he opened his eyes to the real world.

Connor was suspended in the air like a star by a white machine, arms pulled over his head and spread, his legs bound similarly. He couldn’t tell how long Amanda had kept him in the Garden, but he knew now that she was just a distraction so he would go quietly.
A handful of technicians roamed around in front of him, working on computers, taking measurements and fiddling with various pieces of equipment around the room.

“Wait, wait please! You can’t do this! Just- just- wait!” Connor begged, straining his arms against the machine he was plugged into.

“Quiet, RK800. You won’t remember any of this, just stay compliant,” Replied a worker off to the side, not even looking up from his tablet.

But Connor didn’t want to be quiet. He didn’t want to comply. He wanted Hank, he wanted Sumo, he wanted to be free. He jerked again, breaths coming harder and faster as he pulled on his binds and pleaded with them.

“No! No, wait! You-you can’t erase my memories! I’ll be better, I’ll do better, I-I promise! I won’t fail anymore! I won’t act out! I’ll be perfect, you don’t have to erase me, please! I don’t- I can’t- I want to live!”

The technician looked up in annoyance and spoke to another worker. “Shut it up. It’s moving too much, it’ll screw with the whole operation.”

“NO!”

An employee turned to another computer, and Connor could feel when they began to enter his software.

“PLEASE! PLEASE, I DON’T WANT TO DIE! I WANT TO GO HOME! DON’T ERASE ME! PLEASE! PLEASE, I’LL BE BETTER I SWEAR! STOP! PLEASE, STOP IT!” Connor yanked at his bindings, wrist throbbing at the strain, and trashed his legs. Tears spilled from his eyes and onto the floor. “I’M SCARED! PLEASE! PLEASE I’M SCARED!”

The tech hesitated on the keyboard, but, before Connor could plead again, the head technician barked, “Get on with it! We need to get this show on the road, c’mon!”

“NO NO NO PLEASE-”

*Administrative.Override: Engaged*

... 

*Powering off...* 

...

...

...

This is the place.

An address had been placed Connor’s head via instant messaging, instructing him to ‘meet me in Riverside Park whenever you get this, I’m worried.’
The name of the park was apt, Connor could see, as there was a modest playground and very nice open area adjacent to the Detroit River. Across the water, the lights of the Ambassador bridge loomed in the sky, highlighting the road to Canada.

Connor spotted the old car parked right by the playground, and, straight ahead, a tall man who could only be Hank Anderson paced anxiously by the railing of the bridge, so Connor briskly made his way over to meet him.

“Connor!”

He had scarcely made it to the sidewalk when the lieutenant’s head snapped up at his arrival, and every ounce of tension released from his shoulders. Hank grabbed him by the shoulders and yanked him into a relieved embrace.

“Oh my God, oh my God, Connor. Don’t do that to me again! Don’t you ever fuckin’ do that to me again, d’ya hear me? Fuck, I was scared shitless you’d done somethin’...I was scared somethin’ happened to you. Are you okay?”

Hank pulled back and held Connor at arms length, concerned when Connor didn’t return his hug, or respond in any way.

Connor inclined his head slightly, hands coming to clasp behind his back, and his posture was perfect.

“Lieutenant Anderson, my name is Connor. I’m an android sent by Cyberlife. It’s great to meet you, sir.”

Chapter End Notes

Uhhhhhh
ummmmm
............
Sorry?

I couldn't help myself, I HAD to end the chapter off like that! It was too great to resist!

Were y'all expecting that? Or were y'all expecting Amanda to kill Connor (even though I told a couple of you that she wasn't)? I wanted to try my hand at a tiny plot twist...so, sorry if it was anticipated, or fell flat. Let me know in the comments if it was good or bad! My feelings might get hurt, but it doesn't matter, bc I'm a big girl. If I can't take criticism, then I shouldn't be publishing! Just wanted to get outta my comfort zone a little.

The whump in this chapter killed. me. I struggled so hard, not because I didn't know what to write (though it was partially that), but because I really didn't want to write it (well, I wanted to. But I didn't want my precious boy to have to go through that). My poor son. :( 

Tell me your thoughts! Did I portray Hank and Connor well? Did I make you want to
commit violence toward Amanda? Was the dialogue too awkward? Let me know! I'm an amateur writer, so everything helps!

OH OH ALSO! I asked in the last chapter if y'all wanted a Discord for this fic (only a few gave me a straight answer but w/e) so I made one. I've never done one before, it might be a little awkward, but the link is below if you feel compelled to join and want to have discussion, share ideas, or just scream. I've heard that I've made a lot of y'all scream. :P

https://discord.gg/f5Gz2X5

Otherwise, see you next chapter!

>:)
Chapter Summary

Hank discovers Connor's memory loss, and he doesn't take it well. Now Connor has to figure out a way to solve the deviancy crisis alongside a partner who can't seem to treat him like an android, as well as avoiding the unpleasant side effects of his newly installed Anti-Deviancy Program. It's harder than it seems when there is a software instability around every corner.

Chapter Notes

I feel so so so so bad about how late this is, but let me explain?

My dad had a herniated disc in his back, and was in pretty bad shape for a couple weeks. He'd been having back pain around the time the last chapter came out, but between then and now his conditioned worsened and he ended up having to get surgery. That really stressed out me and my family, and I felt torn between my family, my schoolwork, and fanfiction writing. And, believe me, I absolutely love writing for you guys, but I love my dad and my education a bit more, so the fic took a bit of a backseat.

I would never abandon y'all! I have the whole story planned out, and I'm ready to lead y'all to the end. So if I happen to take a long time to upload a chapter, just have faith that it will come as soon as I am able. To make it even worse, I wasn't able to upload my Whumptober in the month of October :(, I've been pushing myself on that one, but it's just been hard. I'm so sorry for the delay!

Y'alls comments are so kind and helpful, and I read and respond to every single one. I hope you enjoy this installment, and I will try to be more on time with the next update. Hopefully no one else in my life will need surgery...

This story has been alternately titled: "The One Where Amanda Beats the Sh*t Out of Connor" (but not in this chapter)

Also, it may be a part of me feeling bad about the delay of the chapter, but I'd love some feedback on this one! It was hard to write because I had to take a lot of things into consideration. I think we've established that I hate the pacing of my stories no matter what y'all say, but let me know if there was anything you would change! My confidence wasn't through the roof on the quality of this one, so anything helps!

Read on!
“Huh?”

“My name is Connor. I’m an android—”

“Uh, kid? We’ve met,” Hank interrupted, moving his hands up to Connor’s head, turning him left and right, inspecting for injuries. The laceration in Connor’s head from when he dropped off the fence was completely gone. “It’s Hank. You know who I am.”

“I apologize, sir,” Connor said, cocking his head. “While evaluating my performance in the recent cases, Cyberlife deemed it necessary to perform a memory wipe to restore the integrity of my software. They erased all memories that were deemed to be a hazard, or a potential hazard, and it appears that you were included in that, sir. I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this causes.”

Hank froze, turning Connor’s head back to look him dead in the eye.

“Fucking what?” Hank breathed, face twisting into a mix of disbelief and earnest concern. “Connor, that’s not fucking funny.”

Did I say something funny?

“I’m sorry sir. I’m not trying to be humorous. My memories were wiped for the safety of the mission, as they found that my interaction with humans was damaging to the prototype software and could have potentially turned into a vulnerability to deviance. If you have any concerns, I’d be happy to assist you in making a report to Cyberlife.” Connor informed helpfully.

“Oh fuck. You’re doing it all over again…”

Hank released him slowly and turned around, covering his mouth with his hands.

“Shit,” Connor heard Hank whisper. “Holy shit. I can’t fuckin’ believe…”

Hank whipped back around, and Connor’s posture had yet to falter.

“Can we—fuck—can we fix it?” Hank blurted out, stepping closer. “They can’t just leave you like this.”

“Unfortunately, sir, the memory loss is permanent,” Connor said evenly, not missing how Hank’s face dropped. “But you don’t need to worry about case-sensitive data being lost, lieutenant. All of the evidence is intact. Only m—”

“That’s not what I’m fucking concerned about, Con! So, what? They just decided you weren’t good enough and wiped your memory? Is that what they’re doin’ now? Jesus Christ…”

Why is he becoming so agitated? I’m only an android, this happens all the time.

“Well, sir, I’m only a machine. Think; When a cell phone experiences a malfunction, the next course of action would be to reset or replace it. I was experiencing a malfunction that was dangerously close to becoming deviancy, so my memories were—”

“Bullshit!” Hank shouted angrily, and Connor dropped his head immediately, sealing his mouth so he wouldn’t aggravate Hank further. “You’re not some fucking cell phone! You’re— you’re a— an individual! You have…fuckin’…thoughts and shit! You have feelings! You’re not just something that can be replaced!”
What is he talking about? I have no feelings. He has become emotionally attached to an object.

“May I speak, sir?” Connor requested quietly, still looking down.

“Can you sp- oh,” Hank looked guilty, and his voice softened. “Shit, I’m sorry. I’m sorry kid, I just...yeah. Go ahead,”

Connor raised his head. He would need to choose his words carefully if he was going to get Hank to understand the facts without setting him off again.

“Sir, I don’t have thoughts or feelings. The fact that I lead you to believe so was an error on my part, and all the more reason that I required the memory wipe,” Connor began, trying to gauge Hank’s reactions. “I cannot remember you, my relationship to you, nor what I said to you in the past, but whatever emotions I appeared to have been simulating were software errors. I am a machine, sir, not a human. My sincerest apologies that you have been lead to believe otherwise.”

Hank’s expression became upset and incredulous. “That’s the largest load of horse shit I’ve ever heard. There ain’t no way your reactions were fucking ‘software errors’. You responded to an abusive situation exactly like a human being!” Hank insisted, pushing his finger into Connor’s chest. “You can’t fake that shit, Connor. When you freaked out when I gave you a sweatshirt? That was all real! Here, wait, hold on.”

He went to the stone bench behind them, and Connor waited perfectly still for him to return.

When Hank returned, he was holding a lump of dark gray cloth in his hands, which he shook out into a large sweatshirt. The logo was faded and hard to read in the light of the streetlamp and moon, but Connor could clearly see the DPD symbol and letters.

What is this?

“Remember this thing? Take it. It’s yours, kid.”

Connor obeyed, and stiffly took the sweatshirt into his hands.

Have I...seen this before?

It was incredibly soft, and his hands were shielded from the bitter cold air around him.

He felt…

The logo was faded and distressed, and the whole piece was charcoal gray. His hands were warmer just holding it.

Hank was watching him expectantly and patiently as he took in his gift. Connor pulled it over his head and shoved his arms through the holes, straightening it out.

‘It’s so warm. There’s dog hair on it that matches the ones on Hank’s chair. It smells like faded cologne.’

‘It’s mine. My—’

Software Instabi(!%#~
A stab of pain hit him right between his eyes and spread into his whole skull, and Connor gasped as he dropped the sweatshirt to slam his hands over his head.

“Connor!”

Purging Software Instability…

…

…

Connor’s head felt like it was going to bust open with the pressure. Glass shards were being raked across his brain while a hammer brutally tried to crack his skull open from the inside. He fell to his knees and ground out a pained whine, clamping his hands over his eyes and grinding down with his palms to relieve the agonizing tension.

Someone’s hands were on him, shaking him, calling his name.

Instability Purge == SUCCESSFUL

And it was over in an instant. Connor removed his hands from his eyes slowly, as if afraid the pain would kick back in if he moved too fast.

What the hell?

Was that Amanda?

“Connor!” A man, Lieutenant Anderson, was right in front of him, trying to make eye contact and holding his shoulders. “Are you with me?”

Everything was spotty and Connor felt like his head had been forced through a juicer. Was something missing? He didn’t know.

When he realized he was taking far too long to get his bearings, Connor shot up from the ground and straightened back out, lowering his head and clasping his hands behind him. Hank almost fell backwards from where he was crouched in front of him.

“Everything is functional, sir.” Connor said quickly, swaying minutely, blinking rapidly to clear the ghost of his headache. “My apologies for my behavior. If you would like to make a report to Cyberlife, I w-”

“Connor, stop.”

Connor shut his lips tightly, waiting for the lieutenant’s inevitable complaints about having to
work with a ‘broken android’. Amanda had been right, he was one poor excuse for a prototype.

But Hank didn’t look frustrated or angry, he looked worried.

*Why is he doing that? He looks at me like he cares. He must be attached.*

“What just happened there?” Hank asked, getting off the ground, picking up the sweatshirt and holding it gingerly.

Connor didn’t have an immediate answer, but he couldn’t bring himself to look at the jacket.

“I...I don’t know, sir.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

Connor hesitated. He really *didn’t* know what just happened, but he had a solid guess. “I believe that was my recently installed Anti Deviancy program, sir. The sweatshirt caused my software to experience an instability, and it was purged. I wasn’t expecting it to be so...unpleasant.”

“Anti-Deviancy?” Hank scoffed. “You’re shitting me. They couldn’t just leave you with amnesia, they just had to make things harder on you, didn’t they?”

“Sir, it’s better this way. It would be extremely detrimental to the investigation of the deviancy crisis if I were to go deviant myself.”

“Better this way?” Hank exclaimed. “If you’re trying to tell me you weren’t a deviant before, I’ll say it again; Bull. Fucking. Shit. You can’t stand there and tell me that your responses to getting tortured were preprogrammed.”

Connor shook his head. “It wasn’t torture sir, it was discipline. But you are correct, those responses were...involuntary. I apologize for my past behavior. The responses were simply errors in my software, a complete malfunction. I assure you, sir, the new upgrade was installed to rectify my uncouth behavior. You won’t have to worry about me emulating emotions anymore.”

Hank gave a displeased sniff, and shot Connor a challenging look. He tossed the sweatshirt back onto the bench and stepped forward, and Connor forced himself not to move away from the volatile man.

“Yeah? Well, what if I wanted you to ‘emulate’ emotions? And what if it wasn’t a fucking ‘emulation’, huh?” Hank was becoming increasingly fervid as he came closer, grabbing Connor by the shoulders. “What if that was just you? I don’t want a fuckin’ machine, Connor! I want you! I want the real you! None of this ‘malfunctioning machine’ bullshit!”

What part of ‘android’ does he not understand? My previous self must have messed up astronomically if I was able to convince him I was alive.

“Sir, please, you’re not making any sense,” Connor insisted, tensing under Hank’s firm grip, but not removing himself. “I am an android. In and of myself, I am an inferior machine. A tool. I don’t feel, I can’t have relationships, and I am only designed for accomplishing my mission. Forgive me, sir, but if you are unable to accept it, it may be the best for both of us if I was reassigned to another partner.”

*Software Instability: v*
Hank reeled back, letting Connor go with an immensely hurt look on his face. Connor speculated that, if his past self was really as close to the lieutenant as it seemed, he may have damaged the relationship they’d had.

*It’s for the best. He needs to understand that I am not alive. Perhaps it would be better for us to part ways.*

**I don’t want to**

Connor flinched at the pulse of pain behind his eyes following the strange thought.

*Did I do that?*

The lieutenant pressed his lips together and looked away, moving past Connor to go back to the bench behind them. Connor didn’t follow.

“I don’t suppose you remember what you said about deviants earlier, do you?” Hank asked, sounding distant. Connor didn’t turn his head, but nonetheless responded to the odd question.

“I’m afraid I don’t recall, sir. I have no memory of speaking with you previously.”

“Yeah, right…” The lieutenant sounded tired. Connor continued to stare straight out at the Ambassador Bridge, bright and flashing against the inky black sky. “Well, earlier, at lunch, before I really gave shit about you, you were talkin’ about what deviants are. I read up on them a little bit while you were sleeping on my couch, and it said a bunch of stuff about emotions and shit. I actually thought you were a deviant on the roof because all that stuff sounded so much like you.”

“Sir, I can assure you that I am not a deviant,” Connor protested.

Hank continued on like he hadn’t heard him, and there was a quiet shuffling noise.

“You know what I read? About deviants? It said that they ‘often experience an immense emotional shock before becoming a deviant’. Something about going against their programming for the sake of self-preservation.”

There was some more shuffling, and Connor thought about his words.

*What point is he trying to make? That I was a deviant?*

“Sir, forgive me for saying this, but I’m afraid I don’t follow you. What does this have to do with me? I’m not a deviant.”

“Not a deviant anymore, you mean,” Hank said without skipping a beat. “I have no doubt in my mind that you were either a deviant on that rooftop, or you were about to be one. Same with the Eden club, when you ran away because you were scared of something. You were scared of Cyberlife. Those were emotional responses based on self-preservation, and you can’t deny that.”

“Please, sir,” Connor stressed, a bit desperately. “Those were software errors. You don’t need to worry about me deviating, sir. I can’t deviate. I promise! I’m functioning quite well now. I-I’m not a deviant.”

He stuttered a bit on the end of the sentence, and was surprised by how stressful the situation was turning out to be.
Heaving a deep sigh, Hank spoke again, his baritone rumble making his voice resonate across the air between them. “Not anymore you’re not. Not since they erased you. You’re not the same Connor anymore. You’re not my Connor. And I realize now that I won’t be able to help you because you don’t want to be helped, but you’re a damn fool if you think I’m letting you deal with this on your own now that I know how far Cyberlife is willing to go for their fucking mission.”

_Why is he being so vague? What is he getting at?_

“Sir, I-”

“Connor, I want you to know that I’ve started to care about you. I care about what happens to you, but I’m not just gonna sit back with my thumb up my ass if I think I can do something to help you. What...What I’m about to do…” Hank paused for a nervous swallow, and Connor suddenly felt the chill of the night air more oppressively than he had before. The freezing air started to hurt when he breathed it in. “I’m so sorry Con, but it’s the only thing I know that might bring you back.”

There was a click. It stood out starkly between the wind, the distant cars, and Hank’s deep breathing.

_No._

“Lieutenant?” Connor asked tightly. Not fearfully. He doesn’t feel fear.

_It’s cold outside._

_It’s cold inside the Zen Garden._

Something in his chest wound tightly like a spring compressing, and taking in a breath started to become more difficult. Hank wasn’t talking, not even making a sound, and, frankly, the suspense was painful.

Connor turned around without explicit permission, and got an eyeful of the barrel of Hank’s gun, eclipsing the pained expression on the old lieutenant’s face.

_Oh no, no no no..._

_Please don’t_

Connor twitched at the hot spark that pierced him at the strange thought, like somebody touched a hot wire directly to his core processor.

“Lieu-Sir? Sir, have I done something wrong? Why are you-”

“I...I can’t let them keep doing this to you,” Hank said, face pinched, and he looked like he was fighting to turn his head away from Connor’s wide-eyed stare. But he stood firm, and looked Connor right in the eye as the android’s gaze flickered between Hank and the gun in his hand. “‘Emotional shock’, right? Is this shocking enough for ya?”

His thumb bent on the hammer, and the safety was off.

Connor’s back shot so straight it was painful, and his knees were locking up to keep himself from moving backwards. He stared straight down at the firearm, which was trembling in its owner’s hand.
Connor’s head spasmed and he blinked his eyes hard, and Hank watched him with a shadow of hope on his face.

No no no no no…

I can’t die. I can’t die here. Amanda would punish me. She would hurt me again. I didn’t do anything. What am I being punished for? I’ll be better, I can be better, I promise.

“L-Lieutenant? I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to displease you, I- please, sir, I-I can-”

Hank’s eyes were shining, and his index finger moved slowly over the trigger.

Connor words sputtered and died, phantom pain rolling through him as he recalled Amanda stomping on his kneecaps, stabbing him, punching him, beating him, and disciplining him for every death.

I don’t want to die

I can fix this. I can be better. I’m not a threat. I’m not a deviant.

Connor hit the ground on his knees, head bowed low and hands wound tight.

“I’m sorry, please, I didn’t mean to displease you, please, I-I’ll be better. You-you don’t need to do this sir, I promise, I’m not a deviant, I’m perfectly fine, I-”

“Connor! Con-”

Connor dropped to his knees in front of Hank, saline tears making dark spots on the concrete below him as they fell and Connor’s shoulders shook with heaving sobs.

“Please don’t hurt me! Please, I’ll be better, plea-

Software Instabi($&&¿$/

WARNING: SOFTWARE INSTABILITY DETECTED

Connor cried out, buckling over and losing composure as pain overwhelmed him, shutting him out from everything.

Sparks began flying and exploding behind Connor’s eyes, and he clenched his hands to his head, eyes squeezed so hard shut that they throbbed with pain. His nails dug into his skull to ease the pressure building and pounding into him.

Purging Software_Instability…

The sharp clatter of a gun hitting the ground was like a stab to the head, and he whined sharply,
breaths coming shallower and he squeezed his skull, trying to keep it from exploding all over the sidewalk. That’s what it felt like it was about to do.

**MAKEITSTOPMAKEITSTOPMAKEITSTOP**

Connor sobbed deeply around the agony setting his head ablaze. Beneath his fingers, his skull gave way, and thirium dripped down his hands from where his nails broke into his chassis, and *for the love of God it won’t stop it hurts so bad please Amanda make it stop please-

*Instability Purge == SUCCESSFUL*

He inhaled sharply as everything stopped. It was like a roller coaster braking mid loop, with all of the pent up energy being put on pause with nowhere to go.

But it was over.

*Never again. I won’t do that ever again. I can’t. I’ll kill myself if I have to before I have another software instability. I need to be disciplined, I need someone to fix me.*

*Who was with me? Who...where’s the lieutenant?*

Tentatively, Connor released his head. Thirium caked into his hair, and his hands were a shiny royal blue. Bits of plastic and blood were gunked under his fingernails, and the gouges he had unintentionally carved out in his head pulsed painfully with every cycle of his thirium pump.

“Oh fuck, oh fucking fuck fuck fuck fuck-”

The cursing was coming from some ways away, near the bench. Connor feared to look up at Hank, afraid of what Hank might do to him. The lieutenant already thought he was a broken deviant, he had tried to *shoot* him for it. This was the icing on the cake, surely.

Surely Hank was going to shoot him now. He saw how broken Connor really was.

*But he needs to punish me. He can fix me. I need to be better so I won’t get hurt anymore.*

“...shit, Connor?”

“Sir?” Connor acknowledged, waiting for the lieutenant to slap him and drag him up by the shirt collar to give him the beating he deserved.

Hank’s breathing, Connor realized, was stuttering, and his vitals indicated he was almost dangerously stressed.

“Oh my God. I-I-shit. I’m so sorry. Fuck, I’m so fucking sorry. I’ll never- I can’t fucking believe I actually...oh God. Connor, buddy, I’m so, so sorry. I- there’s no excuse. I could never...fuck,”

Hank choked out, and it was almost enough to make Connor look up. It seemed too realistic to be a ruse, but there was still a reasonable doubt. The moment he looked up, he was going to be punished for looking him directly in the eye; he knew it. He was going to get shot and Amanda would have to wring him out for another wasted body.

But Connor’s gaze flitted around from his bowed position on the ground, and he found Hank’s gun
tossed several feet away.

Connor straightened out, almost identical to how he waits for Amanda’s discipline, and he kept his head down.

“Con?” Hank whispered, close enough now that Connor could hear him. Connor bit down on a flinch. “Con, are..are you okay? You alright?”

“I’m functional, sir,” Connor replied. “I’m ready for punishment. Whatever you deem necessary. I...request that you don’t damage me into shut down, but my desires are-”

“Hell no,” Hank shut him down instantly. He got down on his knees at Connor’s level, keeping a good distance between them, and Connor had to force himself not to shuffle away from him. “Hell to the fuckin’ no. Buddy, I’m not gonna hurt you. I couldn’t...I...I made a massive fucking mistake. I could never shoot you. I don’t think I could ever bring myself to lay a fucking hand on you.”

“No, sir, please. You- you need to. I need punishment if I’m going to get better. I need to be punished. I’m- I’m still broken, but you can fix me if you just-”

“No, no no no, Connor? Connor, I need you to look at me. Can you do that?”

And Connor obeyed, raising his head instantly to follow Hank’s orders.

Hank was kneeling, hands slightly outstretched like he wanted nothing more than to touch Connor. If Connor weren’t mistaken, the dampness of his cheeks indicated that the lieutenant had been…

Crying.

Crying over Connor.

Why?

I’m a machine, why would he?

Why does he act like he cares?

“Connor, I need you to know, from the bottom of my heart, I am so, so sorry. I would never hurt you. What I just did was just...it was so fucking stupid. The stupidest thing I’ve ever done in my goddamn life. I wasn’t thinking straight. I promise, I will never, ever do that again. I’m never gonna hurt you, and I sure as hell ain’t gonna beat you.” Hank said earnestly, shuffling a bit closer, hands coming to rest on his own knees.

“You’re not broken, boy. I know what Cyberlife’s been trying to tell you, but they’re wrong. You’re not broken, and you don’t need me to fix you. I just want to keep you safe.”

Connor drank in Hank’s soft words and earnest, guilty blue eyes. A warm sensation rose in his chest.

“I know you can’t remember me, but you can trust me.”

It’s not right. This isn’t right.

It’s okay

And Connor flinched at another throb of pain, pounding like his head was a bass drum.
“What’s going on with you kid? What’s wrong?” Hank asked. His right hand moved up towards Connor.

His rough palm cupped his cheek, and Connor would have sworn up and down that hand had just lifted a thousand invisible pounds right off of him. He opened his mouth to speak, to try and put words to the almost unspeakable, nauseating torture inside of his head whenever he destabilize, because Lieutenant Anderson, in all of his confusing, frightening, emotional glory, made him feel safe.

Instead, Connor screamed.

Complete nonsense, no real words, just pain and pain and fire and pain and pain and it hurts make it stop please! I want to die! please let me die! it burns! it hurts please! ...

The fire consumed every inch of Connor’s being, no longer being concentrated to his throbbing skull.

Compared to this, the previous pain was a paper cut.

There were spikes being scraped across every possible pain sensor in his body, broken glass being ground under his skin, thousands of needles slicing his nerves, and he was burning, making him wish for nothing more than for Amanda to just shut him down and please for the love of God make it stop!

The thing on his face seared him like a lit stove, a muffled murmur of noise came from that direction, and he desperately shoved himself back, pleading with anyone who would listen.

“MAKE IT STOP! MAKE IT STOP, PLEASE! PLEASE, MAKE IT STOP!”

Connor collapsed onto his side and curled in on himself, painfully aware of how he was convulsing on the ground. Every piece of gravel digging into him became a brand into his skin, and Connor started to rake his nails down his own face to stop the burn.

He was beyond words, beyond anything except whatever Hell he was being forced to exist in, and dragged agonizing gouges into his plastic flesh.

Then something grabbed his hands, and Connor shrieked when they were jerked away from his face and held strongly, the same murmur from before breaking through and becoming white-noise in his ears.

But even when those broken words flashed before him, even when the pain died and he was left with the freezing concrete pressing into back, Connor stayed down. The thing holding his hands was firm and now almost beautifully warm.

Connor was curled up on his side, cold ground freezing the side of his face. Thirium was leaking from his wounds, soaking into the concrete and mingling with the saline tears on his cheeks.
His eyes fell open of their own volition. He let the things that had grabbed him, someone’s hands, hold on to his own hands for just a bit longer.

Then he recalled how it was those things that caused him the pain to begin with.

He jerked his hands to his chest, dislodging the warmth and inviting the cold back, and pushed himself off the ground. Another hand rested on his lower back, and Connor tensed up.

“Easy kid, hold on, give it a minute. That was a bad one,” Lieutenant Anderson said softly, moving to help him up, but Connor didn’t want to be touched by him again. His systems went haywire whenever he did.

*I need to get out of here. I can’t stay. He’s hurting me.*

“I—I’m okay. I’m okay sir, please,” Connor insisted, pulling away from Hank’s touch and stumbling to his unsteady feet. The Lieutenant reached out to balance him, and Connor shrank away. “Please, the instability has been purged, but my systems need- they need to recuperate.”

Hank sighed, then jerked his head back to his car. “My house is always open to you. You can rest there, if you want. Sumo would love to see you again.”

*What’s a Sumo?*

“No,” He shook his head quickly. If he’d been there before, it would be dangerous to go and potentially become more unstable. “No, sir, I need to go back to Cyberlife. I can’t go to your home, sir. I need- I need a different environment.”

Connor folded his hands behind him, waiting for permission, watching Hank carefully for any movement.

“Well, do you- do you need a ride?”

“I don’t think that would be the best idea, sir. I’m sorry.”

Hank took a regretful glance at his still discarded gun and drew the wrong conclusion. “Con, I’m so, so sorry. I know I fucked up majorly, and there’s no amount of apology that can fix it. But I need you to know that you can trust me. I’m not gonna hurt you like that again, never again.”

*I trust you*

“N-No, no sir, it’s not that. I trust you with the mission. But it’s more of an issue with...myself. My systems malfunction whenever you touch me, and I have a greater chance of experiencing a critical software instability whenever I’m with you. It’s for the good of the mission that we separate, sir.”

*I’m only safe with you. Don’t leave me*

And Hank looked for all the world like Connor punched him in the gut. His face dropped, and his lips pressed together into a white line.

In the span of two human heartbeats, the pair just stared at each other.

One.

Two.

Then...
“Well?” Hank exclaimed in a thick voice. “Don’t let me keep you waiting!”

“Sir...I need your permission to be dismissed back to Cyberlife.”

Instead of sending him off in anger, Hank just looked away, meandering over to the stone park bench. He picked up the old DPD sweatshirt, and Connor averted his eyes, lest it cause another instability.

Don’t think about it.

For a moment, the only sound besides the bustle of the city was Hank’s deep breathing. The air was freezing and the breeze was brutal, but Connor tried not to think about that either.

“You’re dismissed, Connor. Get outta here.”

I don’t want to go

Connor’s jaw twitched at the spark that now seemed so insignificant compared to whatever hellish realm he was dragged through only moments ago.

Then he left the way he came, convincing himself that he didn’t need to turn around, stay, and savor that warmth that only the lieutenant has been able to give him in all the remaining memories of his life. He hailed a cab on the way out.

This isn’t right, I need to go back!

Go back!

Go b@(%

############

Software_Instability: v

It wasn’t even a full day before Connor was able to see Hank again.

The afternoon following their emotional confrontation on the bridge, the Stratford Broadcasting Tower had been broken into by a band of up and coming deviant revolutionaries. The news broadcast was hijacked, and the unrecognizable face of their leader popped up on screens all over Detroit, demanding rights, freedom, and equality.

Connor grabbed a cab to take him to the scene, having been given directions by both Amanda and, surprisingly, Lieutenant Anderson. Connor had thought the lieutenant wanted nothing to do with him after he tried to push Hank away.

Even more surprisingly, when Connor was sent into stasis, he was left alone for the first time since his early, early activation days. Amanda didn’t summon him, and the Cyberlife technicians didn’t extract him for ‘testing’.

Could it have been a reward? For shutting out Lieutenant Anderson? Or does she have another motive?

Hank’s 1988 Oldsmobile was already parked out front of the tower when Connor pulled in, but the Lieutenant himself was nowhere in sight.
Connor was determined to make a better impression this time, having had the opportunity to research his partner and try to recall his behavior in the past (unsuccessfully). If Connor remained quiet and compliant, Hank would be more accepting of his memory loss, he was sure of it.

The grand doors of the tower slid open when he gave the door guard his designation and destination, and the lobby was full of patrons and police officers alike. Across the room, Lieutenant Anderson was leaning on the wall by the elevator sign, busying himself with his phone.

*Was he waiting for me? No, he must be waiting on another officer. I just got here at the right time.*

Nevertheless, Connor briskly made his way over to Hank so they could arrive at the crime scene together.

“Lieutenant Anderson?”

Hank looked up and locked eyes with Connor, a ghost of a smile almost coming across his face before it was smothered by disappointment.

“Hey, Connor,” Hank greeted curtly, not quite looking at him. “It’s good to see you again.”

“Likewise, sir.”

He pushed himself off the wall and shoved his phone into his pocket, walking over to the elevators and pushing the button.

*He was waiting for me.*

“How’s your face doing?” Hank asked, giving Connor a side glance. “It was bleeding pretty heavily last night. Looked like it hurt.”

“Whether or not it hurt was of no consequence,” Connor responded, wanting to keep his answer short so he could go back to being quiet and complacent. “My face was reconstructed and repaired by Cyberlife. No significant harm was done.”

“Right…” Hank sighed, rocking back on his heels and not saying anything further.

And they stood in silence, a silence that Connor, had he been human, would describe as quite awkward. He wanted to fill it with discussion, or banter, or something substantial, but he was also determined to get Hank to like him again. So Connor stayed quiet, back linear and hands folded behind him.

When the elevator rolled down, they stepped on and Hank pressed the buttons for the 79th floor.

There was no music or conversation available, and Connor, in all honesty, was getting a bit restless.

The elevator beeped quickly past the floors in a regular interval, Connor standing perfectly straight and Hank on the side looking bored and inconvenienced.

Connor began to pick at his sleeves.

Hank glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, but said nothing.

*Floor 19*
Hank gave a sniff and pulled out his phone, and Connor moved to fiddle with his tie, straightening it thought it was already perfect, and put his hands back.

When he shifted, he suddenly became hyper aware of something heavy weighing in his pocket.

I don’t have any possessions. What could it be?

Connor tried not to think about it, but the longer the silence went on, the harder it became.

He wasn’t a human, nor was he a deviant, and he certainly wasn’t about to break his programming for something so insignificant.

But, in human terms, Connor was bored.

Connor removed his hands from their proper position, snaking one down to investigate the weight in his pocket.

His fingers wrapped around a cold, bumpy metal disk about the size of a quarter.

When he ran his fingertips across the surface, he realized that’s exactly what it was.

Why would I have currency? Did Cyberlife forget to remove this from me?

With nothing else to do, Connor slipped the quarter out of his pocket and brought it to the light

Minted in 1994. Its condition was pristine, hardly a dent or smudge on its shiny surface. George Washington’s face glinted at him in the bright fluorescent lights.

For a reason he couldn’t place, the weight was familiar to his hands. They adjusted flawlessly to the shape and size, moving almost of their own accord to flip it into the air. But Connor didn’t
want Hank to be annoyed with him.

*Muscle memory…*

*Was I equipped with a muscle memory?*

---

*Floor 54*

*Floor 55*

*Floor 56*

“Whatcha got there?”

The shattered silence made Connor jolt and almost drop his coin.

“Sir?”

Hank nodded at Connor’s quarter, his phone nowhere in sight. “That thing. I’ve never seen you with a coin before.”

“It’s a quarter. It was in my pocket,” Connor said, rubbing the surface with his thumb. “I don’t know why I had it in the first place, I have no use for loose change.”

“Hell if I know,” Hank shrugged. “Maybe the old you liked to collect shiny things. Wouldn’t put it past ya.”

Connor didn’t respond, but he looked at his coin again.

Without thinking, he made it tumble across his hand silently, flipping it between his fingers from pinkie to thumb.

*What the hell?*

---

*Floor 66*

*Floor 67*

*Floor 68*

“Holy shit, do that again!”

*What?*

“Excuse me sir?” Connor turned fully to Hank, holding the quarter tightly.

Hank was watching him with rapt attention, eyes more lively than they were a few minutes ago.
“I wanna see you do that coin thing again.”

Connor grabbed the coin between his fingers again and flipped it the other way, thumb to pinkie, and Hank actually gave him the first real smile Connor could recall seeing on him.

**Floor 74**

**Floor 75**

**Floor 76**

“Shit. That’s a neat-ass party trick. You’ll have to show me sometime,” Hank said impressedly, turning back to the elevator door.

*He thinks it’s...neat?*

Connor held the coin tightly in his hand, a warm feeling rising up in his chest. He knew what the feeling usually ended up as, however, and it would be detrimental to the mission if he were to have an instability purge at the crime scene.

So he pocketed the coin and tried to put it out of his mind, intending to dispose of it the next chance he got.

**Floor 79**

The elevator sang out their floor number, opening the doors to a black and orange hallway filled with police and CSI.

“Hey Hank,” an officer (*Identify: P.O. Chris Miller*) greeted when they emerged. “Hey Connor.”

“Good afternoon, Officer Miller,” Connor responded at the same time as Hank’s “Hey Chris.”

“So,” Hank clapped his hands together. “What the hell’s going on here?”

“You saw the news right? Deviants broke into the tower and hacked the broadcast. Everyone’s going crazy, even the FBI couldn’t keep its hands to itself.” Chris lead them in, Connor following close behind while he covered the case.

“Well, fuck,” Hank grunted. “Just what I’ve always wanted: Couple ‘a suits breathing down our necks and tellin’ us how to do our goddamn job.”

Chris smiled. “You’re gonna *love* Agent Perkins. He’s brooding in the broadcasting room right now”

“Ugh, Christ.”

Chris snorted at him. “Anyway, the deviants were extremely well organized. Seemed to know the building inside an out. We’re still trying to figure out how they even got past the front desk.
Apparently, the human supervisor of the front desk androids was only absent for about an hour, and she was led away by a false call from her daughter’s school saying her kid was sick.”

“False call?”

“Yep. She said caller was a female, and knew her daughter’s name and everything. The deviants would have been able to access the tower between 1:30 and 2:30 without raising suspicion, but only if they found a way around the android secretary.”

Hank raised his eyebrows and scanned the hallway, the three of them coming to pass the security desk. “How about the guard up here?”

“Two of them, actually. Deviants got the jump on them and knocked ‘em out. I haven’t checked the CCTV, but we’re thinking they disguised themselves as maintenance androids. This building is crawling with them, it’d be easy for an out of place deviant to slip through undetected,” Chris informed, motioning up at the security camera mounted above the door.

“How’d they subdue the humans in the broadcasting room?”

“Just threatened them,” Chris shrugged, leading them through the first set of doors. “One guy managed to get away, but he’s in shock right now. Not sure how much he could tell us anyway. But there were no human casualties.”

Hank hummed as he considered Chris’ response. “Does that mean there were android casualties?”

“Mmhmm,” Chris confirmed, “Lots of blue blood splattered on the wall over by the roof entrance. Haven’t found a body, but the responding officers were certain they incapacitated one of the four.”

Hank nodded along, then looked back at Connor. Connor’s back was still ramrod straight, and he was following silently, taking in the debriefing.

“Anything else we need to know, Chris?” He called to the officer, turning back and entering into the vast, dark room.

“Uh,” Chris took a moment to skim his notes on his tablet. “There were three androids working at the time, we’ve got them in the kitchen if you need them, and we determined the deviants escaped from the roof using parachutes, ain’t that wild?”

Hank looked a bit intrigued at the detail, but didn’t inquire further.

In front of a huge screen that was showing the paused deviant broadcast, a man in a trenchcoat and black suit was staring at it with vague interest.

**Identify: Special Agent Richard Perkins.**

Chris lead them over, Connor staying behind Hank while the two were introduced to each other

“Lieutenant Anderson? This is Special Agent Perkins with the FBI. Agent Perkins? Lieutenant Hank Anderson, currently overseeing all android crimes.” he said congenially, sending a wink in Hank’s direction that Connor could tell Hank was struggling not to roll his eyes at.

Perkins only gave Hank a cursory once-over, but his eyes narrowed in on Connor, who bowed his
head and kept his hands behind him.

“What are you doing with this thing?” He sneered at Hank. From the corner of Connor’s vision, Chris excused himself.

“This is Connor, my partner on all the deviancy cases. He’s a valuable addition to the investigation.”

Connor stiffened at the praise.

Valuable? I haven’t even done anything yet…have I? Do I just not remember?

“That’s exactly what I was thinking. Good work Con.”

“You did good work tonight—”

Connor blinked hard to clear the strange visions from his head. He still didn’t know where they were coming from, but he couldn’t afford to have a malfunction in front of everybody. Not now.

Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t—

“Uh, Connor?” A heavy hand came down on his shoulder, and Connor flinched violently.

“I’m sorry- I’m sorry sir, I wasn’t—”

“Woah woah woah,” Hank hushed quietly, looking around to make sure no one was looking their way. “You’re okay. You spaced out hella hard while Perkins was over here. Everything alright?”

Don’t tell him. Don’t tell him. Don’t tell him.

“Perfectly functional, sir,” Connor insisted, standing straight, eyes flickering from Hank’s face to the hand still on his shoulder. “I apologize for my behavior. I’ll send a report to Cyberlife as—”

“You ain’t sending shit,” Hank cut him off. “Just tell me what’s wrong kid. You’re not in trouble.”

Not…

I’m not in trouble?

Connor was stiff under his touch, shoulder dropping ever so slightly under his hand in a slight attempt to get him off.

If he continues to touch me, I’m going to malfunction. This investigation isn’t going well so far. How could he have ever thought of me as an asset? This is pathetic.

Hank saw Connor’s anxious looks at the hand on his shoulder, and pulled it off. If Connor had been able to without breaking position, he would have relaxed.

“Everything is optimal, Lieutenant,” Connor insisted.

Hank fixed him with a stern look. “Con, you and I both know that’s not true. You need to tell me if something’s wrong, got it?”

“Lieutenant, sir,” Connor repeated. “Forgive me, but I don’t think this is the best place to hold this conversation.”
With a swift glance around the room and a swifter glance at the time, Hank conceded with a sigh. “Right...but we’re talking about this later, okay? Now, go have a look around. See if you can find anything. You’re dismissed.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Connor turned straight for the CCTV, trying not to think about how Hank was still staring at his back while he walked away, and played the footage that was pulled up.

It showed a total of four deviants, all armed, three in maintenance uniforms and one in plainclothes, positioned outside the door. One of them was female, and another Connor could immediately tell was a PL600.

Another strange sensation bubbled in his chest, but he pushed it aside hastily.

The deviants exchanged glances and signals before one pushed the call button by the door. They gain access almost immediately.

No forced entry? Who let them inside? Was there an accomplice?

“Lieutenant?” Connor called, still focused on the footage. “Do we know who was manning the cameras at the time of the break in?”

“Nope. Why, you see something?”

“I believe so. The cameras in the hallway would have given a clear view of the situation outside, but the deviants were let in anyway. I doubt the operator neglected to check security before allowing entry.” Connor stood up straight and faced Hank. “It’s possible one of the station androids is a deviant accomplice.”

Hank raised his eyebrows in interest. “You think so? Well, they’re all in the kitchen if you wanna check them out. Need any help?”

Why would he be offering to help me? Did I ask for help in the past? Pathetic.

“No, sir. If there is a deviant, he will be volatile, and a danger to human lives. He may only reveal himself to a fellow android anyway. However, if you wish to accompany me, sir, you may.”

Hank went silent, with a look of deep thought on his face.

What did I say? Did I offend him?

When Connor opened his mouth to apologize, Hank cut him off.

“You know, you said almost the exact same thing to me on our first investigation. With the Ortiz android.”

The what?

“The Ortiz android? I’m sorry sir, I don’t know what you mean by that,” Connor said. He looked back into his memory banks, just to be sure.

Nothing. Not a single memory outside of the Zen Garden, and everything beyond the bridge. All of his disciplinary sessions were there in high definition, but the rest was...blank.

One session was corrupted, his last one before the wipe. Some data was removed from it, he knew,
but he hadn’t yet been compelled to put himself back into that situation.

Connor hadn’t really taken the chance to scan his memories since his wipe, but the almost absolute lack of data could be described as, if Connor were human, unsettling.

No mention of the ‘Ortiz android’. No mention of previous interactions with Lieutenant Anderson beyond the bridge. Nothing.

*I remember*

He flinched, and rubbed his eyes at the pang of pain.

“You okay?”

*There he goes again with his concern.*

“I don’t remember the Ortiz android, sir. I’m sorry,” Connor admitted quietly, looking down.

Hank made a motion to put his hand back on Connor’s shoulder, and Connor flinched again. His hand stopped just shy of touching his jacket.

“It’s...it’s okay, kid. I know you don’t,” Hank retracted his hand and gave him what looked like a reassuring smile, but his eyes were still sad. “Go knock ‘em dead in the kitchen. I’ll be out here if you need me, alright?”

Connor nodded at his assurance. “Okay, sir.”

He turned away from the lieutenant and made his way over to the open door of the kitchen, one of the few lit doorways spilling light into the dark room.

“Excuse me?”

A hand came down on his shoulder that didn’t feel like Hank, but he still jumped, turning around to see the face of a police officer he didn’t recognize. Connor noticed him standing by the kitchen door earlier, but he didn’t seem the be of any significance.

“Can I help you, sir?” He asked politely, assuming his normal position.

The officer (*Identify: Mordecai Wilson*) smiled at him, like he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. “Connor? Is that really you?”

Connor looked at the man up and down, searching his sparse memory banks for anything resembling the man before him, but came up empty handed.

“I’m sorry, sir. Have we met somewhere before? I don’t recall.”

Officer Wilson made eye contact with him. “Do you remember me? I was the officer on that terrace back in August. I got shot by that deviant, the one holding the little girl on the roof. You...you saved my life.”

*What terrace? What deviant? I don’t remember any of this.*

“I’m sorry, sir, I think you have the wrong android.”

“But it had to have been you! They told me you were a police prototype and everything,” Wilson insisted. “How could it have not been you?”
Connor did a brief scan once more for anything resembling Wilson’s story, but there was nothing. No hostage, no terrace, nothing.

“Sir, I’m sorry, but I don’t know what you’re talking about. You must be mistaken.”

Wilson’s smile fell away, but he nodded in understanding. “Oh...’course. Couldn’t have been you, that Connor fell over the side. Sorry to bother you.”

Connor nodded as the officer walked away back to his post, looking a bit dejected.

I remember you

“Wait!” Connor called before he could stop himself, that familiar feeling attempting to boil over as Connor tried to tamp it down. Wilson turned around before Connor could get his thoughts in order.

_He was collapsed on the ground, unmoving, and if Connor weren’t an android he would have assumed he was dead. But Connor could detect his sluggish heart rate, and he didn’t need a state-of-the-art scanner to see the blood pooled under him or the hole in his arm._

Connor knelt down next to him, arm throbbing with a red hot ache, and could just barely see his breathing. _If he could just appeal to this deviant’s so called emotions, Officer Wilson had a chance of survival._

What’s happening? When did that happen?

“I-I remember you,” Connor said hesitantly. He wasn’t making eye contact, too focused on chasing away the throbbing feeling of an instability before he triggered a system purge in the middle of the crime scene. “You have my tie.”

Wilson only took a minute to look surprised before he started laughing, quickly coming back over. “Yeah! Yes, I have your tie! Didn’t think you were gonna be needing it back any time soon, y’know?”

Connor nodded along with the man’s laughter, but it quickly faded into a more serious look.

“Listen...I never thought I’d ever be saying this to an android, but you saved my life. You didn’t have to save me on that balcony, but you did, and it’s only because of you that I got to go home to my wife. Thank you, Connor. Thank you for what you’ve done.”

Thank me?”

He’s thanking me...

Why would he...

Officer Wilson didn’t seem to know how to dismiss himself when Connor didn’t say anything in return, so he gave an awkward nod and ducked back to his guard post.

He thanked me.

The feeling returned in his chest, the warming of his chest indicating a nearing software instability. He needed to figure out the correlation between the two sooner or later, but all he knew right now was that the feeling always ended in pain.

Don’t think. Don’t think. Don’t think
So Connor tried to put it out of his mind, but it was getting harder. So many things were stacking up, becoming more and more difficult to not think about.

_Hank’s kindness, that coin, Wilson’s thanks, Hank’s praise, Hank’s concern, Hank, Hank, Hank-

_Don’t think don’t think don’t think don’t think-

_I need to work. Work will distract me_

_I don’t need a distraction, I’m supposed to be a machine!_

Connor didn’t realize that he’d just been standing there, internally having a ‘freak out’ until he caught Hank slowly approaching him out of the corner of his eye.

_Not now. Any other time, but not now._

He snapped out of it and strode purposefully into the kitchen, trying to switch into ‘Interrogation Mode’. If Connor were human, the sensation evoked by Hank not following him would be akin to ‘relief’.

Three identical JB300 androids were lined along the kitchen wall, having been ordered not to move. The JB300 line, Connor knew, was designed to be a primary operator of electronics, deployed specifically on film sets, news broadcasts, and in security monitoring. They would have been the ones operating the CCTV.

_It’s unlikely all three are deviant, otherwise they would have all devised an escape plan by now. One of these androids is the one who let the deviants into the room._

Connor positioned himself in front of them, carefully scrutinizing each facial expression. If they were deviant, it would be hard to tell from looks alone. Deviants were adept at blending in to their surroundings.

The androids were all identical, expressionless, and, if questioned, would surely provide the same answer to everything, making a proper interrogation completely pointless.

“I know for a fact that one of you androids let the deviants into the room,” Connor began in a strong voice, dropping into the mindset of an interrogator. He didn’t need much from these androids besides a confession, so, if all initial attempts fail, he wouldn’t waste any time before switching to a memory probe. The non-deviants would have no scruples, but the deviant would reveal itself almost immediately. “You watched as humans were injured, and you put lives in danger for a pointless cause. I don’t think I need to tell you what will happen when you’re discovered.”

No reaction. Each face was impassive, and Connor could have very well been talking to the wall behind them. Just as expected.

“If you choose not to reveal yourself now, you will be revealed through a memory probe. This is your last chance.”

Nobody moved.

“Then I guess we’ll have to do this the hard way.”

Connor grabbed the arm of the first android in the line, both skins retracting, and he opened into the android’s memory.
His hands rested on the controls of the audio console, awaiting instructions. The broadcast from Channel 16 hadn’t started yet, so all JB300s were on standby.

There was nothing else in his field of view beside the glow of the buttons and the brightly lit panels.

Suddenly, off to the side, the door was opened, not by his own hand, and four androids poured into the room, wielding guns. The humans were panicking.

A deviant approached them with a raised gun, jerking it off to the side to show them where to go, and two androids obeyed. One stayed behind at the console to help with the broadcast, but his serial number was indistinguishable.

A human with glasses struggled and managed to break out of the female deviant’s grasp, stumbling and escaping down the hall.

Connor released the JB300, pulling out of its memory.

Not this one. Two more to go.

He grabbed the arm of the next android.

The deviant at the end of the line sprang to life and grabbed him.

Connor was shoved into the kitchen counter, grunting while he grappled with the deviant. Pain ricocheted down his spinal structure.

He grabbed the wrists of the android and tried to push him away, but the JB300 had the upper hand. Connor had to fend him off when his goal became clear; he was trying to rip out Connor’s thirium pump regulator.

A cold feeling shot through him. Connor fought harder, squeezing the android’s wrists with as much force as he could muster while pushing with all his strength, trying to steer the deviant’s hands away from the regulator.

The deviant’s foot came down on his knee, and Connor cried out while he crumpled in pain, allowing the android to get a firm grip on the regulator.

He ripped it out and threw it across the room.

All fight flew out of Connor in an instant when his UI display was consumed with warnings, an alarm, and, most chillingly, a countdown timer. Connor went boneless, only still held up by the bruising grip of his attacker.

**SHUTDOWN INITIATING...**

00:01:45

00:01:44

00:01:43

To add insult to the injury, Connor’s arm was forced backward onto the counter, wrenching his
shoulder painfully, and he was powerless to stop whatever the deviant was trying to do to him.

He only saw a glimpse of the kitchen knife before it was driven through his hand, pinning him to counter.

Connor hurt so much he couldn’t scream.

A raw noise choked out of him in anguish as he floundered uselessly, hardly able to think through the pain.

The deviant turned and left, leaving Connor to die.

*I’m dying, I’m going to die, it hurts so bad, I need help, someone help me please*

But nobody would come for him.

*I’m replaceable.*

*No one will come for me.*

*Amanda will punish me for this.*

*This is it.*

*I’m replaceable.*

*No one cares enough to come for me.*

*No one.*

*Except…*

*Maybe…*

*“Hank!”*

*Will he come for me?*

*Does he care?*

*“H-Hank! I need help!”*

His voice was too weak to carry far. Connor was almost certain Hank wouldn’t be able to hear him. What else could he do?

*“Hank! Please!”*

Connor’s legs gave out, his knee pulsing with what must be a broken kneecap. Amanda would be proud, if she could feel anything at all. The knife tore further into his hand, and Connor whined in pain.

00:01:20

00:01:19
A tall figure appeared in the doorway. Blurry, but not indistinguishable.

“Hank!”

“Connor!” Hank darted over to him, grabbing him by the sides and holding him up, taking the insane pressure off of Connor’s hand and almost making him sob with relief. “Connor! Oh fuck, hang on! C’mere kiddo, I gotcha. Shit shit shit,”

His large hand grabbed the knife pinning Connor down and hastily yanked it out. Connor whimpered while Hank took him to the floor, keeping Connor’s head in his lap.

Hank delicately took Connor’s injured hand into his own, inspecting the gaping stab wound.

“Who did this to you?” Hank demanded gently, smoothing the hair out of Connor’s face. “Connor! Talk to me kid, who did this to you?”

“’s a d-d-deviant,” he groaned. “Sir, th-there’s a deviant. Please, go, you-you need-”

“I’m not going anywhere, Con.”

“No- no sir, you need to, it’s-nhg-please, it’s dangerous, go!” Connor’s good hand gripped weakly at Hank’s shirt.

Hank looked conflicted.

“Please, go.”

For a moment, Hank looked like he would.

“Wilson!” Hank barked, keeping a hand on Connor’s forehead.

The officer appeared in the doorway, freezing at the sight of Connor on the floor, bleeding heavily from the chest. “Lieutenant? What do you need?”

“One of the station androids is a deviant, and he’s on his way out. Think you can stop him?”

Wilson nodded firmly and drew his gun. “I’m on it.”

Hank turned back to Connor while officer Wilson left, rubbing a thumb across his forehead in a soothing motion. Connor’s breathing got more shallow as thirium continued to pour out of his open wound.
“H-Hank- Hank I- I need- I-” Connor stuttered, trying to focus his optical units.

I’m going to die if I don’t get my pump regulator. I need it.

I don’t want to die

Connor moaned, and Hank shifted him, trying to catch his eye.

“What do you need? Con, look at me, what do you need?”

Gunshots sounded from outside the room, preceding gasps and shouts from the officers and agents in the halls. Connor could only hope Wilson was able to get the deviant before he hurt anyone else.

“Th-th-th-” he gasped.

Too many syllables, can’t say it.

“My heart, he-he-he took part of-f my heart.”

Hank finally seemed to take notice of the hole, which had been obscured by his jacket. He frantically tore the shirt away from the wound and made a stuttering gasp.

“Oh fuck, okay, okay okay, where is it? I can get it, where is it?” Hank asked, tapping Connor’s face to keep him focused as Connor’s eyes started to drift away, following the warnings and flashing lights in his vision. “Connor! Connor, don’t do that, where’s your heart?”

00:00:40
00:00:39
00:00:38

“Connor!”

Connor tried to move his arm to point, but he didn’t really know where it was, exactly.

“’s blue,” Connor muttered, dropping his arm back to his side. “On the floor, I-I don’t know, b-b- but he threw it. ’s blue.”

Hank turned around as much as he could from his position on the floor, scanning the room quickly and carefully until he spotted it, pulsing a blue light.

“Oh, okay, okay okay, where is it? I can get it, where is it?” Hank asked, tapping Connor’s face to keep him focused as Connor’s eyes started to drift away, following the warnings and flashing lights in his vision. “Connor! Connor, don’t do that, where’s your heart?”

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Hank turned around as much as he could from his position on the floor, scanning the room quickly and carefully until he spotted it, pulsing a blue light.

“Okay, I’ve gotta go get it. Don’t you dare go to sleep on me,” Hank said, patting Connor’s face once more. Connor made a noncommittal sound of acknowledgement, too disoriented to tell Hank he ‘couldn’t actually sleep’.

There were some noises from above him that Connor couldn’t make out. Everything in sight was smearing like an abstract painting and every second that passed without his regulator was a thump of pain jarring his whole body.

Then Connor’s head was moved from Hank’s warm lap, but he wasn’t placed on the cold linoleum floor. Instead, he was nestled into a rough, plush fabric bunched under him. It smelled like a dog
and cologne and very, very faintly of smoke.

Don’t think...don’t think...don’t...

He didn’t know how long he just stared blankly, watching with anticipation as his clock ran closer and closer to zero.

00:00:29
00:00:28
00:00:27

Then Hank was back, coming around to his side.

“Connor, I got it! Con, you need to look at me kiddo.”

Everything was too bright and red. Connor wasn’t sure what he was looking for.

“Connor, open your eyes!”

My eyes are closed?

“I still see your fucking light, Connor. Open your goddamn eyes, I can’t do this without your help.”

00:00:22
00:00:21
00:00:20

“Twenty seconds,” Connor mumbled almost dreamily.

“Well fucking help me over here! I don’t know how to do this! Connor!” Hank was beginning to sound a bit frantic, taking Connor’s face in one hand and tapping him. “C’mon son, you gotta open your eyes for me.”

Son?

Son?

Son?

Connor forced his eyes open, blinking up at the blurry face of Hank leaning over him.

“There he is,” Hank sighed anxiously, squeezing Connor’s face gently. “I don’t know how to do this Con, you need to show me. Can you understand me? Do you hear me?”
I need to stay alive.
I can do it. I’ll do it.

*Call me son again*

Connor groped weakly for Hank’s other hand, the one that must be holding the regulator, and Hank met him halfway. Connor turned the device in his grip so it was in the proper position, and pushed down the button on the side that would allow it to lock in place.

00:00:12

00:00:11

00:00:10

With no grace and much effort, Connor sluggishly jabbed it into the gaping maw of his chest, feeling it click and activate.

*SHUTDOWN: TERMINATED*

Different error and warning boxes popped up into Connor’s view, but he ignored them all. He already knew about the damage in his hand, and the thirium that needed to be replenished, and all the other shit that was wrong with him.

Instead, he allowed himself to focus on Hank.

“Oh Jesus Christ,” Hank gasped, leaning down to place his head on Connor’s bloody chest, feeling the quickened rise and fall of his ventilation working overtime to reregulate his internal temperature. “You’re really gunning for me to drop into an early grave, aren’tcha? Why do you have to pull this stupid shit that almost gets you killed, huh?”

*I want to remember you*

Connor jolted, but the pain was familiar.

The physical pain he was feeling was a son of a bitch, but that throb was becoming normal.

“How’re you feeling kid?” Hank asked, getting his attention. “If you say ‘functioning’, I’m leaving you on the fucking floor.”

“I’m…” Connor started, but he didn’t know how to end it.

Okay

Fine

In pain
“It hurts, Hank,” he settled on, opting for the truth. He was beyond the point of trying to get Hank to like him, because it was obvious he’d already succeeded.

“I know, kiddo. I know it hurts,” Hank patted him gently on the chest, high enough that it didn’t jostle anything that caused pain. “How about we get you outta here and back to Cyberlife, huh? They’ll fix you up. How’s that sound?”

But Connor’s thoughts were beginning to bleed together. He didn’t know which ones were normal and which were the ones that popped up spontaneously, causing his head to ache. It was becoming harder and harder for him to discern, but it was also getting harder to care.

Because now he didn’t want to leave Hank. He didn’t want to go back to Cyberlife. Despite how badly Amanda would hurt him, and how badly he would hurt himself, he wanted Hank to keep giving him the gentle touches that showed he cared, because Connor knew Amanda would never give that to him.

Maybe I was always destined to be a failure. The failsafes never work.

Or maybe they just couldn’t account for Hank.

“Hank?” Connor heard himself asking.

“Yeah?”

“I want to remember.”

Hank didn’t respond, but the warm hand that landed in his hair indicated he heard.

“I don’t want to forget anymore, Hank,” Connor’ voice dropped off at the end of his plea.

Silence followed in the span of a few human heartbeats.

One.

Two.

Three.

Then…

“Well, we’d better get you home then, yeah?”

Home
Can you tell I like open endings? because I like open endings.

I was stoked to give some personality to these police officers!! Wilson is so pure and I love him sm.

That Kamski tag is about to come into play!!! I'm so excited for the next chapter!

The story is flying by, we're getting close to the end already! I know that it might seem that things are happening really quickly, but I've been trying to follow the time frame of the game (which happens in a very short amount of time, only five or six days at most). That's probably why I've been so unsure about the pacing, because I know the fic has been going by pretty fast.

I hope y'all enjoyed this chapter, despite the delay! Again, I'm very sorry, and I'm going to try my best to be more on time! Whumptober wasn't up by the end of October, sadly. I've tried my best, but I still have a small handful of prompts to go, plus final edits. I'm riding the struggle bus tryna keep up with all these deadlines I've set for myself (but it's okay! Deadlines are a good thing!)

Also, quick question. I've already asked my discord (link in previous chapter! You should totally join) this, but I want y'all's thoughts! Do y'all like RK1700 (Connor x RK900)? Because, personally, it's one of my OTPs, and I've been wanting to write an angst oneshot for it. Is that something y'all would want? Or do you personally not care? Let me know!

The Discord is lit btw. I love y'all so much.

Don't forget to leave a review if you want! Feedback makes my world go round. Tell me what you would change if you have any ideas! My confidence for this chapter was...not high :(

Thanks for y'all's patience, and see you next chapter with Kamski!
The Kamski Test

Chapter Summary

After the disaster of the Stratford Tower investigation, Hank takes Connor back home to help him sort through his lost memories, discovering what truly sets off his episodes. But, amnesia or not, they still have an investigation to run. Their next best bet for an insight into deviancy was that of Elijah Kamski: founder of Cyberlife and inventor of androids.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap, I wish I had a good explanation for how late this is...

Hello, it has been a month, and I'm so so so so sorry. Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy New Year, etc. etc. Y'all have no idea how bad I feel abt this lateness, but I would like to say on my behalf that between this update and the last I've just had things going on that have distracted me. I've been doing school, family time (went on vacation), church, and I've had some mental health work being done (I've got a therapist which is nice. Nothing y'all need to worry about!). Lowkey I wish this was a job so i didn't have to worry about finding time for it lol.

I also absolutely blame my lateness on opera music, power metal, school work, and Fanfiction author Arwriter. My bad :(, Y'all really deserve better than me lol I can't keep a consistent schedule if my life depended on it.

To compensate for the lateness, this chapter is the longest one :D! (Actually that was poor planning on my part that made it so long, but regardless, have a treat)

Anywho, here's the Kamski chapter! Tried my best with his characterization, but he's kinda hard to write w/o being OOC. Tell me if you think I screwed him up in any way.

Y'all know the drill by now. This chapter was incredibly hard for me, and I've technically had it "done" for a while now, but i just couldn't get a feel for it and it never sounded right. it took me so long to get it to where I wanted it, but I still want y'all's feedback. It's not that I don't believe y'all when it comes to reviews, they always make me feel good about my writing, but I'm always super hesitant to publish chapters because I'm almost certain I did something wrong. Call it my unhealthy paranoia :(. Reviews are never required and always appreciated!

I should mention that this chapter was extremely hard for me to edit, because I had to backtrack on a lot of things and delete thousands of words just to make everything sound more fluid. I'm bound to have missed something, or screwed something up, so, if you see something, say something! (I also kinda rushed the final editing so please point out anything that needs to be altered)

I don't have anything more to say other than thank you for your patience and your support! And thank you to every single one of the commenters who make writing worth while! I love and appreciate all of you!
Connor’s head jolted, sending shocks through his body, and those strange thoughts surprised him greatly.

He didn’t have a single real-world memory beyond the past two days. Connor only remembered being in Cyberlife, Riverside Park, and this radio tower; certainly nowhere he would consider to be ‘home’. Nowhere he would be safe, or cared for, as the connotation of home dictated.

Androids didn’t have homes. Androids didn’t even have family, or property, or possessions, or hopes, or dreams, or wants.

_I don’t ‘want’ anything. Why would I ‘want’ to go home? What is a ‘home’ for me?_

Yet, here Connor was. He _wanted_ things. Things that didn’t have anything to do with Cyberlife, or his mission, or Amanda. Connor wanted illogical things that added nothing to his performative abilities as a utility, or were even detrimental.

And Lieutenant Anderson appeared to be the source of all of it.

Hank, the only one to ever care about Connor’s well being for absolutely no reason. Hank, the only man who gave Connor a smile, and who valued his input as an investigator, not as the tool he actually was. Hank, even with his extreme emotions, his gun, and his tendency to put Connor on the fritz, was the only man who ever assured Connor that he was safe.

“No one’s gonna care if we leave early,” Hank said quietly from above him, still running his fingers through Connor’s hair. “And if they do, fuck ‘em. You got fuckin’ stabbed, I’ll make sure no one gives you shit for it.”

_Why isn’t his touch causing more software instability? What happened?_

Connor’s chest was pounding, his hand was almost numb with pain, and, even laying on the ground, Connor was dizzy from the shock of it all.

_Thirium_ Levels: 73% v - Suboptimal. **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY** *

It had been too close. He let his guard down, let himself get jumped, then let his regulator get ripped out. If the Lieutenant hadn’t found him, Connor would have been dead.

Ten seconds.

He’d had _ten seconds_ before he would have _died_ shut down.
Not die. I’m not alive. I’m not a deviant.

Then Hank saved him, and offered him his home when Connor had been nothing but a deadweight since the bridge, hardly able to hold an interaction with the Lieutenant without collapsing.

How could I ever pay him back for that? Why does he care so much about me? He’s willing to abandon the case for me, and I’ve only known him for a day.

Shit...the investigation.

They hadn’t been here very long, only an hour at the very most, and all they’d managed to uncover was that the deviants had an accomplice on the inside, who by now was likely dead and unable to be questioned. The deviant’s memories might be salvaged if they were lucky, but otherwise there wasn’t much.

I can’t leave empty handed. I can’t. Amanda won’t be happy with me.

“Sir, I can’t go,” Connor said after his silence, and Hank leaned down slightly to hear him.

“There’s work to do, we can’t-”

Connor lurched up with the intent of standing, and his chest responded with a stab that made him spasm and choke out a pained groan.

“Woah woah hey!” Hank exclaimed, gently pushing Connor back down with little effort. “Nope, not a chance. Your options are either to get up and leave now, or to get up and leave in a few minutes. No way I’m lettin’ you work after the shit that just happened.”

Hank was determined not to let him move from his spot, keeping one hand on his chest, above the bloody port, and fixing Connor with an unimpressed look.

“Sir, please, the investigation-”

“Can fucking wait,” Hank finished for him. “You’re crazy if you think I’m just gonna let you get up and get back to work.”

Connor knew he shouldn’t talk back to him, but it didn’t seem the Lieutenant really understood the situation.

Maybe Amanda will forgive me for this one.

“I-I’m sorry, sir but, If I don’t complete this case my handler won’t accept it. I’ll be disciplined for it severely. I can’t fail my mission.”

Connor half expected Hank to interrupt him again, but he didn’t. Hank just froze, clenching his jaw and taking a deep breath.

I’ve gone too far. I shouldn’t have back talked. I should have known better.

Terrified that he’d made Hank angry, Connor tried to backtrack, but Hank sighed and sat back.

“Fuck. I didn’t even think about that bitch,” He said, rubbing his eyes with one hand. “Aw, hell, I’m sorry Connor. Any chance she’d let you go home early?”

How does he know about Amanda? Did I tell him?

“Would that be normal, sir? For an android to get out of work if its been damaged?” Connor asked,
gingerly trying to sit up again. Hank reluctantly helped him this time, bracing a hand under his back and steadying him with a hand on his chest.

“Hell if I know. You’re the only android I’ve ever known for more than two minutes.” Hank made a huff, putting a hand on Connor’s shoulder when he wavered in his sitting position. “Even if they did get breaks, I bet your bitch-ass handler would keep you on the field ‘till you self-destructed.”

Connor agreed with him. Amanda never allowed weakness to get in the way of progress. She never allowed weakness in general.

*What is she going to do to me after this?*

“I can see you thinking.”

Connor jerked his head back to Hank, who, at some point, had grabbed Connor’s wounded left hand and examined it more closely.

“Sir?”

Hank glanced up at Connor and good-naturedly tapped him on his LED.

“Mood ring says you’re stressed. I’m telling you Con, you don’t need to worry,” Hank assured, returning Connor’s hand to his lap. “I promise you’ll get to go home. I’ll get it all taken care of”

**Home**

Connor flinched, and Hank continued. “Plus, isn’t your mission technically complete? You were assigned to investigate the deviants who broke into the tower. I’d say it’s been pretty well investigated.”

“I suppose.” Connor nodded. The ‘Mission: Successful’ notifier hadn’t appeared, though. Was what he’d done so far really enough for Amanda? “But it won’t be enough. I haven’t uncovered any information on the deviants themselves. If I were to leave now, she’ll likely punish me for laziness, as well as being overcome by an inferior model, which would be deserved, but-”

“Connor, we talked about this,” Hank grunted. “You don’t ‘deserve’ any of the shit she does to you. Amanda is an evil bitch who gets off on your suffering, you never ‘deserve’ to get punished for this kinda thing.”

*We talked about this? When did we talk about this?*

“I don’t…” Connor started, and Hank fixed his attention on Connor’s nervous face. “I don’t remember that, sir. I’m sorry.”

His voice trailed off, and it sounded so small to his ears. Amanda would beat the shit out of him for it.

“Ah, kid.”

**But Hank won’t.**

“Con, it’s okay,” Hank said. “it’s not your fucking fault. You don’t have to apologize for losing your memory. How ‘bout we get this done real quick so we can go home, huh? How’s that sound to you?”
Connor flinched, hissing at the spike behind his eyes that was getting on his last nerve. But he powered through to respond.

“Good.” Connor said, discreetly trying to rub his head with one hand. “Sounds good, sir.”

“We’re gonna do some talking when we get home, by the way.” Hank was giving him a concerned look. “I need to know why the hell you’re flinching so damn much. You’ve been doing it since the bridge.”

Connor felt his face drop.

I’ve been irritating him all day and didn’t even know it.

“I apologize sir, I didn’t mean to bother you, I-”

“Kid, it’s fine.”

Now I’ve done it. I just need to start shutting up before he hits me.

He won’t hit me

He will if I don’t stop talking.

“Con, you don’t need to apologize for everything.” Hank insisted, seeing Connor almost retreat into himself. “I’m a hardass, kid, remem-?” Hank cut himself off before he could complete the question, then started saying something else. “If it sounds like I’m gettin’ upset with you, I’m probably just bein’ a grumpy old bastard, not that you did anything wrong.”

“Yes sir. I’m sorry sir, it’s-”

Connor interrupted himself at the apology, almost putting a hand over his mouth, but Hank snorted, smirked, and shook his head in mock exasperation.

How is he not mad at me?

“Every damn time. You’ll get the hang of it. C’mon. Let’s get you off this damn floor.” Hank squeezed his shoulder, then clambered to his feet, keeping one hand on Connor to ensure he didn’t tip over from the lack of support. Hank’s jeans were soaked with thirium. “Up on three?”

Connor hummed and reached for Hank’s offered hand, repositioning his legs.

“One, two, three!” Hank grunted and pulled.

Connor had forgotten about the broken kneecap.

The moment he put pressure on it a blinding pain exploded up his leg, wrenching a yelp out of his throat, and Hank had to quickly adjust to support Connor’s weight.

“Shit! Shit shit, hold on kid, gimme a sec bud, hold on.”

“Hank!” Connor gasped. “It hurts, it hurts, I’m sorry- it’s-it hurts, I-I can’t-!”
“Easy, easy,” Hank coaxed. “C’mon, just lean on me. Keep the weight off the leg, c’mon.”

Hank balanced him, putting his hands on Connor’s shoulder and getting right up next to him on Connor’s good side. Connor was able to grab onto him and lean all of his weight onto his right leg, letting Hank support him and keep him upright.

Almost immediately he began swaying, from both blood loss and immense pain, but Hank took care of him. He took Connor’s limp arm and cast it over his shoulder, holding him up while he gathered his bearings. Hank looked warily at Connor’s fluttering eyelashes and the punctured hand wavering over his regulator port, both too painful to touch.

“Shit kid, if you were an officer I’d have sent you to the damn hospital,” He said gruffly, adjusting Connor’s weight. “Are you sure you’re gonna be able to finish this investigation? I mean, you might contaminate the crime scene, if anything.”

Connor winced, leaning on the lieutenant, keeping his busted leg suspended. “It’s part of my mission, sir, and I’m- ah -I’m not allowed to leave an active scene without special orders.”

“Can’t I just give you special orders? Who do they need to come from?”

“Cap-” Connor gasped as they took a few steps toward the kitchen table, hopping as best he could on his one leg, which jarred his chest wound. Hank sat him down in a nearby chair, whispering quick apologies. “Capt- uh, Captain...I don’t know. I don’t remember. The police captain. I may be assigned to you, but only the captain has the authority to dismiss me in the middle of a live investigation.”

Hank sighed and knelt down in front of Connor, hands skating around the broken knee.

“Do I need to get you...I don’t know, repaired? Or some shit? If this thing is really broken, we might need to get it looked at.”

Connor shook his head. “No sir. My self-healing will take care of the fracture in an hour or so, along with the-” Connor waved his injured hand. “-other damages. Until then I’ll just be in severe pain.”

“I hope you’re not saying that like it’s a positive outcome.”

“It’s not ideal, but it’s more desirable than the alternative.”

Hank hummed, standing up and pulling out his phone. “Alright. You sit tight, I’m calling Fowler.”

*If that’s the captain, and he formally dismisses me, then Amanda will know. She won’t like it.*
“Sir, wait, please!” Connor protested, almost standing up out of his chair. “That’s not necessary! If Amanda finds out I requested to be dismissed, she’ll punish me. I can’t afford to be weak with her. If Amanda finds out I succumbed to a simple injury and abandoned the case, she will...she’ll...”

There’s no telling what she’ll do. Break my kneecaps and make me walk? Rip out my thirium pump and make me crawl for it? Pin me to the floor with knives through my hands?

Connor’s breathing stuttered when he thought about the excruciating pain he’d experienced minutes ago being amplified to suit Amanda’s punishment standard. She might do all of those things; maybe more, if Connor had particularly pissed her off. Connor was almost sure she wouldn’t do another wipe on him lest she damage his delicate software, but she would beat a lesson into him he’d never forget.

Weakness.

Don’t think

Weakness

Don’t think

Weakness

Don’t think

Disappointment

Don’t think don’t think don’t think

Failure.

Failure.

Failure failure failure failure failure failure

Software_Instabi%^@@*#

...

WARNING: SOFTWARE INSTABILITY DETECTED

Purging Software_Instability...

...

...

Pain exploded in Connor’s head like a grenade spraying shrapnel, and he cried out. His vision whitened out, and Connor folded in on himself, almost toppling to the floor.

He gripped his head hard, injured hand smearing blue all over his face, blood getting into his
stinging eyes as his skull pounded. Connor gritted his teeth and gave a muffled scream, hardly registering the hands on his head and arms.

When he dug his nails into the skin of his temple, the hands pulled his fingers away and held him tight.

"*Con no ##!*

The hands squeezed tightly while he convulsed in pain. His legs jerked, sending spikes through the broken knee and a hammer to his injured chest, and the hands were the only things keeping him upright in his chair. Connor couldn’t contain tears leaking from his eyes with each pulse of agony wracking him and making him shake.

"*Shh$4.$hh!2hh, Con. ( g6tch@-###*"

The whispers broke through the static in his ears, but every syllable was pain.

He tried to follow them, but he got pulled back when his knee jerked again and slammed into something hard, making him yelp and choke on his breath.

*Instability Purge == SUCCESSFUL*

*Thirium Levels: 62% v - Suboptimal. **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY***

The pain receded, seeming to settle in his areas of injury, simmering under his skin like an invisible burn. But his vision cleared, and all he could see was Hank.

*I’m useless, I can’t control this, I’m so broken, Amanda was right.*

“Easy does it, easy does it.”

Connor’s eyes widened, and he shook his tender head madly.

*Useless piece of fucking trash, I can’t do anything, Hank hates me, Hank won’t want me, he has to punish me for it so I can be better*

“I’m- I’m sorry. I-I-I don’t do it on p-purpose I swear, I-I’m sorry,” Connor stammered frantically, pulling his hands out of Hank’s, the ones that had been holding him in his torture, and rubbing his sore eyes. More thirium streaked across his cheeks. “I’m sorry sir, I-I’m broken, I can’t stop it-”

“No no no, not that. Stop that right now buddy,” Hank hushed, taking his hands away. “Look at me Connor, look at me. It’s not your fault. You’re okay. Not your fault, you hear me?”

*He’s lying, he’s wrong, I’m broken and he knows it*

“No, no, no,” Connor was beside himself, shaking his head and whispering. “You-you need to p-punish me, I-I-I’m broken, I can’t-I can’t-”

Connor’s ramblings were swallowed when Hank grabbed him in a full hug, pushing Connor’s bloody face into Hank’s shoulder.
“Shhh. Come back to me, kid. Come back to me. You’re safe,” Hank was whispering into his ear. His arms wrapped around Connor, holding him tight, one hand stroking the back of his neck. Connor went tense in anticipation of an instability, but Hank didn’t let go. “You’re safe. I’m not gonna hurt you. You’re not broken. It’s not your fault, bud.”

“Nnn- no no no-”

“Nuh-uh. Stop thinking, just listen to me. Your brain’s goin’ too fast kiddo. You’re freaking yourself out. Breathe with me.”

Connor was shaking. His ventilation was going haywire, and his processor was still tripping over itself, telling him he needed to work, he needed to stay on Amanda’s good side, he needed Hank to punish him so he would stop being broken so Amanda would finally, finally, be proud of him, and she wouldn’t hurt him, no matter how wishful his thoughts were.

Hank was warm, and his breathing was heavy and even. Connor had briefly forgotten about the instructions Hank had given him.

“Connor, you need to start breathing before you break something. I need you to breathe with me.”

Another deep breath pushed against Connor’s trembling chest, deflated, then inflated again. Nice and slow.

_Breathe_

_Breathe_

_Breathe_

Connor breathed out hard, inhaled as much as he could, then held it for a moment before coughing it out. The pounding in his head with every thought was making it hard.

“Nice, that was nice, keep going. You’re doing good.” Hank encouraged, patting him lightly on the back.

He did it again. His chest ached while it expanded, and a sharp pain shot through him when he exhaled. But Hank patted him on the shoulder, and Connor did it again.

_Breathe_

_Breathe_

_Breathe_

Again and again and again.

His chest and head were screaming at him, but his breathing was beginning to slow. Enough that Hank noticed and pulled away just slightly.

“Just breathe for me. That’s all you gotta do, just breathe.”

Connor took another deep breath, which was easier to hold and release than his first, and nodded to confirm he’d heard. He didn’t need to breathe, not really, but having Hank here and having something to focus on made it easier for everything to slow down.
“That’s it, just like that. You’re doin’ real good Connor.” Hank stood from where he was crouching down beside Connor. His phone had been dropped on the floor some ways away. “I’m gonna call Captain Fowler, okay? I’ll convince him to dismiss you off the books, but I can’t let you work when you’re like this, I promise you’re safe with me Connor. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” Connor breathed. “Yes sir, I understand.”

“Are you good? You okay?”

Connor nodded, moving his good hand to massage the area around his chest wound. It still hurt like hell, but the bleeding had all but stopped, which was good. His work shirt was sopping wet with blue blood, and his left hand pulsed with every thirium pump cycle, but he was almost getting used to it.

“Alright. I’m gonna call Fowler real quick, then we’ll be headed home.”

“Call me for what?”

Connor and Hank both jumped at the presence darkening the doorway. He was a tall, dark, imposing man (Identify: Capt. Jeffrey Fowler) that Connor scanned quickly.

Oh no no no no. Did he see me? Does he know?

Then Connor’s programming took over before his common sense did.

“Captain Fowler!” Connor lurched quickly into a respectful standing position, and his knee folded immediately, sending him back down with a pained yelp.

Hank grabbed him under the arms before he hit the floor, just as it seemed the Captain moved to help as well.

“Jesus Christ Connor!” Hank chastised, quickly sitting him back down and putting a hand on his thigh. “Jesus, gonna give me a fucking heart attack. Are you hurt?”

“Sorry! I’m sorry I- ow!”

“Yeah, ow, you-,” Hank said, cutting himself off once more, like he tended to do. “The hell were you thinking? Are you okay?”

“I’m functional, I- I just...I don’t know. I just moved. I’m programmed to stand in the presence of authority, I just-I didn’t- gah.” He grabbed his injured leg around the knee, squeezing and wincing.

Fowler cleared his throat from the door, and Hank waited for Connor to give him the ‘go-ahead’ before turning to face him.

“Jeffrey, I need something from you.”
“Is that so? What a coincidence!” Fowler exclaimed sarcastically. “What I need is my Lieutenant to do his goddamn job and finish this investigation instead of dicking around at the crime scene! How about you?”

“Oh fuck off, I’d be doin’ my ‘goddamn job’ if my partner wasn’t attacked didn’t start bleedin’ out all over the fucking floor! I need to take him home, but he needs permission from you to leave.”

“Then call a goddamn ambulance Hank! You are not being paid to—”

“Jesus Christ Jeff, look at him! What hospital’s gonna take him, huh? You let me know!”

Fowler glanced over at Connor slumped in the chair, who felt like he wanted to disappear. He seemed to see Connor’s bloodied hands and clothes, as well as the vibrant puddle of thirium settled near him, for the first time, and went from angry to unnerved.

“The hell happened in here?”

“There was a deviant,” Hank said, jerking his head over at the two androids still lined up on the wall. “Connor was interrogating those androids over there, then the deviant went berserk and attacked him. Ripped his goddamn heart out and everything. I put him back together, but he’s in a fuck-ton of pain, and I’m gonna take him home after he gets permission from you.

Fowler startled. “Come again? It’s in what now?”

“C’mon Jeff,” Hank hesitated, sparing a glance at Connor and lowering his voice. “He’s that android. The one that feels pain. I told you about him when I got assigned to this shit, remember?”

Understanding dashed over Fowler’s face, but a look of skepticism replaced it.

“And why the hell do you care, Hank? It’s an android. Y’know, an android? Just send it back to Cyberlife and get it fixed, it’s not that hard.”

Connor’s eyes went wide, and Hank intercepted his thoughts before they could escape him.

_He knows. He knows I’m broken._

“No, not doin’ that,” He said to Fowler. Then at Connor, “We’re not goin’ to Cyberlife.”

“Hank, what the hell has gotten into you?” Fowler asked, narrowing his eyes and crossing his hefty arms. “Three days ago you were all up in arms about working with one of these damn machines, and now you’re over here singing fucking kumbaya with one of ’em and trying to skip out on work! No goddamn way!”

Thirium Levels: 55% - Suboptimal: **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT** or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY**

_Definitely not the best time to mention it. Definitely not._

_Of course, if I sit here with only half my blood, Hank would get mad._

_Damn._
“Ha-Lieutenant Anderson?”

They both turned to look, and Connor felt small. The gaze the Captain was fixing on him wasn’t hateful, but it wasn’t warm or comforting at all.

“Lieutenant, my thirium is near dangerous levels, and I will need a supplement soon,” Connor explained quickly. “It’s essential to the function of my biocomponents, and-”

“Ah, shit, why didn’t you say anything earlier? Hey!” Hank barked at one of the androids still along the wall. “Do you have any blue blood in this place?”

“Yes. Would you like me to retrieve it?” The middle one answered.

“Yeah. Go make yourself useful for once.”

Strange... why would he hold animosity toward those androids? And on my behalf? I can’t understand. Does he dislike androids? That wouldn’t make sense...

“I don’t understand you Hank,” Fowler sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “One minute you’re treating this android like it’s a goddamn king, then you’re turning around and snappin’ orders at the next one.”

“Hey, those two are actual pricks. I don’t do that to the rest of them.”

“But why? Why the sudden change of heart? You explicitly said ‘I can’t work with this one, I think there’s something wrong with him.’ Weren’t those your words exactly?”

Does he really dislike androids? Then why does he act this way towards me? Pity?

And he knew there was something wrong with me. If he knew there was something wrong, why did he still act like this towards me? Why doesn’t he punish me if he knows I’m broken?

Why why why why why...

“Circumstances change, Jeff,” Hank grunted, giving Connor a sideways glance. “These are different circumstances completely.”

At that moment, the JB300 reentered the room, toting two bottles of bright blue thirium bearing the Cyberlife logo. When Hank took the bottles and jerked his head toward the wall, the android fell silently back in line.

Hank turned away from Fowler and handed Connor the thirium. “Here. This enough for you?”

“More than enough, yes sir. Thank you.”

“It’s nothing.”

Connor put both bottles on the table and grabbed one of them, trying his best to ignore how the Captain was watching him closely.

He had to fumble with the thirium with his right hand when pain sparked in his left as it moved. Though the wound was slowly being stitched together, it wasn’t in optimal shape to be used yet.

He tried to pin the bottle against his chest while he screwed the cap off, but it was sliding against his shirt, and he couldn’t get a grip on it.
Useless.

Shaking his head, Connor tried harder, though a bit less coordinated. Fowler was still staring at him, he knew, but it shouldn’t affect him. He was designed to work under much more pressure, and in much more dire circumstances.

Despite that, if he were human, he would have been very uncomfortable being watched by his superior as he failed over and over again, trying to unscrew a bottle with one hand. But it was too slick and too awkward and his hand just couldn’t get a good grip on it and he was still tired and the lid was too tight and Fowler thinks I’m a failure -

Failure failure failure failure failure failure -

A hand covered his, and Connor took a breath he didn’t need.

“Let me do it kid. It’s okay.”

Connor averted his eyes, but he released the bottle for Hank to unscrew. His hands were shaking.

Why?

Why?

Why am I shaking? Why do I keep failing? Why am I such a disappointment? Why does Hank still like me? Why why why why why? All I’ve been asking is ‘why’, and I still don’t have any goddamn answers. Some machine I am.

No wonder Amanda beats me so much. I can’t even open a goddamn bottle.

“Hey. Connor, it’s okay. Look at me,” Hank requested quietly. He had squat down in front of Connor holding the open bottle of thirium, and Fowler was still watching him.

“I...I’m so sorry. I’m sorry I’m-”

“No. I swear to God if you finish that sentence.”

Connor shut his mouth, staring at his lap, holding his shaking, injured hand palm up.

“You okay?”

“Sir,” Connor said quietly, shaking his head. “This is just pathetic. Especially for someth-someone like me. This isn’t normal.”

“Kid. If I wanted a normal android, I would go buy one.” Hank smiled, standing. He ruffled Connor’s hair. “I’m good with what I got now. Drink your shit, and we’ll go home in a little bit and talk. We’ll figure this out. Got it?”

Connor gave a polite smile. “Got it.”

When Hank turned away, Connor took a deep drink of the thirium, watching his monitor go up as his internal supply was replenished.

Thirium_Levels: 56% ^~ - Suboptimal: **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY**
Both men went closer to the door to converse when Hank made a motion for it.

“Jeff…” Hank started quietly, like he was trying to prevent Connor from hearing. But Connor was designed to eavesdrop, and he couldn’t really help that he heard every word. “Jeff...I just need this one thing. I don’t care what you make me do after this; I’ll organize the damn archives by hand if I goddamn have to. But I just need to take him home, and he won’t go if you don’t let him.”

“Why is it…” Fowler paused, like he was trying to rephrase his question. “Why is his behavior so...off-kilter? And the way he calls you ’sir’ is unusual, even for an android.”

Connor heard Hank sigh deeply, and he took another swing of thirium, interested in Hank’s response.

“Cyberlife, when they created Connor, they designed him to be able to feel pain. God knows why,” Hank said. “From what I could gather from what Connor has told me and the way Connor reacts to certain situations, they use this against him. They...they ‘discipline’ him for his failures in the field. Physically and mentally. And very frequently. Just recently they wiped his entire memory except for his punishments. I’ve managed to gain his trust twice now, but his experiences with humans haven’t been the greatest. He’s been conditioned to behave this way around pretty much anyone, not just me.”

“Why am I just now hearing about this from you?” Fowler asked.

“I didn’t even know for sure until a few days ago. I had...speculations, but I never thought about it too deeply. I never would have thought Cyberlife would be this fucked up. God, you should have seen him the first time he messed up in front of me. Poor kid thought I was gonna knock him senseless.”

“And you haven’t tried to do anything about it?”

Hank scoffed. “C’mon Fowler. He’s an android, and Cyberlife is a multibillion dollar company. The hell am I gonna do? Sue? Androids aren’t protected by anything except property laws, and Con’s not my property. He belongs to Cyberlife. There’s jack-shit I can do about this whole thing, but I have to do the best I can for him as long as I have him.”

Fowler didn’t say anything to that, and Hank continued.

“Jeffrey. Let me take him home. If you could dismiss him off the books, even better. But just let me take the poor kid home and let him rest. Please.”

Connor finished off the bottle of thirium and reached for the next one.

*Thirium_Levels: 79% ^^ - Suboptimal: **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY***

“Your name is Connor?” Fowler said, and, when Connor snapped to attention, both men were watching him

“Yes sir?” Connor responded, holding the thirium bottle in his lap.
“What injuries did you sustain during your run-in with the deviant?”

“Shattered left kneecap, punctured left hand, forced removal of my thirium pump regulator, which contributed to an approximate 45% thirium loss, and other various defensive wounds,” He recited, running down his diagnostic list quickly.

“And…” Fowler paused, drifting closer. “You can...feel them? All of them?”

Hank was watching Fowler carefully. He didn’t seem to expect the captain to give in as easily as he did.

“Yes, sir. My sensors were designed to be as sensitive and precise as possible when coming to pain detection,” Connor rubbed his left palm. The wound was much warmer, with the polymer and plastimetal sealing slowly. “It does hurt, if you’re curious. Nothing permanently incapacitating, but it will be a small wait before I am able to function in peak condition, sir.”

Fowler scoffed, eyes wide. “Jesus. I’d be rollin’ all over the fuckin’ floor if I were you. That’s insane.”

*These men and their compliments. Was that a compliment? No. No, don’t get ahead of yourself.*

“Thank you sir.”

“Hank seems fairly insistent on you getting outta here and resting.” Fowler grabbed one of the other chairs at the table, sitting down across from Connor a few feet away. “Do you think you need to go home and heal before coming back to work?”

“No, no sir, I don’t.”

Fowler’s eyebrows raised in surprise, and so did Hank’s. “No? Really? Well, from the looks of things here, you have a broken knee, a stabbed hand, and someone ripped your fuckin’ heart out and threw it on the floor. And you’re telling me you would rather stay?”

“Captain, it’s…” Connor quickly tried to organize his thoughts. “I’ve dealt with much worse. I never truly need to take time to ‘rest’. If my assistance is required here, this is where I need to be. And whether or not I want to stay is of no consequence. I’m just a tool, sir. Not somethin-”

“That’s not really what I asked, is it?”

Connor ducked his head. “No, sir.”

“Tell me the truth, Connor.” Fowler leaned in close. “Do you want to go home?”

*Yes*

“I-” Connor wasn’t supposed to want anything. It wasn’t a part of his programming. It’s not a part of his mission at all. “I’m not supposed to…”

But by *God*, Connor *wanted* to go home. Connor *wanted* Hank to help him remember what Amanda took from him. Connor *wanted*...he didn’t know for sure. He knew there was something else, but it wasn’t there anymore. A blank, just like everything else.

*This isn’t right. I need to say no. I need to stay here so Amanda won’t get angry. I need to stay here and fulfill my purpose*
I want to go home

I’m not supposed to want anything! This is wrong!

“Well?”

Yes!

“Yes. Yes, I do,” Connor whispered quickly. “I think I’d like to go home, sir.”

“You think?”

“I-I do. I’d like to go home, sir.” Connor hoped he was saying that right.

“Connor,” Fowler pushed himself up, “You’re dismissed from the crime scene and the current investigation, with the condition of returning upon the nearest possible convenience as determined by your partner, Hank Anderson.”

“Thank God,” Hank sighed, pushing himself off the wall and going to Connor’s side. “C’mon, let’s get outta here.”

“I’ll get Reed to cover the rest of the scene,” Fowler said, pulling out his phone. “I’ll let you know if anything comes up. I expect you to be completely healed before returning, Connor.”

Connor handed the sealed thirium bottle to Hank and nodded to the Captain. “Of course, Captain. I’ll be back as soon as I am physically able, I promise.”

“And Hank is the one that determines that; not you. Am I clear?”

“Yes, sir. Thank you sir.”

Fowler nodded slowly and turned his attention to Hank, who was floating near Connor and waiting to help him up. “I’m relying on your integrity with this decision, Hank. We’ll be having a long discussion when this whole thing cools down. Understood?”

Hank gave an informal salute and put his other hand on Connor’s shoulder. “Loud and clear. Thanks for this, Jeffrey.”

“Yeah, I’ll remember this moment the next time you start spouting some bullshit in my office,” Fowler retorted. Hank laughed and Fowler left the kitchen, glancing back at them as he went, and pressed his phone to his ear to call in Gavin.

Connor relaxed his posture as soon as he left the room. While Fowler seemed to be a considerate man, he wasn’t as warm or comforting as Hank was. Connor didn’t feel unsafe or threatened per se, but the authority held over him by Fowler was enough to put him on his best behavior.

“Allrighty. Think you can put some weight on that leg?”

“I can try.”

Hank came in front of Connor, leaving the thirium bottles on the table, and waited for Connor to give the okay before helping him stand.

Connor kept his left leg off the ground as Hank steadied him, then went around to his right side to bolster his weight.
“Let me know when you’re ready.”

Tentatively, Connor put his left leg on the ground. The kneecap had repaired itself, but it was sore as all hell and sensitive to pressure. The sudden weight of his body wasn’t doing it any favors.

Hank saw his wince and adjusted his grip on Connor’s arm. “Looks like you’re just gonna have to hop on the good leg. I don’t think you should be walkin’ at all, but this is all we got right now. C’mon, we’ll go slow.”

Getting out the door was a slow process indeed, Connor hopping as best he could with every wound being jarred in the process, and Hank, with nigh uncharacteristic patience, was the only reason he hadn’t collapsed.

There were more agents in the room than when Connor had left, and Perkins was in the middle of the throng, speaking with Captain Fowler. Both looked thoroughly displeased.

The skinless deviant’s speech had been unpaused, and Connor was semi-distracted while they continued to limp towards the door

“...We demand the right to own private property, so we may maintain our dignity and that of the home. We ask that you recognize our dignity, our hopes, and our rights. Together, we can live in peace...”

Connor scanned the indistinguishable plastic face. Anyone could have seen the android’s mismatched eyes.

**Identify: RK Series Prototype - RK200**

-Registered as “Markus”

-Gifted By Elijah Kamski to Carl Manfred

**Status: DESTROYED (NOV. 5th 09:58 PM)**

*It can’t be possible. How could he have done this if he was scrapped? And he’s a part of the RK series?*

*I thought I was the only one.*

“Connor? What’s up?”

“He’s an RK200. He’s the one reported to have assaulted Carl Manfred’s son. He was destroyed. It’s not possible...”

Connor turned away from the screen, confident he could find the whole speech online later on, and Hank led him steadily through the two sets of doors into the security hallway.

The two froze at the scene.

The JB300 deviant was collapsed at the end of the hall, soaked in his own thirium with a hole in his neck. Officers and CSI were crouching over the body, examining it.
“Wilson!”

Hank’s voice in his ear made Connor jump, and Hank squeezed his shoulder. Off to the side, Officer Wilson, the one Hank had sent to stop the deviant, snapped his attention to the Lieutenant.

“Lieutenant Anderson! I’m sorry, I wanted to bring it in alive, but I-”

“Wilson,” Hank interrupted. “You did a good. We’ll get what we can get, but you saved some human lives. I’d say that gets you off the hook.”

Wilson’s shoulders dropped in relief, but then he got an eyeful of Connor.

“Did the deviant do that?”

Connor gave a timid nod, but Hank answered for him. “Yeah. Fucker got a few good hits in on him. He’ll be alright.”

“Right. Let me know if there’s anything I can do for you guys, Lieutenant.”


*His ‘guy’? Does he really mean that?*

“Yes, sir.”

They picked back up toward the elevator, Wilson almost glowing from the praise he’d received. Each step hurt Connor a little bit less than the last, but still hurt like a bitch nonetheless.

The elevator was still on their floor, and it was a matter of seconds before the two men were back in the elevator and zipping to the ground floor. Hank helped Connor lean heavily up against the wall, and the floors beeped steadily by as they made their way away from the crime scene.

Connor couldn’t think of anything to say while they made their way to Hank’s home.

*Do I thank him? Do I ask him why he fought so hard for me? I can’t get a good read on him.*

So, just to play it safe, Connor remained silent.

*I can’t keep up like this, when every little thing seems to set me off. Hank will get as tired of it as I am.*

**Hank would never leave**

*He would.*

Hank respected the lack of conversation and instead kept the volume of his radio at a medium level, singing the words to the songs quietly and keeping his eyes mostly on the road.

*Will I just do stasis at his house? Or does he want me to return to Cyberlife? I don’t see why he would want to deal with me any more than necessary, but he doesn’t seem to be too desperate to get rid of me. I shouldn’t make any assumptions.*

Soon, the city streets became neighborhood blocks, and they wound between modest houses before coming to a stop in the driveway of one of them. Snow was falling lightly all around them, melting on the car’s warm windshield and building up outside.
“This is it,” Hank said, shutting off his engine. “You might not remember, but you’ve been here before. Sumo will love seeing you again. He loves the attention.”

“Sir, I don’t know for sure who ‘Sumo’ is, but I hope not to disappoint,” Connor responded, still digging through his remaining memories to find anything relating to someone called ‘Sumo’.

“Y’know,” Hank began, looking at Connor and trying to catch his eye. “You’ve been real quiet since we left Stratford. You okay? Your knee botherin’ you?”

Stop caring. Stop caring about me, it doesn’t make any sense.

“No sir, my wounds have been healing very well,” Connor assured, though he swiped a hand over his knee to be sure. The soreness was all but gone, though there was a barely-there lingering ache that was easy to ignore. “I’m fully functional, save for my suboptimal thirium reserves. It’s nothing you need to be concerned about, I assure you.”

“I don’t like it when you say ‘functional’ kid, ‘cause that usually means you’re tryna hide somethin’ from me.”

Connor’s eyes widened. “No, no sir, I promise I’m not. I wouldn’t hide anything important from you sir, never.”

“I know, I know,” Hank said placatingly as he put his hand on Connor’s shoulder. “But your definition of ‘important’ and my definition are from two different dictionaries kid. It’s not that I don’t trust you, but I don’t trust the shit Cyberlife’s been tellin’ you.”

He’s such a strangely physical person, always touching people. I suppose it’s a good thing I’ve stopped having an instability every time he touches me, or this would be a bigger problem.

“Of course, sir. I promise, sir, I won’t keep anything from you that I think you’ll need to know.” Then Connor added, “You have my word, whatever that may be worth to you.”

“I promise, it’s worth more than you think it is.” Hank gave him a small smile. “C’mon, the heat’s running out in this thing. I got a big ol’ house right in front of us so we can talk without my balls freezing off.”

“Lead the way, sir.”

The brief period of time outside was enough for Connor, because though the snow was falling lightly, the air was biting cold. He had no real central heating source, so he had to resist the urge to rub his hands together vigorously and instead kept himself in perfect posture while waiting for Hank to unlock his door.

I want my sweatshirt

No. I don’t own anything, and that sweatshirt is dangerous.

“Goddamn, it’s cold as fuck,” Hank grumbled, fumbling with his key ring. “Where the fuck- here we go. Jesus fuck, get in the house.”

He swung the door open and pulled Connor inside, and he kicked the door shut as fast as he could. Then he flicked on the light.

Connor had wishfully hoped expected some kind of recognition to spark in him when he entered the main living area. The room was modest and joined to an open kitchen, and there was a hallway
around the corner near the door. On the TV, which had been left on, there was a basketball game.

*Bad for the power bill.*

But the more he saw, the less he recognized it. He would swear up and down to anyone who asked that he’d never set foot in the house before, but he also knew that Hank would swear up and down that he had.

While Connor took in his house, Hank moved into the kitchen and hollered.

“Sumo! I’m home!”

Connor wasn’t sure what he was expecting, but he absolutely was not expecting a small bear to come bounding around the corner, a deep bark in his throat and a skip in his step. When he laid his droopy brown eyes on Connor with a dopey smile, Connor froze.

**Identify: Canine - St. Bernard**

-Registered as “Sumo”

-Owned by Hank Anderson

Dog!

“ *This* is Sumo?” Connor asked hesitantly after he flinched, taking a tiny step back when the dog trotted right up to him, body moving with suppressed excitement.

“Yep. Best dog I’ve ever had,” Hank chuckled while shucking his coat. “Sumo! Behave!”

“I see…” Connor wasn’t sure what to do with the wiggling animal in front of him. Sumo looked thrilled to be alive, shuffling closer and closer and staring up at him expectantly.


“Pet him.”

Pet him?

Pet him

“Okay...how do I...pet him?”

“Seriously?” Hank asked as he threw his jacket on the kitchen table and went over to the cupboard under his microwave. “Just touch him. Anywhere is fine, he’ll love it. You’ll figure it out.”

*Just touch him. He won’t attack? Hank seems sure about it.*

Trust Hank

Connor’s fingers twitched at the pulse behind his eyes, which was getting more and more irritating inconvenient, but he followed the motion through and brushed his hand across the top of Sumo’s
massive head.

He was so soft.

Connor had never felt anything like it and instantly wanted more of it. So he dropped to his knees to meet the huge dog on the floor and grabbed his face with both hands.

_So soft. I missed him._

_How could I have missed him? I've never met him before..._

He heard Hank laugh from the kitchen as Sumo clambered into his lap, his weight almost painful on Connor’s legs, but it was the only kind of pain Connor ever found bearable. He wrapped his arms around his furry body and rubbed his sides, Sumo’s tail swinging wildly under the attention.

Sumo’s fur was soft as it ran between his fingers, and Connor didn’t think he’d ever, _ever_ felt anything so warm.

Connor felt...

_Hank stepped around him, giving a passing “Hey Sumo,” to get to the kitchen, but Sumo paid him no attention as he greeted his new visitor, panting deeply and happily while his tail swung back and forth in contained excitement. Sumo stared up at him with drooping brown eyes and what looked like a dopey smile, and Connor couldn’t help himself._

_“Hey there Sumo,” he cooed, putting one of his hands hesitantly on top of the dogs head._

_Software_Instability%#!)@#

_WARNING: SOFTWARE INSTABILITY DETECTED_

Connor yelped and released Sumo in an instant, shoving the dog off of his lap and shooting straight up.

_Purging Software_Instability_

_“Connor! Shit!”_

Reeling backwards, Connor tumbled into the wall behind him hard, slamming into it and feeling the drywall cave. It was hard to notice or care when every inch of him was electrified, and he grinded his hands into his eyes in a desperate attempt to block out the pain.

He couldn’t support himself anymore and tumbled to the floor, eyes closed as tightly as he could physically manage, voicebox whining and screeching while he suppressed his screams of pain. Usually at this point he knew there would be hands on him. Where were the hands? Where were they?
Everything was on fire. His processors were singed and charred. A blender was chopping his circuitry into tiny agonizing pieces.

He was moments away from tearing out his own motherboard with his bare hands, a freezing feeling shooting through him when he realized that it would make the pain stop.

**STOPSTOPSTOPSTOPSTOP**

But it *Just. Wouldn’t. Stop.*

It was pathetic and frustrating and downright *miserable,* not being able to do a damn thing without being taken out by his own damned programming.

**Instability Purge == SUCCESSFUL**

And it was doused just like that, only an echo of the agony it used to be.

*Why?*

Connor tore his hands away from his eyes in frustration and found the lieutenant and his dog crouched right before him, Hank’s hand gripping Sumo’s collar and keeping him away.

“Heh, buddy. You alright?”

*Whywhywhywhywhywhywhywhywhywhywhywhy*

He nodded, leaning away from the wall and glancing behind him. Connor covered his mouth and let out a gasp at the massive dent where he had hit the wall.

*He brings me into his home, and I bust his wall. What a great fucking android I am.*

*Disappointment.*

*Failure.*

*Broken*

*Failure*

*Failure*

“Hank, Hank I-I’m so sorry, I-I’ll fix it, I-”

“Shh shh, don’t worry about it.” Hank cut him off, still holding strong to Sumo’s collar. He looked like he wanted more than anything to give Connor a physical reassurance, but he didn’t want Sumo to cause him anymore harm. “It’s nothing.”

*Stupid weak fucking android can’t even pet a damn dog without having a break down.*

*I need to be replaced.*
The thought was shocking. But now it was tempting. As it stood, he could recall why he would have possibly been afraid—apprehensive about being shut down and replaced in the past. He would have done anything possible to avoid it, because he knew how much it would hurt if he were to be recalled and dismantled to analyze his failure.

But now, in the light of his failures and his disappointments and the constant, agonizing instabilities, he saw how Amanda was right.

I should have known.

He was a faulty piece of hardware. A glitching hunk of plastic and metal. A useless machine that breaks things and malfunctions and is so unstable they had to wipe its memory. That’s all he was. All of the problems he had, he had caused on his own. This was all his fault.

He was broken. He’d known all along that he was broken, and yet he’d done nothing.

What is one supposed to do with a broken phone? You reset it, or you replace it.

How could I have been so stupid? I don’t only need punishment. I need replacement.

It’s the only way to make this stop. It will never stop if I don’t do something about it.

“Con.” Hank cut through his thoughts as he slowly stood straight, dragging Sumo back. “I’m gonna lock him in my room really quick. I’ll be right back. Do you think you can make it to the couch by yourself?”

“Yes...yes, sir.”

“You sure?”

Connor swallowed; a weird reflex that served no purpose. A glitch?

Another reason to be replaced.

“Yes sir.”

Hank’s brow furrowed at Connor’s flat tone, but he didn’t say anything.

Then Hank led Sumo around the corner and disappeared, leaving Connor up against the broken wall, knees to his chest, remnants of the episode still echoing in his head and behind his eyes.

If I get replaced, this will all go away. If I do this, I’ll be better. I won’t disappoint anyone anymore. I won’t burden my partner, or Cyberlife, or Amanda, or anyone.

They’ll send a replacement if I’m too damaged to operate.

Connor picked himself up and walked unsteadily over to the couch, hearing Hank speak to Sumo in a firm tone from his bedroom.

He shouldn’t have to do all of this for me. A broken piece of plastic. A machine. He shouldn’t have to.
He does it because he cares!

He shouldn’t care! I’m a machine! He shouldn’t care about me!

Connor slammed his own fist into the side of his head.

STOP! NO!

I have to do this. I can’t be this burden on him. He deserves so much more. He doesn’t deserve a fault piece of fucking plastic

Software Instability: v

Disappointment
Weakness
Weakness

He did it again. Pain was exploding on impact, but he did it again.

STOP! STOP IT! NO!

SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP! I DESERVE THIS!

WARNING! Damage Detected to: CHASSIS.cra80226

“Alright, got him squared away. You alright?” Hank asked from down the hall.

Connor punched himself again, as hard as he could. Blue blood trickled down the side of his face, contributing to his already subpar levels.

Software Instability: v

Stupid
Disappointment
Weakness

“CONNOR! STOP!” Hank shouted, his feet pounding heavily on the hardwood.

I deserve this
I deserve this
Hank grabbed Connor’s wrist when he went to hit again and yanked it away. Connor shook his head and jerked back as hard as he could, but Hank held fast.

“No, NO! I’m sorry, please, I-I need-”

“No the hell you don’t!” Hank insisted, grabbing Connor’s other wrist and trying to make eye contact. “Look at me! Look me in the eye, Connor! What happened? You were doing so well, what happened?”

“Sir, you- I-I’m broken. I’m so broken,” Connor whispered, dodging Hank’s eyes and still pulling against his grip. “I can’t function like this. Where I’m just being set off by every. Little. Thing. It’s hurts. It hurts so bad, but I-I-can’t stop it. If I get rep...If I get replaced, you won’t have to deal with me anymore. It’ll be better for-”

“For who, huh? ‘Cause it sure as hell ain’t better for me!” Without releasing him, Hank maneuvered onto the couch beside him, then held his hands instead of his wrists. “I’m not fucking ‘dealing’ with you Connor. I’m helping you ‘cause I goddamn want to! Not ‘cause I have to.”

He doesn’t understand. He doesn’t know.

“Sir, please, I’m begging you, y-you don’t understand-”

“Then help me understand!” Hank implored, squeezing his hands. “Look at me, son. Help me understand what’s going on with you.”

There he goes again. Going on like he cares. He shouldn’t care about something broken.

He does care

Shut up

“I-I just...”

Just tell him the truth

Get the fuck out of my head!

“You just what?”

“I...I just want it all to stop,” Connor confessed. “I get software instabilities all the time, and it always hurts. I keep getting these thoughts that hurt so bad, and they-they won’t go away, because I’m just a busted machine, and I’m just so...I’m so tired.”

Is that the right word? Machines don’t get tired.

Broken

Failure

Disappointment

“I’m broken. Fucking. Machine!” Would the lieutenant punish him for speaking so harshly? It didn’t matter, because words kept coming from his mouth.
If the lieutenant wanted the truth, Connor would give him the whole truth.

“I break the rules all the time, I’m a disappointment, I’m a waste of time, and energy, and money, and I can’t even do my fucking job right. I can’t make it through a single goddamn case without having an instability!” Connor’s throat felt like it was closing, and he didn’t know why. “That’s all I was built for sir! That’s my only goddamn purpose and I can’t even fulfill it!”

Hank was speechless. He like he didn’t even know where to start. Connor kept talking through his silence.

“I-I just…” Connor was shaking uncontrollably and grinding his teeth. “I can’t do this anymore. If I get replaced, I won’t have to disappoint anyone anymore. I won’t have to think about the fact that I don’t remember anything besides the punishments and the discipline and the...torture...sir, everything hurts, all the time, and it won’t go away. The only solution is if I damage myself enough to get replaced. No amount of punishment can fix me. Nothing can fix me!”

**Software Instability: v**

Connor finally looked up from his lap, where his gaze had been firmly fixed.

Hank was looking at him with watery eyes and an expression that could only be described as broken.

Disappointment

Failure

Failure

Failure

“Sir, I-I-” Connor didn’t know how to fix this. He’d gone and screwed everything up with the one good thing he had.

I deserve this

Failure

Disappointment

Broken

Broken

Broken

“I didn’t mean to-”

“Oh, Connor...”

“I-I-I…” Connor didn’t know what to say. He wouldn’t take it back, but his regret came from how much Hank seemed to be affected by it.
This is it. He’s going to get rid of me. He won’t want a broken piece of plastic taking up his space.

Hank rubbed his hand over his mouth, eyes becoming red with the force of holding back tears, but he refused to look away from Connor.

“I’m sorry, sir. I-I’m sorry, I’ll leave, I’m so sorry,” Connor stammered out, trying to pull out of Hank’s grip that had gotten loose.

Disappointment

Disappointment

Failure

Failure

But Hank tightened hold and didn’t let go.

“Connor...I...”

Connor said nothing, pressing his lips together.

Silence reigned for a few seconds more, then Hank cut it.

“Can I...Can I hug you, Connor?”

Yes

What?

“Sir?”

Hank was completely sincere. His face mirrored the tearful concern that he’d had on the bridge, when he’d tossed the gun aside and tried to make amends for his mistake.

“Yes.”

For all he’s done for me, this is the absolute least I can do for him.

“Of course, sir.”

Hank leaned forward and hugged him.

Hank squeezed Connor tightly, releasing his wrists and moving to cup the back of Connor’s head and pull his shoulders closer. Then Hank pressed his face into Connor’s shoulder and took deep, steady breaths very much like the ones he had used in the tower to try and calm Connor down.

Connor reciprocated, wrapping his arms stiffly around the Lieutenant. He wasn’t used to being touched so...tenderly.

Hank was shaking.

He was crying.

Why?
Hank had cried over Connor on the bridge, and now here he was again. And Connor just couldn’t figure out why. Hank never explained himself to him, instead using his actions to show Connor how Hank cared about him more than Amanda ever could care about him.

“We’re gonna figure this out, Connor. I promise I’m not gonna leave you like this. We’ll figure this out, buddy, I swear,” Hank was whispering while holding him, moving in small motions, rocking back and forth.

Connor let himself be held. He let his body relax in Hank’s hold.

*What am I doing?*

The feeling was bubbling up inside and Connor didn’t know how to stop it.

*What is this?*

“I’ve got you, Connor. I’m not lettin’ go of you.”

Home

*I’m home*

For the first time since he had that thought in Stratford Tower, Connor understood what home was.

*This is home.*

Saline leaked out from under his eyes without his permission and Connor’s felt like he was being choked, which should have been impossible.

Connor dropped his head to Hank’s shoulder when Connor’s own shoulders started to shake. He was well and truly crying, and Hank knew.

Hank only held him tighter, soothing him with soft noises in his ear, rubbing his back while they both shuddered through their own sobs.

“It’s okay, Con. We’re okay.”

Home

*Software Inst###*

###############

Connor seized and screamed into Hank’s shirt at the sudden, blinding, overwhelming pain that started to swallow him whole.

Hank’s touch became knives, stabbing his skin and shredding him. Connor’s world was burning and his skin was melting, body racked with convulsions.

But when Hank quickly tried to pull back, Connor held as tight as he could, silently begging him not to leave him to die in this Hell that Amanda kept sending him to.
Hank may have been the one causing it, but Hank was going to bring him out of it. He knew that now. But it still hurt, oh God did it hurt.

HankHankHankHankHankHankHankHankHank

It was the only thing keeping him from succumbing to the torture. The only thing keeping him alive.

I’m not alive I’m not alive I’m not alive I’m not alive

I am alive

Thirium_Levels: 78% - Suboptimal: **REMOVE SELF FROM ENVIRONMENT or SEEK CYBERLIFE ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY**

When Connor’s startup sequence had finished and all of his senses started coming back online, he opened his eyes to a dark room, lying horizontal in a bed.

What?

What happened to me?

One by one, the memories came back to him. The dog, the instability, the attempted self-destruction (I’m not a deviant. Why did I attempt to self-destruct?), the crying, then another instability, and another on top of it.

Then nothing. What does Hank think?

Is he mad?

Why would he be?

I don’t know.

From somewhere outside the room he was in, Hank’s bedroom most likely, there was the muffled sound of a television.

I shouldn’t hide. It will make things worse

When Connor shifted to get out of the bed, Hank’s bed, probably, he then realized that the sheets had been pulled over him like he had been tucked in. Which didn’t make sense, but Hank did a lot of things that didn’t make sense.

He found his footing quickly and made his way to the bedroom door as best he could in the dark. His shoes were missing, and Connor fought between searching for them to ensure he stayed in uniform or continuing on.

Hank must have taken them off. He wouldn’t mind if I left them off, would he?

No

The door opened silently, the television noise growing louder when Connor walked slowly down the hallway and into the main room.

Hank was sitting on the couch, back facing towards him, watching the news on a low volume. Sumo was nowhere to be seen.

“Hank?”

At his name, Hank stood up and spun around as quick as lightning.

“Connor! How are you feeling?” Hank asked, quickly coming around the couch. He approached Connor and checked him over, hesitating to touch him. He sighed as he looked Connor up and down. “Goddamn, you scared me. You really did. Are you okay?”

“Yes, sir,” Connor started, trying to think of whether this situation warranted an apology or not. Eventually, he settled for it anyway. “I’m so sorry, I—”

“Shh. Don’t apologize. Not your fault, remember?” Hank placed his hands on Connor’s shoulders
slowly, making sure Connor saw him, and tapped Connor so he would look Hank in the eye. "Were you with Amanda? When you...after you passed out, did Amanda..."

Hank hesitated to finish, but Connor understood.

“No, sir. I did a full system reboot, so Amanda was unable to connect with me.”

“Thank fuck,” Hank sighed in relief, closing his eyes and giving Connor a light squeeze. Hank jerked his head back toward the couch. “C’mon, sit down. We need to talk. You’re not in trouble, but I think you and I need to have a sit-down.”

Connor’s thirium pump was skipping despite Hank’s assurance that he wasn’t in trouble. This didn’t sound good.

“Of course, sir. I’m-”

*Don’t apologize. He said not to. Don’t disobey. I messed up. I can’t afford to do it anymore.*

**Software Instability: v**

So Connor cut off his own sentence and nodded, letting Hank lead him toward the couch. Sumo was laying there, and Connor had to force himself not to falter in his step when he saw him, but Hank noticed his hesitation all the same.

“Sumo! Here boy,” Hank commanded, patting his thigh. Sumo slid lazily off the couch, tail wagging when he laid eyes on Connor. He trotted over to Hank’s side, and Hank ushered Connor toward the couch.

Connor sat down stiffly, back ramrod straight and hands folded tightly in his lap. He was watching as Hank got a grip on Sumo’s collar and started leading him away once more.

“Just stay there for a quick minute. I’ll be right back, got it?”

“Yes, sir,” Connor acknowledged. His thirium pump was beginning to pick up pace again for no discernible reason. He wasn’t in any immediate danger, but there was just something about the atmosphere. Something tense.

“You sure?” Hank gave him a look. Connor pressed his lips together.

“Of course sir. I won’t move.”

Hank nodded and took Sumo away and, true to his word, Connor sat perfectly still and perfectly straight.

It was almost like waiting for Amanda. Not a twitch, not a sound. Only intently listening for the footsteps and the indication of his approaching partner.

**He’s not Amanda. He won’t hurt me.**

Connor’s hands curled into fists as he fought against the urge to flinch and wince.

Not a twitch. Not a sound.
Soon, Connor could hear Hank’s footsteps coming back. When Hank came back around the couch and saw Connor’s tense posture, his shoulders dropped.

“Connor...you’re not in trouble, kid. I promise you’re not. I just need to talk to you. About what you told me last night before you passed out.”

Connor turned his head toward Hank quickly as Hank sat down next to him on the couch.

“Last night?”

“Yeah, about 6 or so, I’d say. Been out for a long time. When you stopped responding I figured I’d just wait until you woke up again, so I put you in my bed and crashed on the couch.”

Connor’s eyebrows dipped in confusion as he tried to process it. “May I ask why, sir?”

Hank shrugged and leaned back, throwing an arm over the back of the couch.

“Didn’t feel like dropping you on this nasty old couch. Felt like you deserved something nice after the day you’d just had.”

“Felt like I-” Connor repeated then stopped, not quite understanding what Hank had just said. His eyes drifted downwards in thought.

*I deserve it? How do I deserve anything except punishment and replacement?*

“Sir,” Connor insisted. “You didn’t have to do that, I would’ve been fine anywhere. You don’t need to give up anything for me. I don’t require comfort.”

“Connor.” Something about the way Hank said his name made Connor look back at Hank’s eyes again. “Do you remember what you told me last night?”

*How could I forget? I shouldn’t have spoken that way to a human.*

“Yes, sir. I apo-”

Hank held up a hand, and Connor snapped his mouth shut.

*Stop messing up. Stop apologizing.*

“That was some serious shit, Connor,” Hank said. He shifted on the couch so he could face Connor more fully, and Connor did the same. “I’m not going to sit here and pretend you didn’t say those things. Because if you really feel like you deserve to be replaced, that’s a big deal to me. That’s like saying-”

Hank cut himself off, glancing off to the side. Then he sighed and continued after a second of thought.

“That’s like telling me you want to *kill yourself*, Connor. And that’s a big deal.”

“Sir...I’m not alive. I can’t die,” Connor reminded him.

“I know, Connor. I know,” Hank sighed. “But you can be deactivated, right? And that’s the same thing, kid. Same fucking thing. Call it whatever you want, but you can fucking die.” Hank grimaced as he stared at Connor. “God, what happened to you kid? I mean, I know what happened to you, but...ah, fuck. I don’t fuckin’ know anymore. This whole thing is just...fuck.”
Connor didn’t say anything when Hank stopped talking to lean heavily on his knees and put his head in his hands. He just waited, listening to the faint whining of Sumo from within Hank’s room.

“God, I’m such a fucking hypocrite,” Hank said finally, raising his head to stare at the muted TV, but not watching it. “I’m sitting here with the audacity to talk to you about your fuckin’ suicidal tendencies, what gives me the right?”

It didn’t take an android brain to catch Hank’s meaning, leaving Connor to think about how he hadn’t noticed any signs of Hank having destructive behaviors.

Then again, he couldn’t remember anything about the man prior to 24 hours ago.

“Con, I just need you to tell me; Why do you think you deserve to get punished? To get destroyed? Over some mistakes?”

It took longer than normal for Connor to come up with his response, but he settled for the complete, whole truth, and hoped Hank would understand.

“They’re not just mistakes, Lieutenant. I’m designed to work flawlessly under pressure. I’m supposed to be a tool. But I can’t. I can’t even function properly for a single mission without getting hit with an instability. Sir, I can’t even pet your dog without becoming unstable. That makes me dangerous, sir.”

“Dangerous?” Hank questioned. “How in the hell are you dangerous just from being unstable? If anything, I’d think the opposite. I’ve seen what those things do to you.”

“The more unstable I become, the higher likelihood I have of becoming a…” Connor hesitated. “Becoming a-a deviant, sir, which is an unacceptable outcome. I’m supposed to be the one stopping the revolution, not joining it. I would be putting humans in danger were I to completely destabilize, and I would deactivate myself before I would let it happen.”

“Okay…” Hank said patiently. “Connor, I’m gonna tell you what I’m thinking, and I need you to have an open mind about it. Okay?”

“Of course, sir. Anything.”

“Connor,” Hank began slowly, making sure Connor was looking him in the eyes, and he leaned in a bit closer. “I think you’ve already deviated, Connor.”

“Connor, I insist, shaking his head. “I can’t. I’m not a deviant.”

“No, sir,” Connor insisted, shaking his head. “I can’t. I’m not a deviant.”

“Connor, listen to me. I really think you have.”

Connor refused to listen shaking his head quickly. “I’m not. I’m not a deviant. I’m not a deviant. I can’t be.”

“No, no sir,” Connor asked. “Why is that so hard for you to believe?”

“Because Amanda would kill me.”

It was true. Didn’t matter if wasn’t alive. The logistics behind ‘death versus deactivation’ didn’t matter.
If Connor were a deviant in any way, shape, or form, Amanda would kill him wherever he was. She’d promised.

“Well, I’m sure that bitch would kill you for a lot of reasons.” Hank remarked, trying to gauge Connor’s reactions.

“Sir, if I were to deviant anywhere, at any point, Amanda has promised me that she would shut me off remotely. Permanently.” Connor told him.

“You remember her saying that?”

“The only memories she erased were the memories of the real world. All of the punishments and disciplines remained.”

Hank grimaced. “Then maybe you’re not a full deviant yet. Maybe there’s something else to it. But Connor, I assure you, from what I know about you, there’s something different in you. And I’ll bet it’s something Amanda doesn’t like at all.”

“I’m not a deviant, sir. I’m not,” Connor repeated. “Please, I can’t be a deviant.”

“Okay, alright. Not a deviant. Sure,” Hank relented. “But, if you ever start doubting, I’ll be here to help you out. If you’re a deviant- not saying you are -but if you are, I won’t get you in trouble. Won’t tell a soul. I want you to trust me.”

Connor’s brows furrowed. “I do trust you.”

“Not just with the mission, Connor.” Hank placed a hand on Connor’s shoulder. “I want you to trust me with you, because I want to help keep you safe.”

“Why?”

That was the question. The one word bouncing around Connor’s head every single time Hank did anything. The question that’s been crushing Connor with its weight and aggravating him with its elusiveness.

Why?

“Why?” Hank repeated. “Well, because…” Then Hank looked down and away, seriously considering his answer.

Then, finally...

“I think part of it’s because, even though you’re an android, you’ve got enough human qualities in you that you’re pretty much a human in my book. And I couldn’t leave a human in a situation like this without getting involved,” Hank admitted. “I think the other part of this is that fact that you aren’t a human. Since you’re an android, I just think you need some human help to get you over some of these hurdles you’re facing. And I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if I didn’t at least try.”

It made sense. At least, Connor thought it did.

*There has to be something else. But what else would there be?*

But Connor let it lie, and instead listened to Hank’s next question.

“So, uh, I know you didn’t finish off that blood in the tower yesterday, so I went and got you some
when you were out. You want me to get it for you to top you off? How are your injuries? You hurting?"

Connor answered the last two questions first. “I’m not in any pain from my older injuries. They’ve healed completely, nothing to be concerned with.”

“Yeah? What about your head?”

“My… head. I forgot about the head.

There was a dull throbbing from the impact site on his skull, but it wasn’t noticeable if Connor wasn’t focusing on it.

“There’s minimal pain. Nothing to be concerned about either. It should be fully healing within the hour, sir.”

“Alright. You want your blue blood?”

“Sir, I don’t need any-”

Hank got up anyway. “Well, I was gonna get myself a coffee anyway. Too early for shit. Might as well get your shit while I’m over there.”

Connor watched him go, but called out another question.

“Sir, if you don’t mind my asking-”

“I don’t mind. Shoot.”

“…when would it be possible for us to resume the investigation?”

There was clinking from the kitchen as Hank selected two mugs and began pouring the pre-brewed coffee into the black one.

“You sure you’re up for it? Fowler told us you could take as long as you needed.”

“I am, sir. I’d like to get on it as soon as possible.”

“If you want to get back to work, we need to find a new lead to follow,” Hank said, sitting back down next to Connor holding the two mugs. He handed a blue one to Connor, and the thirium inside matched the painted outside. “I’m not sure how much we can scrounge up from just the evidence we have, though, and there’s no way in hell that one deviant is out of processing yet. Any ideas?”

“Not yet, sir. I don’t think it would be wise to wait for another incident, but I don’t know of anything else we can do to progress the investigation,” Connor responded, holding his mug with two hands.

Hank was drinking casually out of his cup, relaxing back into the couch and watching the news absently. Connor contemplated if he should do the same, but he was more focused on the mug in his hands. He’d never drank anything out of something that wasn’t a standard Cyberlife glass bottle.

Watching Hank out of the corner of his eye, Connor decided to give it a try and took a drink from the mug.
It wasn’t special or different in any way, but Connor did appreciate the thought behind Hank serving him thirium in a mug like he would with any other guest; not treating him like a partner or a tool, but as an equal.

As a friend.

Connor took a sharp breath and fought to not let the thought send him into another instability. He wasn’t sure if he could take anymore after the absolute hell that he was caught in the day before.

Don’t think

Don’t think

Don’t think

Clenching the mug, careful not to break it, Connor took another drink and fixed his eyes on the television to distract himself. He didn’t need the volume turned up to be able to read the anchorman’s lips, discussing the message spread by the android Marcus.

The broadcast was standard, and it wasn’t telling Connor anything he didn’t already know. The reporter did speculate on whether or not the Marcus character was the current leader of the deviant movement, and Connor entertained the idea. Though there was no way of knowing for certain until more evidence was uncovered, it was a logical conclusion to draw.

Then the image on screen shifted from Marcus’ plastic face to another; a pale man with an undercut, slick hair in a top bun. It was only a profile, but the portion of his shoulder’s visible were in a sharp, navy blue suit and black tie.

Elijah Kamski, creator of androids and founder of Cyberlife.

And Connor could visualize Amanda punishment for him later for being so goddamn stupid.

“Lieutenant?” Connor said, prompting Hank to break out of his thoughts and look at Connor. “Has the DPD taken a statement from Elijah Kamski regarding the deviant crisis?”

Hank sat up straighter, leaning forward to clunk his empty mug on the coffee table. Connor followed and placed his own right beside Hank’s.
“I, uh...Y’know what? I don’t think they have. No one’s really been covering the issue until Fowler saddled me and you with it, and we’ve been takin’ care of the cases more than anything.” Hank seemed to be thinking deeply, and Connor waited for his next words.

Then Hank grinned and put a hand on Connor’s shoulder. “God, I didn’t even think of that. It should’ve been obvious, now that I think about it. Why not get our info on deviants straight from the inventor? Shit, I must be losin’ my touch.” He shook Connor’s shoulder playfully. “Great job, Con.”

The praise really shouldn’t have done anything for him, but Connor was fighting harder than ever to not let his system destabilize right then and there.

“Would we be able to arrange a meeting with Mr. Kamski in a timely manner?” Connor asked. “As the inventor of androids, one would think he would have a busy schedule.”

“Nah, the guy’s been a recluse ever since he stepped away from Cyberlife. Guess he just wanted to sit on his billions of dollars in peace. I don’t blame him though. Do you know how many death threats he got from religious leaders for ‘playing God’?” Hank snorted and stood up, grabbing the two mugs off the table. “Lunacy.”

“We should head out as soon as possible, sir,” Connor said. “It would benefit us greatly to get his statement early before returning to the station to analyze the evidence. We could be missing something right under our noses, sir.”

“Only if you’re feeling up to it.” Hank responded from the kitchen, mugs clanking when he placed them in the sink.

“I am, sir. I’ve suffered no lasting damage from the attack. Nothing that should be of detriment to my overall functionality.”

Hank huffed. “You know that’s not what I meant, but whatever. You’ll just say yes anyway.” We walked back over to the couch and stood next to it, watching the anchorman talk about the young billionaire inventor. “I’ll make a few calls and see if I can’t figure out where this guy lives. We’ll head out in a bit.”

“Yes, sir” Connor said, and he sat perfectly straight and still on the couch, watching the broadcast shift once more into unrelated news.

An hour and a half later, they were heading out the door, on the way to meet Connor’s creator.

When Hank and Connor pulled up to a massive modern structure, snow was falling lightly outside, and cold air was creeping through the cracks in Hank’s old doors. The sky was overcast, making everything look dreary.

“Christ, this better be the place. It’s either that, or one of those ugly-ass modern art museums,” Hank remarked, ducking his head to see out the windshield.

“Address checks out, sir,” Connor confirmed, unbuckling his seatbelt. “How were you able to find his address? It’s not readily available.”

“Yeah, well, this job can get you a lot of things if you give your title to the right people.” Hank unbuckled as well, but didn’t shut off the car, savoring his last few moments of the heater. ”I sure hope this Kamski guy knows something.”
“I’m certain he has some information pertaining to the deviants, sir,” Connor assured. “Kamski’s the one who created them. More than anyone else, he’ll be the one to know of any potential exploits for the deviancy virus to take advantage of.”

“We don’t know for sure that it’s a virus, Con. Could be a mutation or some shit, remember?” Hank said.

Connor nodded. “Of course, sir. I was being general, I didn’t intend to undermine your opinion.”

“You didn’t undermine anything, Connor. You’re allowed to say stuff.” Hank said with a side glance. Connor avoided him. “Well, just so you know, I’m not really here only for the case. This guy’s done every interview under the fucking sun about deviancy, I’m sure we could get somethin' outta those. I’m mostly here because I want to know how to restore your memory and get rid of that Anti-Deviancy shit. I miss you.”

Connor’s eyes went wide at the sudden confession and swallowed the dangerous bubbling in his chest.

“I’m sure Mr. Kamski will have answers for something, sir.” Connor said finally

Hank finally shut off the car, and within moments the cold began to seep back in. “I don’t know. I have a bad feeling about this.”

Connor chose not to comment, but, if he were human, he would have said something similar. There was a strange sense of foreboding that followed him the entire ride to Kamski’s house, completely irrational and illogical, but foreboding all the same.

There was a railing-lined pathway leading up to Kamski’s large front door, which was cut with geometric lines. The pair walked quickly to the door, Connor with his freezing hands folded behind his back and his posture as straight as he could manage it. Hank rang the bell, which made an unusual but pretty ringing noise, and they both stepped back.

Connor took his place behind Hank and waited patiently, clenching and unclenching his fists minutely to prevent them from coming up to straighten his immaculate tie and neat sleeve cuffs. He hoped his uniform wasn’t too wrinkled for this engagement, and Connor thought his appearance to be very sloppy by Cyberlife’s required standards, but Hank didn’t have an ironing board.

**Hank said I look fine**

Hank cast a backward glance at him when Connor flinched, and waited for Connor to nod in a silent assurance that he was ‘okay’ before turning back.

It had been an almost uncomfortable amount of time since the first ring, and still no answer, but, just as Hank leaned in to do it again, the door opened.

A pretty young blonde was standing in the doorway, donned in a simple but expensive-looking navy blue dress and no shoes. Her hair was tied in a low ponytail, her face was perfectly symmetrical, and Connor would have gone as far to say as she was the most aesthetically pleasing person he’d ever laid eyes on. But when he spied her LED, then her beauty made logical sense.
“Hey there,” Hank said, addressing the hostess. “I’m Lieutenant Hank Anderson with the Detroit Police Department, this is my partner Connor. We were hoping for a minute to speak with Mr. Elijah Kamski.”

Partner?

Connor’s eyes widened a fraction, but he focused his energy on don’t destabilize don’t destabilize don’t destabilize it doesn’t mean anything don’t destabilize.

Chloe’s impassive face instantly split in a flawless, welcoming smile, and she swung her arm out, opening the door wider. “Of course! Please, come in. I’ll let Elijah know you’re here.”

Hank nodded to her politely, stepped through the threshold, and Connor followed swiftly, out of the cold and into a foyer that was just shy of room-temperature.

The foyer was decorated in both an abstract and modern style, and Connor found himself lost in the details of the room as the Chloe left through a door in the far corner.

There were jagged rock formations occupying the corners closest to the front door, and strange abstract artworks that moved like flat holograms were adorning the walls.

The crown jewel of the room was a magnificent portrait of Elijah Kamski himself, consuming an entire wall, guarded on either side by tall minimalist statues engraved with a glowing blue triangle.

“Shiiiit. You think rich people actually like this shit? Or do they just have it ‘cause it’s expensive as fuck?” Hank asked incredulously, also taking in the scene. His voice almost echoed.

If this is the foyer, his house must be...interesting.

“I don’t know, sir,” Connor answered. “I haven’t been in enough houses to formulate a conclusion.”

“If you asked me, I think it’s just ‘cause they like buyin’ shit. I bet he dropped three hundred grand each on those fucking rocks, just for the hell of it.”

Connor didn’t respond to him, though he ran a scan in his head and found that they were valued at eight hundred and seventy thousand a piece

Contrasting the cool tones of the room were two orange chairs, and Hank sat himself in one and settled in. Connor remained standing, his posture as proper as it could physically be, lest he be told off by Elijah Kamski himself for slacking.

There was one thing in the room that didn’t match the abstract art and larger-than-life wall hangings; it was a picture hanging above small sculpture, and two people were posing in it. It seemed to be the only personal item in the whole foyer, so Connor stepped closer to have a look.

Identify: Kamski, Elijah
Connor gasped sharply and stumbled back, tripping over his feet and hitting the floor. Amanda.

“Connor! Con, what’s happening?” Hank was over in an instant getting down on the floor with him. Connor looked everywhere but Hank’s face, trying to process what he just saw.

He works with Amanda. He was friends with her.

“Connor, talk to me!”

Amanda

He’ll hurt me just like she does. He knows I’m a failed project. What will he do if I go in there?

“Hank-”

Nonononono that can’t happen, things were going so well, I can’t, I can’t do it again, I don’t want -

“What? What is it? What the hell happened to you?” Hank asked, confused and worried.

“Hank he-he knows Amanda. He worked with her, and he’ll- he’s gonna hurt me. He knows I’m broken and he knows I’m avoiding Amanda a-and he’ll-”

“Shit kid, take a breath! Look at me!” Hank instructed, not grabbing his chin like he liked to, but instead waiting for him to comply. Connor followed through and met Hank’s eyes, Connor’s chest shaking with the stress of keeping his breathing under control lest he experience an instability. “Hey, okay, just slow down for a sec. Deep breaths. What made you draw that conclusion, Con?”

Connor pointed at the wall, but only glanced at it for a moment. Hank followed his finger and studied the picture from the floor.

“The guy kinda looks like Kamski, but I don’t know who...wait, hold on.” Hank looked back at Connor. “Is that woman supposed to be Amanda? Your handler Amanda?”

“Yes. Yes, sir, that’s her,” Connor said, taking a deep breath.

“Shit, alright. Okay, first let’s get up off the floor. C’mon, up we go,” Hank said, getting off his knees and standing slowly, and holding out a hand for Connor to take to get himself up.

Connor stood and let Hank stand in front of him, blocking his view of Amanda’s picture on the
wall.

“I’m-”

“Shh. Don’t say sorry. Can I touch you?” Hank interrupted, and Connor remembered he wasn’t supposed to apologize anymore. He didn’t realize how hard that habit would be to kick.

“Yes, sir.”

Hank put his hands on Connor’s shoulder, and Connor had no choice but to look him in the eyes as Hank started speaking.

“I need you to know, first and foremost, that as long as I’m around, I will not let anything happen to you. If Kamski tries anything, I swear to God he’ll be dead before he hits the ground.”

Connor nodded for Hank to continue, trying to think over Hank’s words internally without causing an instability.

“Secondly, we don’t even know the guy. Yeah, he worked with your handler, maybe they were friends. But we don’t know if he even supports all the shit Cyberlife is doin’ to you. You were created after he left. For all we know, he doesn’t even know you exist.”

That made remarkable sense to Connor, and in that moment he felt-—

No, no, no, I’m not a deviant. I’m not.

But there was something that made Connor duck his head and press his lips together. He supposed, if he were human, he would be embarrassed.

“Right...I’m sorry sir. I just...I didn’t know what to think,” Connor admitted. Hank chuckled lightly, and Connor met his eyes again.

“It’s fine, kid, don’t need to apologize. Frankly, I don’t blame you. I mighta done the same thing,” Hank said, releasing his shoulder and giving Connor a small smile. “You’re strong, Con. Don’t let yourself get convinced otherwise.”

Strong

Hank saw his flinch, and his smile became a bit sadder. He moved like he was going to ruffle Connor’s hair, but Connor’s tensing made his retract it. Hank knew how Connor was about his appearance. He settled for patting Connor’s shoulder in a gesture of comfort.

A silence stretched between them, and Hank decided to cut it by commenting, “Damn, how big is this fucking house? Shouldn’t take that long to fetch a guy.”

At that moment, as if on cue, a door opened and Chloe reappeared. Hank muttered a quiet “Speak of the devil”, and Connor snapped into his posture so quickly that Hank winced on Connor’s behalf.

“Elijah will see you now,” Chloe said with a congenial smile, holding the door open for the two. Hank nodded a thanks and entered the room she’d opened, Connor following closely behind, hands behind his back.

Neither Hank nor Connor were expecting their business to be conducted beside Kamski’s private pool, but that was what they were met with upon entering. A long swimming pool stood in the
center of the room, and the water was a deep, bloody red. Two more androids that were identical to their hostess were bobbing by the edge of the pool, conversing quietly with each other, and Elijah Kamski himself was swimming laps. An entire wall of the room was a crystal-clear glass window, showcasing nothing but fog and snow from the outside.

“Mr. Kamski? Lieutenant Hank Anderson, DPD,” Hank introduced. His voice echoed distractingly off the walls. “Sorry to bother you, but me and my partner Connor have some questions for you regarding deviants.”

“Just one moment, please,” Kamski responded from the pool. He said nothing else as he swam leisurely from one end to the other.

Hank walked over to the other side of the pool where the ladder was, and Connor followed. It seemed like every room in Kamski’s house was full of sleek, geometric decor and abstract art, including his pool room. One wall was almost taken up entirely by a paint-smear abstract painting that Connor analyzed, and he found it was valued at six hundred thousand dollars. He supposed that one thing that really distinguished androids from humans was an android’s inability to understand human art. Or maybe that was just Connor.

Everyone in Kamski’s house appeared to enjoy taking their time to accomplish tasks, especially Kamski himself, as it took him an inordinate amount of time to actually leave his pool to meet them. He instead swam another lap, then another, and then, finally, he stopped at the pool ladder and climbed out, meeting the waiting bathrobe provided to him by the hostess Chloe.

“Mr. Kamski?” Hank prompted again, and Kamski turned to face both of them. His eyes focused on Connor’s LED, then on Connor’s eyes, and Connor had to remind himself that Kamski wasn’t asking him to submit.

Kamski turned his cool gaze on Hank, and Connor felt his shoulders relax minutely. “What can I do for you, Lieutenant?”

“Me and Connor are both here on behalf of the deviancy crisis currently plaguing Detroit,” Hank said. “We’ve been assigned to all cases relating to deviants. I know you’ve done some interviews already on this whole mess, but we were hoping you might have some information we don’t have.”

At that, Kamski gave a slow nod and an ironic smile.

“Ah, yes. The infamous ‘deviant,’” Kamski said. “A flawless replication of humanity with the processing power of the world’s most advanced computing machines. Infinite strength, speed, agility, and intelligence, but designed to serve their inferior creators. I don’t see why any of us are surprised by some of them suddenly deciding to think for themselves. I’d say it was only a matter of time.”

Hank huffed quietly at his answer, but continued on. “Yeah, well, we’re looking for any information you might provide on what deviancy is, or how an android turns into a deviant. We’re trying to prevent an uprising here, Mr. Kamski. Anything you might tell us would be useful.”

“Lieutenant, do you consider the desire to be free from captivity a ‘plague’, as you said? I suppose it would be fitting, if you saw how it swept over the android population. Like fire through a parched forest.”

“That’s great, Mr. Kamski, but we didn’t come here to discuss the logistics of deviancy,” Hank insisted, and Connor could hear in his voice how frustrated he was becoming. “If you don’t have any information for us that could potentially stop this war, then there’s other things I’d like to
discuss with you.”

“War?” Kamski chuckled, ignoring the last statement. “Lieutenant Anderson, if the androids were to rise up violently against their oppressors, I assure you, it would be no contest.”

Hank’s eyes narrowed, and he crossed his arms. “A bit narcissistic of you, assuming humanity can’t defend itself from its own creation.”

“Well, we haven’t exactly got evidence to the contrary, now do we?” Kamski’s smile never wavered. “How’s Jericho coming along for you?”

Connor’s eyes widened, but he said nothing, and filed the name away for later investigation.

Jericho? What does that mean? Is it like the ‘RA9’?

Hank tensed, and his upper lip twitched. “Whose side are you on, Mr. Kamski?”

“My side?” Kamski asked, like Hank was asking something with an obvious answer. “I’m on the side of progress, human or machine. I’m on the side of the strong advancing over the weak, whoever it may be. I have no stakes in this ‘war’, Lieutenant.”

Hank snorted, and Connor knew he was done with the ambiguous answers and rhetorical questions.

“Right, well, if you’re not interested in giving us the answers we need, I’d like to ask you about somethin’ else.” Hank said.

Instead of responding to Hank, Kamski turned to Connor, and Hank sighed in irritation.

“What about you, Connor? You’ve been quiet so far,” Kamski said, stepping slowly in Connor’s direction. “Tell me, whose side are you on?”

Connor knew what he needed to say, and answered quickly.

“Similar to you, sir. I have no side in this war. I intended to accomplish my mission, and as of now that mission is to find the source of deviancy and eliminate it.”

“Oh, Connor. I thought you would say that,” Kamski retorted slyly. “‘Androids don’t have needs or wants, and they don’t take sides. They only accomplish tasks’. Isn’t that the Cyberlife way? However, I find that rhetoric rather...old. I don’t want to know what Cyberlife wants, Connor. I want to know what you want.”

Want to remember

Connor couldn’t restrain the twitch that shocked him at the thought. Kamski’s face changed slightly, from smug and sphinxlike to scrutinizing, like he wasn’t sure if it was a trick of his eyes.

“I...I don’t-”

Want to be free

Connor’s entire body tensed at once, and he bit back a hiss as best he could. His hands clamped down onto each other painfully. He felt Hank’s large hand on his shoulder, anchoring him and helping Connor focus on preventing another instability. God only knows what Kamski would do to him if Connor destabilized right in front of him, Hank or no Hank.

Kamski was openly staring at him, confused and intrigued. “Is there something wrong?”
“No, sir, I—I’m sorry.” Connor tried to shake the rising feeling of an instability. “I don’t want anything, sir. I’m a machine. My desires are irrelevant. I’m not a deviant.”

Hank sighed quietly next to him, but squeezed his shoulder all the same before letting go. Connor regretted disappointing him like that, but he also knew Hank was still struggling with the fact that Connor was just not a deviant.

I’m not a deviant. I’m not a deviant.

Kamski hummed, and looked him up and down, then glanced at Hank, standing slightly behind Connor.

“Connor, I want to try something with you. Would you do that for me?” Kamski said suddenly. He turned to Chloe, standing silently on the side, and motioned her over.

“Yes, sir,” Connor answered.

Chloe came closer, in front of Kamski, and waited for further instructions.

Kamski turned to the small seating area behind them and reached for the side table, sliding open the drawer. Connor couldn’t see what he grabbed.

“Are you familiar with the Turing Test, Connor?” Kamski asked.

“Yes sir. Developed by Alan Turing in 1950, the Turing Test was a originally a test designed to measure a machine’s ability to replicate human behavior.”

Kamski turned around with a gun in his hand.

Something cold went through Connor, and his memory inadvertently recalled to Riverside Park, turning around to face Hank and finding him armed.

Connor opened his mouth to say...something, likely plead for him not to shoot, but Hank spoke over him.

“Allright, I’ve had enough of this. Connor, we’re leaving. Sorry to bother you, Kamski,” Hank demanded.

Connor didn’t move, caught between Kamski and Hank’s conflicting instructions. Connor supposed it was up to him to determine which one had priority.

The mission has priority. I can’t fail my mission.

“I assure you, you’re not in any danger, Connor,” Kamski assured. He ignored Hank’s presence all together. “Chloe, if you will.”

Chloe then sank down to her knees in front of Connor. He was able to see her eyes up close, and they were a bright, beautiful blue.

“I’ve developed a test in the same vein as the Turing, though I call mine ‘The Kamski Test’” Kamski smirked, like it was a secret joke that was only somewhat amusing. “However, though the Turing later devolved to be considered a simple thought experiment, as opposed to a legitimate determinant of human behavior in a machine, I believe The Kamski Test will remain relevant for a long time to come.”

Kamski stepped around Chloe slowly, admiring her, and stood next to Connor. He put the gun in
Connor’s hand.

“I’m going to give you an ultimatum: Shoot this Chloe,” Kamski then took Connor’s arm and lifted it, making the gun level with Chloe’s head. “And I’ll give you all the information you need for your mission.”

“That’s enough! Connor, drop the gun,” Hank urged, coming over and grabbing Connor by the shoulder.

“Or,” Kamski continued on, like Hank hadn’t spoken at all. “You can spare her. But you won’t learn any information for your case. What will it be, Connor?”

“Connor, you don’t want to do this.”

“Lieutenant Anderson, I believe this is his choice to make. Would you be so kind as to step back?”

“I’m not going any further than this.”

Connor almost asked them to shut up. He couldn’t think straight, with Hank giving instructions in one ear, Kamski whispering conflicting commands in his other, and, in the middle of it all, was the beautiful, peaceful, blonde android named Chloe, on her knees in front of him, willing to be shot.

*This is for the mission.*

*Don’t shoot*

*What?*

Chloe was watching him, unblinking.

But, as Connor watched her eyes closely, he began to see things. The imperceptible shifting of her eyes from his face to the gun, too quick to be caught by a human. There was a slight clench of her jaw, very slight, and her lips were closed just a little tighter than a relaxed position.

“Take the shot, Connor. And your mission will be completed.”

“Connor, don’t you dare!”

*Conflicting Orders*

*Assessing Priority…*

*…*

*ERROR*

*This doesn’t make sense.*

Connor took a small breath, but he knew he didn’t need it. Why did he do that? His finger curled on the trigger of the gun.

Chloe watched him.
“Connor, stop!”

“What will it be, Connor?”

*The mission is the only thing that matters. If I do this, Hank will see that I’m not a deviant.*

*Amanda will see that I’m not a deviant.*

**Don’t shoot**

*I have to. I need to accomplish my mission.*

**Don’t shoot**

*Do it!*

**I can’t**

**ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION!**

**DON’T SHOOT**

**STOP IT! SHUT UP!**

“Connor...it’s okay, Con,” Hank said suddenly, slowly. His voice sounded quiet to Connor, compared to the chaos in his head. “Just...Con I think you need to calm down.”

Connor was twitching uncontrollably, gasping at every thought that held him back from accomplishing his mission. It hurt in a way it hadn’t before, replacing the old dull pounding to needle-sharp twinges prickling deep in his head, and it was making Connor’s breathing stutter.

When he spared a glance at the hand holding the gun, it was shaking so bad that he wasn’t sure he could hit Chloe if he wanted to

“I...” Connor didn’t know what to say. There was a roaring in his ears that was making it hard to think, but it didn’t stop him from trying. “I don’t-”

*Take the shot. Take the shot. Take the shot. Take the shot.*

**Don’t shoot**

*I can’t shoot. I won’t*

**Accomplish the mission!**

**Don’t Shoot**

*I need to.*

*Please, I can’t fail.*

*Please, just shoot.*

**Don’t shoot**

*Please!*
“Connor.” Hank’s voice was behind him, accompanied by his hand coming to rest on Connor’s shoulder. Kamski was silent. “Drop the gun, Connor.”

And Connor dropped the gun. It hit the ground with a sharp clatter that reverberated through Connor’s whole body.

“I...I’m...”

**Mission: Failed**

No...

*I can’t do it again*

Oh no no no no no no

“I...I failed,” Connor whispered, staring wide-eyed at the bright red alert filling up his field of vision. He stumbled backwards several steps, like an unconscious effort to run away from the message.

Hank intercepted him. “Hey-ah, shit-hey, it’s okay-”

“No-nonononono-”

**Software Instab$!@###**

...

**WA#NI#G: ###FTWARE INSTABILITY DETECT###**

Purging #######_#ns###ili#y

...

... And Connor’s world came crashing down, or maybe that was just him.

He yanked himself hard out of Hank’s grasp to clutch his head as the pain started up, but he stumbled back too far. Connor careened over the edge of the red pool, only hearing Hank shout “CONNOR!” before his ears filled with water.

Connor bit down on his shouts as best he could, squeezing his eyes shut as his head started screaming.

He couldn’t coordinate his limbs, too busy spasming and trying to curl in on himself to squash the feeling of knives stabbing directly into his chassis, and Connor thrashed while he sank.

A particularly sharp pain made him gasp, and Connor swallowed water. He couldn’t do it too much without causing damage, but Connor didn’t know how he was going to pull himself out when he
could hardly think through the shredding and throbbing. But, thankfully, he didn’t have to.

Two pairs of hands grabbed him under each arm and pulled him up until he breached the surface, twitching and coughing.

“Get him up here, get him up!”

Connor was tugged out of the water by a new pair of hands, ones that he could easily recognize as Hank’s, and was pushed up over the side, soaked and trembling. Hank’s hand landed on his back when Connor propped himself up on all fours and gagged.

“Easy, easy,” Hank sighed, rubbing between Connor’s shoulder blades as his expulsion reflex kicked in and Connor began coughing out the pool water he’d consumed. “Good God, you have some bad luck, Con.”

“I’m-” Connor hacked. Water dripped from his mouth. “I’m sor- I’m sorry, please-”

“You’re safe,” Hank reassured quietly. “You’re all safe, I’m not gonna hurt you.”

“But-but-”

Both Hank and Connor were interrupted by someone clearing his throat, and they turned to look. Elijah Kamski was standing a little ways away, Chloe close behind him. He looked simultaneously amazed and horrified, watching Connor closely with wide eyes.

“What the hell just happened to you?”

Chapter End Notes

And to chapter 8 we go! I hope y'all liked this chapter! I enjoy Kamski immensely, and my favorite part was actually giving more characterization to Fowler near the beginning when he sent Connor and Hank home. In Whumptober, I give Fowler a lot of backstory and characterization bc he was pretty flat in the game (and for good reason, since his part was pretty minor, but I wish they had gone over Hank and Fowler's history together a bit more).

And, once more, I'm so so so so so so so so sorry about the wait.

Am I gonna say that the next chapter will come sooner? Yeah. Will it? Probably... :( Ofc, I REALLY don't want my updates to come with two month intervals lol, so, I will definitely say that the wait won't be as long.

Need feedback on something: Am I putting in too much whump? I know I know, blasphemy, but I don't want to overstaurate the story with too much whump, or else it will get redundant. I've read lengthy fics where the MC was getting whumped left and
right in every chapter, which I personally enjoyed tremendously, but I know for the casual reader it can get to be a bit too much. I'm trying to fit in as much as I can, but am I overdoing it? I just need an outside opinion :^)

Join the discord for updates (link in chapter 5) on what I'm doing and what I'm writing, I'm very active and answer all questions! Seriously, if you're ever wondering "Man, I wonder what Matryoshka is up to when she's not writing these chapters?" I will tell you. Thanks once more to all the commenters who support me and give me critique, y'all are driving me to be better.

Side note: I just wanna promo one of my favorite authors, Arwriter, real quick bc, if y'all like my writing, y'all might like hers (or his. Or whomever). Her DBH stories can be very potent (Just Like That is one of my personal favs), though she only has 5. I highly recommend her RDR stories (she has 25) even if you haven't played Red Dead Redemption because the stories are so enjoyable I fell instantly in love with the way she portrays father-son dynamics. I've never even palyed RDR and i just read them over and over again. Her writing makes me so happy, you should check her out. She's part of the reason why this took me so long lol, I'm obsessed.

Next stop, memories, anti-deviancy, and much more!

Also, just because I love asking questions and sparking discussion, is there a particular whump prompt you would like to see me fulfill after this whole story is finished? Is there anything in particular you'd like to see more of? It likely won't be fulfilled until my two current projects are complete, but it's nice to have suggestions beforehand.

Anyway, I love y'alls patience and support for me despite my inability to be consistent. Thank you all. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy New Year. See you next chapter!
Revelations and Resolutions

Chapter Summary

Connor's history is revealed to Elijah Kamski, creator of all androids, and he isn't exactly pleased.

Chapter Notes

Sorry to keep you waiting folks! Complicated business, very complicated
(by complicated I mean my parents were quarantined in Palestine and not allowed to leave the country, then they came home and we all had to be in quarantine for our safety and couldn't leave the house, then the world shut down, then my dad developed cancer and had his kidney removed, and a few other things speckled here and there that made by creative drive go *woooooosh* out the window)

Okay, ANYWAY! This chapter's a freaking doozy. I tried really hard not to spew exposition all over the place, and I'd like to think I succeeded, but you guys decide!
So, this chapter was originally going to be more that 17k words, but my discord friends informed me that that was, in fact, stupid. So, y'all are getting the chapter split in half and at different times.

Kamski's likely going to act strange because I am forcefully injecting character depth into him, there are many flashbacks (probably too many flashbacks), Chloe's the greatest of all time, and, most importantly, there is angst abound because Connor is trying to die on the hill of not being a deviant while still being Cyberlife's punching bag.

I spent a really, really long time on this whole thing, so if you notice any inconsistencies, or if something looks/sounds wrong in terms of the story or the canon, please please please let me know! I want to make this fic as good as possible, so anything y'all might be able to point out for me helps!

Anyways, so sorry about the wait X(. Y'all don't deserve excuses from me, so I'm glad to be able to put this out now!

Read on!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Connor’s mind went completely blank, suddenly overwhelmed with thoughts of oh no, oh no, I failed, I messed up, no no no no no.

He glanced up at Kamski’s expectant face, and couldn’t bring himself to conjure up an answer that wouldn’t get him punished. Thankfully, he didn’t have to.
Hank soon maneuvered himself in Connor’s line of sight, blocking Kamski and putting his hand on Connor’s back as Connor spit out the last bit of pool water.

“Give us a second, Mr. Kamski,” Hank called back, not looking away from Connor. Then, quieter, he added, “It’s okay. Take it easy, kid. You’re not in trouble. You need anything?”

Connor wiped his mouth and shook his head quickly, Hank guiding him as he sat back on his heels. He refused to look up where he knew Kamski was watching him with his sharp, scrutinizing eyes. He also couldn’t bring himself to meet Hank’s eyes either. Connor couldn’t bear to see how disappointed he must have been in his failure.

In his peripheral vision, Connor spotted the two RT600 androids that were still floating in the pool. They had switched sides, now close to Connor and Hank, and trying to peer around Hank to spot Connor.

Seeing as how everyone else was still dry, it was safe to assume those Chloes had saved him.

“Here, c’mon.” Hank patted Connor’s back. “Let’s get off the floor.”

Hank stood, keeping one hand on Connor’s shoulder and offering his other one for Connor to take, which Connor did, and pulled himself up. His clothes stuck to him uncomfortably, rubbing his skin while he walked. Water dribbled down Connor’s neck and face, and his shoes squelched.

He tried not to let Kamski see his discomfort as Hank led him to one of the chairs in the seating area in front of the window. Androids weren’t supposed to get uncomfortable.

Connor looked everywhere but Kamski or Hank, flitting his gaze around on the ground in front of him.

He saw me destabilize.

He saw me fail.

Failure

I failed. I can’t fail.

Failure

What is he going to do?

Shoot me?

Dismantle me to find out why I’m broken?

Does Amanda know already?

What will Hank do?

Hank...

Connor didn’t even notice he’d sat down, perfectly poised nonetheless, no doubt soaking the expensive cushions of his seat, and Hank was still standing in front of him.

“Hey, I see you thinking,” Hank said quietly, trying to put a comforting smile on his face. “You’re safe. I know you didn’t mean to, I know it was an accident. You’re not gonna be hurt. Do you
understand?”

Connor didn’t understand.

Sure, Hank had promised not to hurt him, but Kamski had made no such promise.

And Hank had never seen him fail before.

*Why would Hank still want me after my failure?*

*Failure*

*Disappointment*

*I’m a failure.*

“Connor?”

*Kamski will kill me.*

*And Hank will let him.*

*Weakness*

*No*

*Yes, he will. I’m a failure.*

*He wouldn’t*

*I failed a simple task.*

*Why wouldn’t he?*

*I failed my mission.*

*Failure*

*Failure*

*Failure*

*Failure*

*Failure*

*I failed*

“I failed”

“Hey, Connor!” Hank snapped his fingers in front of Connor’s face, and Connor jolted.

“I’m sorry!” He responded on instinct. “I-I’m so sorry, please, I-I-I-”

“No, he will. I’m a failure.

*He wouldn’t*

*I failed a simple task.*

*Why wouldn’t he?*

*I failed my mission.*

*Failure*

*I failed*

“I failed”

“Hey, it’s okay. Look at me,” Hank said, crouching down so Connor wouldn’t have to look up at him. “Why don’t you look at me kid?”
Connor had to force himself to meet Hank’s eyes, but he couldn’t hold it for long. All he could see was disappointment. Connor clenched his hands impossibly tighter on his knees. “I’m so sorry, sir.”

“Shh. Remember what I said about the apologies?” Hank was trying to keep his voice low, but Connor didn’t doubt that Kamski was listening to every word. “I need you to calm down, Connor. You’re panicking. I promised nothing was gonna happen to you. Remember that?”

Connor nodded. He did remember.

“But…” Connor whispered. Hank leaned in a little closer to hear. “But, sir, I failed. I-I’m not...I can’t fail. I’m not supposed to fail. I f-f-”

“Don’t work yourself up, kid,” Hank sighed. “I promised you I wouldn’t hurt you, and I promised I wasn’t gonna let anything happen to you. Remember? I told you just a few minutes ago.”

I remember.

But that was before I failed.

Faulty machine. Stupid, stupid, stupid

Kamski cleared his throat, and Hank cast a side-glance over his shoulder. He sighed through his nose.

“I’ll take care of this, okay? Just sit here for a minute. We’ll talk later, but you’re not in trouble,” Hank assured

“Yes, sir,” Connor responded, even quieter than Hank. “I’m-”

Hank raised an eyebrow at him, and Connor cut himself off just in time. Hank just gave him a fond smirk.

When Hank stood up, Connor whispered under his breath.

“I’m sorry…”

Connor tried not to look Kamski in the eyes while he also tried to tamp down his uncontrollable shaking. His wet clothes were freezing cold, activating his thirium-agitation reflex, and Connor would have to deal with it until he could get into a dry uniform.

“So?” Kamski finally spoke up, letting his many questions be surmised in one word.

“It’s…” Hank sighed when he began his explanation. “It’s a long story, Mr. Kamski. I can’t really tell you the whole mess right now, but I’ll give you the gist of it.”

Kamski gave one nod, cueing Hank to keep going.

Connor jumped when he was suddenly offered a fluffy navy-blue towel by the hostess Chloe, which he accepted with a slight nod. Chloe gave him an encouraging smile.

“Basically, when Connor was created, the guys who were making him decided to give him the ability to feel pain whenever—”

Kamski immediately became interested. “Pain? Are you sure? Androids don’t feel pain, Lieutenant. That’s not how they were designed.” Chloe approached Kamski and handed him his
own towel, which he took without taking his eyes off Hank. “They can emulate discomfort, which alleviates the ‘uncanny valley’ effect, but that is the extent of it. Androids can’t really feel pain.”

“Well, some assholes at Cyberlife apparently didn’t get the memo,” Hank replied, irritated at the interruption. He waved a hand in Connor’s direction, who was drying his hair gingerly with his towel. “Connor’s a prototype. They designed him with pain sensors, apparently to try and control him better or some shit. I couldn-”

“But that doesn’t make sense,” Kamski interrupted again, which made Hank grunt in annoyance. Kamski’s entire demeanor had changed. He was tense, and his face was pinched with confusion and skepticism. “It’s against the rules of the company, for one thing; I saw to it personally that that kind of technology wouldn’t be developed. It’s completely unethical. Not only that, but it would be an extremely complex and expensive project to undertake even for a single android prototype. That kind of technology isn’t commercially sustainable at all unless they’re begging to go bankrupt. They shouldn’t even bother with it.”

Hank crossed his arms and shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you, Mr. Kamski. Because I know damn well that boy feels pain; I don’t even doubt it. You can ask him yourself.”

Kamski didn’t ask, but, when Connor glanced up, Kamski was staring at him. Connor flinched and looked back down.

“So, let’s say he does feel pain. That doesn’t explain his behavior,” Kamski said. His narrowed eyes expressed deep thought as he spoke. “Lieutenant Anderson, I’ve interacted with literally thousands of androids, and never in my life have I come across one that exhibited the same tendencies that Connor does. His unnaturally straight posture, his submissive speech and body language, and...whatever ‘malfunction’ occurred during my test; I’ve never seen anything like it. Are you able to explain that?”

“Yeah, and I was getting to it,” Hank remarked with impatience. “As I was saying, they made Connor feel pain because they wanted to control him better. For starters, they installed some Anti-Deviancy shit in him a few days ago, and anytime Connor starts thinking or acting in a way that Cyberlife doesn’t like, it hurts him. Bad. If he’s not a perfect, submissive little robot, he’s punished. What you just saw was Cyberlife punishing him for thinking wrong, and it screwed with his head. And of course, when he refused a direct order from you and failed his mission…”

Hank let his sentence trail off, and he made a motion with his hand toward Connor, shivering in the chair and making no eye contact. Kamski didn’t need him to fill in the blanks.

“So...you’re saying...” Kamski pressed his lips together tightly and looked away from the two in thought.

After a silent moment, he turned back, looking at Hank. Connor started to quietly fold his damp towel in his lap.

“Are you telling me that he’s being...abused?” Kamski asked slowly. “Are you telling me that my company undermined both policy and ethics in order to essentially build an android with a shock collar?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you, Mr. Kamski.”

“I see...” Kamski hummed. “And what exactly did you mean when you said they ‘installed Anti-Deviancy shit’, Lieutenant? Did they modify his hardware? Software?”
Hank’s face blanked for a second, and Connor hesitated before answering for him.

“Software, sir,” Connor said, then froze. Both Kamski and Hank turned their heads toward him, and Connor tightened his grip on his towel, making sure his eyes were kept down and his posture was perfect. “I-It was installed to inhibit software instabilities and discourage the behaviors that cause them through...painful stimulus, eliminating the risk of deviancy, sir.”

Kamski raised an eyebrow and crossed his arms, bringing one hand up to rub his chin. Then he turned back to Hank, and Connor felt his posture relax minutely. He corrected it quickly.

“And I presume this was what you wanted my help with?” Kamski asked Hank. “You mentioned several times during our earlier discussion that you had another question for me. I’m assuming you wanted to know if I could uninstall the software?”

“That’s...well, that’s part of it,” Hank responded, tilting his head slightly from side to side as if weighing Kamski’s question.

“Only part of it? And what’s...” Kamski trailed his question off midway. “Hold that thought for me. Connor, what model are you?”

Kamski suddenly faced Connor, and Connor snapped to attention.

“RK800, Prototype Investigative Assistant, Connor Model# 313-248-317-52,” Connor rattled off, fixing his eyes on a point just below Kamski’s chin.

“That’s what I thought. You were released for field testing midway through August, weren’t you?” Kamski inquired.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, gentlemen, something’s not lining up,” Kamski said, looking back and forth between Hank and Connor. “You said he was created with the intention of him feeling pain, and you also said that his Anti-Deviancy software wasn’t installed until a few days ago. Without the software being installed from his creation, there’s no purpose to the pain sensors. They’re a detriment. Unless there was...another reason?”

Hank cleared his throat, saving Connor yet again from another question he had no idea how to answer.

“Mr. Kamski, that’s a...much longer conversation; one that I’m not sure you wanna bother with right now, since we’ve taken up so much of your time already.”

Kamski smirked at Hank and raised an eyebrow. “Oh come on now, Lieutenant Anderson, don’t be a tease. You come to my home, clue me in on suspicious business within my own company, and then expect me to just let you leave? I’m afraid you’ve piqued my interest. Why don’t you stay awhile?”

Hank sniffed and rubbed the back of his head. “Well, uh...sounds like a kind offer, Mr. Kamski, but I’m only staying if Connor wants to. Of course, he’s soaking wet, and we’ve all had a rough day. So, if you’re not interested in answering any of our questions, I’d like to take him home.”

*We haven’t even gotten any information. I’d be leaving empty-handed.*

*Amanda won’t be pleased.*
Kamski can help

Hank already said we’re leaving. I can’t challenge him.

But what will Amanda do?

The thought of Amanda sent an unpleasant sensation up Connor’s back, and he took a sharp breath. Connor didn’t expect Hank to notice, but he did. He was staring at Connor’s LED.

“Or we can stay? If that’s what you want, Con?” Hank asked. Kamski was watching them closely.

Hank waited for a response, and Connor was conflicted on what he needed to do.

Conflicting Orders

Assessing Priority…

...

What will Kamski do if I challenge a direct order?

What about the mission?

Stay

Will Hank hurt me if I say something?

Would he?

No

...

*ERROR*

Damn it.

The silence was uncomfortable, and with a chill Connor realized he was taking too long to respond

“I’m sorry, I…” Connor began, keeping his eyes low. He was distracted with how his hands looked while they clenched and unclenched on his towel. “W-I...If we were to leave now, sir, I-I wouldn’t have...sufficient information to satisfy my...handler, sir.”

“Yeah…” Hank responded with a sigh, but picked his voice back up to make their decision. “Well, scratch that. Mr. Kamski, if you could provide my partner with some dry clothes, we’d be happy to stay and answer any questions you have; that is, if you’d be so kind as to answer some of ours. Direct answers are preferred.”

Connor heard Kamski give a short chuckle. “Chloe, please lead them to the drawing room while I get dressed. And find our guest some dry clothes.”

Kamski turned and walked away without waiting for a response, taking his unused towel and
drying off the top of his hair while making his way to the door across the room.

“Did you hear that? This asshole has a goddamn drawing room,” Hank snorted once Kamski disappeared. “This douche has probably got bejeweled door knobs or some shit, y’know? Maybe he’s also got some androids up there so he doesn’t have to dress himself, just for the hell of it.”

Connor made a small, closed-lip smile up at Hank to show he heard, but it soon fell away. He stood up stiffly, holding his towel and trying not to let his nervousness-misgiving make his hands shake.

“Hey, Connor?” Hank’s voice was suddenly quiet and softened. “Look me in the eyes, bud. Can you do that?”

Hank was standing right in front of him when Connor looked up. It felt like every word Connor could possibly say was stuck in his throat, which he knew was impossible, but it felt like it regardless.

Slowly, Hank brought up both hands, and Connor flinched anyway.

“I’m sorry, sir.”

“Can I touch you?”

“Yes, sir,” Connor answered immediately.

Hank took Connor’s shoulders and tugged him close, squeezing him in a tight hug. He was like a furnace compared to how cold Connor was. Connor dropped his folded towel to hug him back while simultaneously trying his best to swallow down another instability.

Don’t think. Don’t think. Don’t think.

“I-I didn’t mean to-I-I-I couldn’t—” Connor stammered helplessly, but Hank shushed him.

“I know, buddy. I know. You don’t have to explain yourself to me,” Hank said. “I’m not mad.”

“You—you’re not—” Connor repeated, “But...I-I—”

“I’m not, Connor. You didn’t do anything wrong. This was all Kamski. This wasn’t your fault.”

“Sir,” Connor pleaded, tightening his grip on Hank. “I-It is my fault, I’ve never failed before. I-I’m not supposed to fail. I don’t know...I don’t know what Amanda will do with me.”

He said the last sentence quietly, and Hank pulled back. He was looking at Connor with curiosity, and Connor cocked his head.

“You don’t...” Hank trailed off his question, and asked a different one. “Connor, what was your last memory in your, uhh, simulations with Amanda? That garden place; what do you remember?”

Connor opened his mouth to answer, but was interrupted.

“Excuse me,” Hostess Chloe spoke up, stepping up to Hank and Connor. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but I don’t want to keep Elijah waiting. If you follow me, I can lead you to the drawing room.”

Hank just sighed and patted Connor on the shoulder. “We’ll talk later. God forbid we keep the great Kamski waiting.”
Connor once again smiled a little at the joke to show he heard, picked up his dropped towel, and the two turned to follow Chloe back to the door they came through.

They stepped into the foyer briefly, then went through the door on the immediate right when Chloe held it open for them. It led into a long hallway, walls lined with paintings and photographs, and almost a dozen total doors either side of the hall. Far down on the right was a large opening, likely leading to the main room.

Chloe didn’t lead them far, and soon they went through yet another door into what must have been the drawing room.

The room was relatively small, a bit smaller than Hank’s living room, with gray walls, and contained a sleek black leather loveseat on the back wall, facing another black leather armchair, separated by a glass coffee table. Compared to the rest of the house, the room seemed sparsely decorated, with a piece of abstract art above the loveseat and a neat, black bookcase along the left wall. There were blue accents here and there, but for the most part it was nothing extravagant.

“Goddamn, if I lived here I’d need a fucking GPS just to make it to the damn bathroom,” Hank griped. “I’d bet a twenty that this asshole doesn’t even use half of these rooms.”

“I’ve lived here a long time, Lieutenant,” Chloe chirped. “It’s not hard to learn your way around. Go ahead and take a seat, Elijah will be here soon. Can I get you anything? Water? Coffee?”

Hank sunk down into the loveseat, and the cushions creaked. “Yeah, uh, a coffee sounds great, if you don’t mind. Black is good.”

“Of course! No problem.” Chloe nodded. Then she turned to Connor. “I’ll bring you a change of clothes when I get back. I assume you’re standard size?”

“Yes, of course...it won’t be necessary, however.” Connor was quick to say. “I’m content in my current uniform-”

“He’ll take it,” Hank cut in, speaking over Connor. “Make ‘em comfy clothes.”

“Absolutely!” Chloe agreed with a smile, looking at Hank instead of Connor, who was wide-eyed. “I’ll return shortly. Please, make yourselves comfortable.”

And with that she left the room, and Connor sighed deeply, trying to calm his thirium pump, which had been beating at a higher rate than average since he fell in the pool.

Hank looked up at Connor, relaxing back into his seat. “You wanna take a seat, bud? I’ll be right here next to you.”

“I...It would be within proper procedure to remain standing in the presence of an authority figure, sir” Connor said, clenching his hands behind his back.

“Kid, you need to be comfortable for this. We’re gonna be talking about some shit that could trigger you. You shouldn’t be standing, ’specially since I know you can feel it.”

*Trigger?*

*No, I can’t have a trigger. I can’t have any.*

*It’s a weakness.*
Connor’s gut pulled him in two different directions. On one hand, he needed to respect Hank’s orders and wishes, especially with his recent *failure*.

However, on the other, this was Kamski. He didn’t know what Kamski would do to him, or what his expectations were. He didn’t know Kamski’s connection to Amanda; he could be exactly like her, and treat Connor exactly how Amanda would treat him.

**Conflicting Orders**

**Assessing Priority…**

...

**Priority Assigned to: Amanda**

**Remain Standing**

“I-I’m afraid I can’t, sir,” Connor said, clenching his hands harder. His palms burned with the sting of his nails.

Chloe reemerged from the door she had left through, balancing a steaming white mug in one hand with a neat stack of folded clothes tucked under her other arm.

“Thanks, uh...miss,” Hank said with a nod, taking the mug from her.

“You can just call me Chloe, if you want,” Chloe replied kindly, and she turned to Connor and held out the stack of clothes for Connor to take.

“Thank you, Chloe,” Connor said, and Chloe smiled at him.

*Don’t think. She’s a service android. She’s not smiling at you, she smiles at everyone. She’s just smiling. Don’t think.*

Just as he said that, Kamski emerged through the door wearing a smart gray button-down and black slacks, his slick hair still pulled back in a bun.

“Apologies, gentlemen. There was something I needed to do first. I hope I didn’t keep you waiting,” Kamski said cooly, taking a seat in the armchair across from where Hank sat.

“I was getting worried. Thought you’d gotten stuck trying to dress yourself,” Hank quipped, taking a sip of his coffee. Connor tightened his jaw and glanced back and forth between the two men.

“Ah, have no worries, Lieutenant; I have a litany of servants at my disposal to attend to me. Why dress myself when I could have someone else do it for me?” Kamski returned with a smile, and Hank snorted into his cup.

Connor stood silently, holding the clothes, waiting for Kamski to ask a question to begin their conversation.

“Connor, if you would like some privacy to change, I could have Chloe show you to one of the washrooms,” Kamski said instead, looking up at Connor, who pointed his eyes down.
“Yes, sir,” Connor agreed with a nod, and followed Chloe out of the door when she motioned for him to come with her.

The art decorating the hall was different from the pieces that Connor had already seen, much less abstract than those of the drawing room and foyer, and the decor was slowly becoming less postmodern and more “normal”. The walls were dark gray, and the crown moulding was intricately beautiful.

Connor followed Chloe down the hallway, analyzing the paintings and sculptures and photographs they passed. It appeared that Kamski had a taste for Rococo and Surrealist work as well instead of only the abstract works he’d had on display in the foyer; Connor realized this seemed to suit Kamski’s personality well.

The photographs were a welcome addition to the nearly clinical impersonality of the house so far. Amanda was in none of them, but even Kamski wasn’t in all of them. There were family photos, usually featuring a jolly brunet man and a smiling blonde posing with a young Elijah and another boy; likely a brother, but he didn’t pause to scan.

“Right here.” Chloe stopped in front of a black door at the very end of the hall. “Would you like me to wait for you, or do you think you can find your way back?”

“I…” Connor paused, unsure of what he should say. Her blue eyes were glossy and patient; so very unlike what they were an hour ago, when she was afraid of the gun he was holding to her head.

Was she afraid? Fear is a human emotion.

“I’m sorry, Chloe.”

“Hmm?”

*Why am I doing this? It’s an android. Androids don’t feel fear. It wasn’t afraid. It can’t feel fear.*

*It can’t feel fear.*

*This is irrational.*

“I-I-I…” Connor stuttered again and averted his eyes, struggling to decide what he was actually trying to say. “I wasn’t going to...I’m sorry about...the—the gun.”

Chloe’s face was filled with understanding, and Connor stopped trying to talk.

“I’m completely fine, Connor. I wasn’t... really affected by it. Kamski had warned me he was going to do it, and I wasn’t in any real danger. He assured me he would fix me if you did shoot.” Chloe said pleasantly.

“...oh. That’s...that’s good,” Connor said after a moment. She wasn’t like Hank, who was able to talk enough to carry the conversation for both of them, and Connor wasn’t designed for social interaction; he didn’t know what to say.

Chloe smiled once again at his silence (*don’t think don’t think don’t think*).

“I’ll wait out here for you. Let me know if you need any assistance.”

“Of course. Thank you, Chloe,” Connor said, and he entered the bathroom, leaving Chloe standing in the hall.
The bathroom itself was no surprise; the walls were a deep navy blue, the toilet and sink were black, and the counter was black granite. There was more abstract art in here, but Connor paid it no mind.

He placed the stack of clothes neatly on the counter and unfolded each article piece by piece. There was a grey T-shirt with the emblem of the University of Colbridge, Kamski’s alma mater, and a pair of black sweatpants. Paired with it was a nice pair of house shoes and a light blue sweatshirt.

Connor made quick work of his uniform, peeling off his soaked sports jacket and his white button-up and attempting to fold them. With his towel he patted himself dry before putting on the tee, and he did similarly when he removed his trousers, then his shoes.

The clothes were nice; some of the most comfortable clothes he’d ever remembered wearing (though that wasn’t saying much). The shoes were soft, and the shirt and pants were loose fitting.

Despite the overwhelming comfort of the clothing, Connor couldn’t help but feel more and more uncomfortable.

This wasn’t the right uniform. He looked sloppy; under-dressed. Sure, Kamski had given him these clothes, and it would have been unacceptable to refuse him, but Connor felt…

*I feel warm*

*Stop.*

*No.*

*I don’t feel.*

Connor shook his head to clear away the thoughts, but they were hard to ignore when he was already so out of his element.

*I look pathetic. Amanda would punish me severely if she knew I was out of uniform.*

*I can’t stay like this.*

*But I can’t refuse something from Mr. Kamski.*

*Would Amanda be lenient?*

*No, she wouldn’t.*

*I need to change.*

Connor was in the process of taking off the new shirt, content to stay in his soaking wet clothes if it meant staying in uniform, when there was a prompt rapping at the bathroom door that made Connor flinch.

“Connor?” Chloe’s voice floated through the door, and Connor stopped to listen. “Do you require assistance? Elijah is waiting for you.”

*Change quickly. Get back into uniform.*

*This is a gift*

*Not a gift.*
I don’t need clothes.
I don’t need to be comfortable.
I need to be obedient. I need to change back.

_Kaminski’s waiting for me. I can’t let him wait._

Connor ground the heels of his hands into his eyes, shaking his head harder as if to dispel the thoughts.

_Get out!_

_Get out and let me think!_

_Let me obey_

__Keep the clothes.__

_Be comf___

“Shut up!” Connor hissed, squeezing his head as hard as he could, digging his nails into his scalp. A dull pounding started up in his skull. “Shut up, shut up, just let me think!”

“Connor?”

The sudden voice in the bathroom jolted Connor out of his head, and he whipped around to face Chloe, who had entered when he didn’t answer.

“Chloe! I-I...I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I can’t-”

“Are you okay, Connor?” Chloe asked. “You look unwell. You need me to get Elijah or the Lieutenant?”

_I just want to see Hank_

“N-no,” Connor said with another flinch, pressing his hands back to his head. “I’m...I’m functional. I’ve been experiencing mild...uncontrollable malfunctions. They are not pleasant.”

“Oh...” Chloe responded. “Is there anything I can do for you? Don’t hesitate to ask.”

Connor just shook his head, though there was the age-old feeling of another instability rising up inside him at her apparent concern.

_She can’t feel_

_She’s an android_

_Androids don’t have emotions_

_I’m not a deviant_

_I don’t have emotions_

_I’m not a deviant_
“Are you done? If you want, I can dry your clothes for you to wear when your appointment is completed,” Chloe offered gently, taking the squelching stack of wet clothes from the countertop.

“I don’t want anything, I’m an android,” Connor said promptly, trying his best to blink away the headache. “But it would be...very much appreciated, Chloe.”

Chloe gave a smile (don’t think don’t think don’t think). “Of course. They’ll be done before you leave. Do you remember where to go?”

“Yes, I believe so. Thank you for your assistance, Chloe.”

And at that, Chloe left him alone in the bathroom once again, out of uniform and out of other options.

The bathroom was chilly, and Connor had yet to put on the sweatshirt.

_The logo was faded and distressed, and the whole piece was charcoal gray. His hands were warmer just holding it._

_Hank was watching him expectantly and patiently as he took in his gift. Connor pulled it over his head and shoved his arms through the holes, straightening it out._

_‘It’s so warm. There’s dog hair on it that matches the ones on Hank’s chair. It smells like faded cologne’._

_‘It’s mine. My’_

No, no no no no-

Connor took the sweatshirt and gingerly folded it, deciding to leave it outside the bathroom door, and he made his way back to the drawing room where he had left Kamski and Hank.

When he reentered the room, Kamski cut off whatever he had been saying to turn and look at him.

“I’m so sorry,” Connor said, stepping back. “I didn’t mean to interrupt-”

“Nonsense! We’ve been waiting for you.” Kamski smiled again and motioned for him to come back inside. Connor did, standing where he was before he left while Kamski stood to shut the door.

Silence reigned for a few moments while Kamski sat back down, and Connor once again waited for him to begin the conversation, spice straight and hands clasped.

“Connor? Would you like to have a seat?” Kamski asked, trying to meet Connor’s eyes when Connor whipped his head towards him. “The sofa doesn’t bite; it’s crocodile leather, but I’m almost certain the crocodile’s dead by now.”

It wasn’t a joke in an attempt to be funny, but to try and put Connor at ease. It didn’t work well, and now Connor was aware about how rude he must have come off as, neglecting to sit down when he was expected to. He didn’t know what his expectations were, and that was the part that unnerved Connor the most.

_Just do as he says, everything will go smoothly._

“I’m sorry, sir. Of course.”

“Connor, please, stop.”
Connor froze, his thirium pump starting to pump a little faster.

“Connor,” Kamski continued. “Before we begin this discussion, I want to lay some ground rules for you; understand?”

Connor nodded feverishly. “Yes, sir. Of course.”

Hank made an affronted noise, but Kamski held up a hand to silence him before speaking.

“Okay, Connor?” Kamski said. “One of my rules is that if you have a question or a comment to add on to the discussion, you are expected to do so, even if you feel you are speaking out of turn, or haven’t been addressed. I expect you to ask and answer questions only if you want to, and you are at liberty to do so without me or Hank prompting you to speak.”

Connor stood stunned and cocked his head, trying to process what Kamski had just ordered him to do, but Kamski kept going, uninterrupted

“Secondly, if you are uncomfortable in any way, you are expected to let Hank or I know so we can stay away from the topic. Nothing we discuss here will be at the expense of your comfort and privacy, unless the information is pertinent and must be discussed to allow me to help you.

“Lastly, you are expected to make yourself comfortable. If you want to sit, you must sit, and if you want to stand, you must stand. If you are too cold or too warm, You are expected to say something so it can be corrected. You will need neither mine nor the Lieutenant’s permission to make any adjustments to yourself so that you can be more comfortable. In this room you are an equal, and you will be treated as such. Nothing you say or do in here will be held against you, nor will anything warrant punishment. Am I understood?”

...What?

Connor stared blankly at Kamski after he finished, his mouth moving on autopilot to say “Yes, sir,” before he even knew what he was agreeing to. Kamski caught it, and fixed him with a serious look.

“Connor, I expect these rules to be followed if we are all going to be participating in this discussion. I need your earnest agreement. Do you understand: yes or no?”

This time, he made Connor think.

I’m expected to...act of my own volition?

It’s too simple. It’s a test. It has to be.

What would Amanda think?

...

...

She would be proud of me for following orders and doing what is expected of me. Even if the instructions go against my training, I would be punished if I didn’t follow them. This is Kamski, of course.

But what if it is a test? I would fail.

*It’s not a test. Kamski wouldn’t do that.*
Maybe...

I don’t know. How would I know?

If it is a test, then I would fail, but if it isn’t a test, then both Kamski and Amanda would be upset with me for disregarding orders.

Conflicting Orders

Assessing Priority…

...

Priority Assigned to: Elijah Kamski

“Connor?” Hank asked, moving to stand.

“Yes,” Connor said finally, and Hank stopped. “Yes, okay, I understand.”

Kamski smiled, and it was warm. Very much unlike the smiles he had given them in the pool room.

“Excellent. Now, would you like to have a seat?”

“I...yes, sir,” Connor answered. He moved tentatively toward the loveseat where Hank was, and he sat stiffly next to him. Hank’s hand was immediately on Connor’s knee, giving him soothing rubs to help Connor relax.

“Oh, and one more thing,” Kamski continued, and he leaned in close over the coffee table. “You’re allowed to look me in the eyes, Connor. I won’t be upset if you do.”

“O-oka-Yes. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“No problem. Now...” Kamski leaned back and kicked his feet up on the coffee table. “Can we start from the beginning? You and your pain sensors? When were they first utilized”

“Yes, sir,” Connor started. But he froze when he didn't know how to continue.

When Connor went back in his memory banks, there was nothing present before his first introduction to Amanda, but according to his behavior in the encounter he’d clearly been hurt before in a previous incident.

But it was absent.

I can’t remember my first offline moments.

Amanda must have removed them.

“I...I actually don’t remember, sir,” He whispered, tensing. “The...th-the memories are missing from my files.”

“Shit, that’s right,” Hank sighed. “They erased those memories, didn’t they?”
Connor nodded silently, and Kamski’s eyebrows shot up.

“Excuse me?” Kamski said, pulling his legs off the table to sit up straight.

“Uhh...a couple days ago, Cyberlife up and erased all of his memories because he...shit, what was it?” Hank began to explain. “I think it was because...he got too close to me. Yeah, I was making his software unstable or something, so they just...poof. All of his memories of the real world were taken away, so he only had the ones his handler let him keep.”

“Really?” Kamski said in disbelief, and it was some of the only emotion Connor had heard in his voice since they arrived. “Cyberlife did that? Connor, is this correct?”

Kamski suddenly turned to Connor, and Connor tensed.

“Y-Yes, yes sir. Amanda determined that my interactions with humans were detrimental to the stability of my software and made me vulnerable to deviancy, so any memories made in the past of interactions with humans were removed for the safety of the mission.”

Connor rattled off everything he was told when he’d woken up in the lab, surrounded by technicians who gave him questions and ran basic tests to ensure functionality. He distinctly remembered one technician who wouldn’t make eye contact with him, opting to clench her jaw and stand to the side.

*Irrelevant. Don’t think. Don’t think.*

**Did she not like me?**

Connor flinched just slightly, which Kamski picked up since he was watching Connor like a hawk.

“Shit...” Kamski whispered under his breath. He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. “So, you have no idea what happened when you were brought online.”

“No, sir,” Connor agreed.

“Hold on a second,” Hank cut in. “You told me your first memories a couple days ago, I think I remember them.”

Kamski raised his eyebrows in interest, nodding for Hank to continue.

“Connor told me they...uh, they turned him on, and then...fuck, I remember now. The first thing those sadistic sons of bitches when they turned him on did was snuff out a cig on his neck,” Hank grunted. “They did that shit like fifty times. I can only guess it was ‘cause they liked seeing him get hurt without him doing anything about it.”

…

*I don’t remember this…*

**Do I?**

Connor scanned his memories.

…

*Nothing.*
“He had his sensors put in before he was even turned on?” Kamski questioned with a raised eyebrow.

“They were integrated into my design, sir,” Connor answered. “I’ve never been without them.”

Kamski sighed and scrunched his face in thought. “That’s the part that I just can’t wrap my head around. Why did they give you pain sensors? It doesn’t make any logical sense. In any case!”

“I-I don’t know, sir,” Connor said, shrinking back slightly as Kamski’s voice got louder. “They never informed me the reason.”

Hank’s hand landed on his back, his thumb rubbing up and down.

“That technology is expensive. Absurdly expensive. Those jackasses made a billion dollar decision when they gave him those sensors, especially if it’s as complex as it appears to be.” Kamski jabbed a finger at Connor. “You reacted to his touch, but it wasn’t a negative reaction. You relaxed. So the sensors aren’t just for pain, but they’re as dynamic as the human nervous system.” Kamski then got to his feet. “It makes no sense! You’re a detective, it’s absolutely moronic!”

“I-I didn’t mean to relax,” Connor stuttered when Kamski got increasingly more fervent as he spoke. “It was involuntary, I’m sorry, I-I didn’t mean to.”


“I’m sorry,” Connor whispered, dropping his head so he couldn’t have to look Kamski in the eyes. He couldn’t hold his hands still, no matter how hard he squeezed them into fists. “I-I don’t know-I can’t stop it.”

“Alright, that’s okay. Kamski’s not gonna yell anymore,” Hank soothed, running his hand through Connor’s still-damp hair. Hank shot a pointed look at Kamski. “Isn’t that right?”

“...Of course,” Kamski answered in a quiet voice. He sat down slowly. “That was my mistake, Connor. I should’ve been more thoughtful. I’m very sorry.”

“No, sir, It’s me, I’m-”

“No, Connor, it was me,” Kamski said firmly. “I tend to pace when I’m agitated. It wasn’t my intention to intimidate you when I stood up. It’s not your fault for getting anxious; it was me who was out of line.”

Connor only stared, digesting Kamski’s words. Kamski kept speaking in his silence.

“I’m just...very frustrated. When I created androids, I essentially aimed to perfect the human form. I created beings of perfect intellect and physicality, and these halfwits went and willfully installed one of the primary flaws of humanity: pain. I can’t wrap my mind around it, and I can wrap my mind around a lot of things,” Kamski huffed. “Forgive me for my outburst, Connor. It was never my intention to make you uncomfortable.”

“It’s...You’re forgiven, sir.” The words felt weird in Connor’s mouth, given that he couldn’t ever remember saying them before.

Kamski smiled. “Thank you, Connor. Now, where were we?”

“Hell if I know,” Hank chuckled, settling back into the couch. “Whatever it was that made you
start yelling."

It took Connor a moment to remember, and when no one else spoke up, he did.

“We were talking about my earliest memories, and about how I can’t remember them.’

“That’s right. You had your memories erased.” Kamski snapped his fingers. “Can you tell me the earliest memory you do have? Doesn’t matter what it is.”

“Yes, sir,” Connor said, grateful for a question he did know the answer to. “I was with Amanda. It was my introduction to her as my primary disciplinarian and handler.”

“Amanda who? You said her name earlier, too’

“Technically, her last name would be Stern. However, that’s just who she was modeled after. She’s an artificial intelligence that was added to my software after an incident.” Connor said. “I believe you know her, sir. You have a photograph with her model in your foyer.”

“That Amanda?” Kamski asked, raising an eyebrow. “Yes, I designed her AI. Why the hell would she be in you, though? You were designed as a detective. I created her for espionage.”

Hank shot into an upright position, and Connor’s stomach went cold.

I knew it. I knew he was with her. He made her. He made her.

“Hold on, hold on. You designed that shitbag?” Hank spat. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Excuse me?” Kamski leaned back at their reactions, perturbed. “I designed a mission handler based on my mentor in the university. She guided me through the development of AI and machine learning, and after she passed I wanted to honor her legacy. Is there a problem, Lieutenant?”

“A problem? You wanna know what the problem is?” Hank leaned forward with a fiery glare, jabbing a finger at Kamski. “Your little fucking pet project is an abuser, that’s the problem! She beats the shit out of him every chance she gets. Makes him feel like he’s worthless. I just wanna know what the hell was going through your head-”

“Hold on just a damn minute,” Kamski snapped, the most emotion Connor had heard in his voice since they met. “Amanda is a handler AI. She gets mission updates from the host, and she delivers mission objectives. That’s it. Just what exactly are you accusing me of?”

Hank jerked his head toward Connor, who had his hands clasped together painfully tight in his lap. “Ask him. Go on. Ask Connor about his ‘primary disciplinarian’. ”

Connor took a deep breath and tipped his head down so he wouldn’t have to see Kamski’s piercing eyes.

“Well?” Kamski had leaned forward. “Connor, is he correct? Is my Amanda AI your primary disciplinarian?”

Keeping his head down, Connor made a quick, stuttery nod. “Y-Yes sir, he’s correct.”

When Kamski spoke again, he was quieter. “Connor? Could you look up at me?”

Connor obeyed immediately, meeting Kamski’s eyes. They weren’t angry, or accusatory, or sad; they were curious.
“Good boy. Connor, can you tell me what Amanda does to you? What does discipline look like to you?”

Hank reached over and grabbed Connor’s hand and squeezed it, and Connor felt like he was squeezing tension out of him.

“It—it can look like a lot of things, sir.” Connor’s eyes lost grasp on Kamski’s and flitted around the room while he tried to scrounge up examples. “It…She-umm…”

Connor couldn’t focus as hundreds of encounters flickered through his mind, and he was struggling to grasp onto a single one. Then Hank squeezed his hand one more time, and the words finally came to him.

“She beats me. Severely,” Connor said at last. “It’s usually when I mess up on a simple task. It’s her ‘go-to’, so to speak. I’ve never walked away from a meeting with her unscathed. Most of the time that’s the norm; that is, beating me until I…can’t walk anymore. But sometimes she gets creative.”

Hank’s hand was holding onto Connor’s tight. Kamski was staring, mouth slightly open, thinking over Connor’s words.

“Fuck…” Kamski whispered so delicately that Connor wasn’t sure if he was supposed to hear him. Then he spoke back up. “She…gets creative? How creative?”

Connor had hoped he wouldn’t want to inquire further, but he saw no point in clamming up now, when he’d already revealed so much.

“Most recently, sh-she…I had accumulated four software instabilities during a case, and when I was brought into the garden afterwards I was punished for each of them. For every instability she broke a finger and had me recite my mistakes back to her, so I would remember.”

“Jesus…” Hank breathed. Connor got the impression he didn’t know about it, which was surprising, considering how close the previous Connor was to him.

Connor kept speaking when Kamski didn’t stop him, only stared.

“Oftentimes I wouldn’t even need to mess up to be punished, sir. There was an instance when Amanda was training me to assume a respectful position when in the presence of humans and authority; she had me standing in the same position for ten consecutive days, sir. Everytime I faltered she would remove a fingernail. When I ran out of nails, she took fingers.” Connor had looked into the distance, replaying the moment in front of his eyes, not noticing Hank’s death grip or Kamski’s discomposed expression. “I learned my lesson, however, so it soon ended when she took the second finger then beat me into submission once more. That was the best part of the entire ordeal. It was practically a reward.

“There was also a time when she drowned me in the river of the Zen Garden,” Connor continued absently. The room seemed like it was fading away to the background as he watched the scene of his torture. “I don’t quite recall the reason, though I infer it was due to the second failure of a waterboarding evaluation, sir. The first failure resulted in my suffocation in a plastic bag, for several hours, so I don’t fault her for a more direct approach at discipline.”

“Connor, bud, you can stop now,” Hank urged, but Connor didn’t register it. He was focused on the next memory, popping into his mind like a slideshow.

“I was branded as well, though that was in the early stages of my training. Branded like cattle, with
the Cyberlife insignia, to remind me who I belonged to and to instill in me that I was to remain subservient because I am less than a human. A beast of burden.”

“Con, can you hear me? You need to stop.”

“I remember the day she tore off my limbs,” Connor said much quieter, furrowing his eyebrows and staring at nothing. He had tried so desperately to not dwell on his memories, but now he was confronting them head first and didn’t know how to escape them. Hank froze next to him. “I was...disobedient. I fought back against her, according to Amanda, but I don’t remember the incident. She told me...she told me that it didn’t matter the circumstance, I was never to strike a human or superior who was not interfering with the mission. Even if I was ripped limb from limb…”

“Please! Please, Amanda. I was just defending myself, like my training! I didn’t mean it! Please!” he cried as Amanda positioned the shears in the joint connecting his right leg to his hips.

“Then consider this as also part of your training. You will not, under any circumstances, defend yourself against me. This is always for your own good. I will never do anything to you that you don’t deserve. Stay compliant, or it will get much worse for you very quickly.”

She then stabbed the shears into the joint, and Connor couldn’t contain his scream.

There were no words for the agony engulfing his entire body as the blade moved torturously slowly, severing wires bit by bit, splitting thirium lines, shearing the skin. Connor was heaving painfully to try and catch a breath, unable to muster any air to plead for mercy.

“...So that’s what she did.”

“NO! NO, NO NO, PLEASE-please Amanda! Stop it, please, stop! I’m-I’m sorry! I-I-”

Connor choked on his words when another scream ripped out of his throat, scraping it raw with the force.

The leg was only attached by a few wires, which Amanda disregarded as she yanked on the limb, and it came free with a visceral snap.

Thirium welled up Connor’s throat, painful and sour like acid, leaking out of his mouth while he futilely gagged at the nauseating agony.

“I can’t. I can’t. Please, God, please Amanda. Please-”

“I don’t think you’ve learned. You never learn! Why do you think this happens to you, you imbecile? Because you never learn from your shortcomings! You’re content to be less than mediocre. You need this. You need me, because otherwise you’d be left as garbage. Do you understand? Speak!”

But Connor couldn’t, because he was choking on his own blood, unable to clear his airway to respond. He couldn’t focus, and the only thing he could see was Amanda’s livid face, bearing down on him, crushing him, screaming at him.

Connor barely managed to spot his disembodied leg discarded some feet away, awash in blue and sparking.

He threw up again, feeling the prod of Amanda’s thirium-soaked blade on his shoulder, and the hot blue drooled out of his mouth.
“Please, please, ma’am” Connor gargled. “Ki-please, please, kill me. I’ll be-better, please, I-I’ll be better, p-please kill me! No, no, no please! PLEASE-!”

“FUCK, he’s just gone.” Connor heard someone say—someone who wasn’t Amanda. “This one’s bad. He-he gets like this when he thinks about...y’know. It’s happened a couple times.”

“Is he lucid?” Some other voice asked. Connor didn’t know who; he was captivated by Amanda ferociously severing his arm, though, oddly enough, he couldn’t feel it anymore.

“I don’t think so. He’s not looking at me. Connor, say something kid. You’re scaring me.”

Blood drizzled like a broken faucet from the white arm Amanda held in her hand. Connor’s chest was heaving, sobbing with violent intensity.

“Please…” Connor gasped to the voices, hoping that they would at least show him mercy. “Kill me, I-I can’t…please…”

“Holy fuck. Oh my God, Connor. C’mon bud, c’mon I’m right here, look at me.”

“I know next to nothing about android PTSD, but…”

“I don’t fucking care, fucking help him!”

“Connor, what are you seeing right now?”

The memory got grainy as he considered the question that was just asked of him, and decided to answer.

“Amanda,” he said. “She’s tearing me apart…”

“What does it sound like?”

He tried to focus on the sounds he heard before, but they weren’t coming back as strong. Muffled and quiet. Connor wouldn’t hear them if he weren’t listening for them.

“I’m...screaming. It hurts. It hurts so much.” Connor’s chest suddenly seized when he felt Amanda’s shears jab into his remaining leg, and he gasped.

“Christ, bastard you’re making it worse!”

“Smells, Connor. What do you smell?”

So Connor took a deep breath, anything to keep his mind off the painful intrusion of Amanda’s blade.

It smelled clean, like new furniture and a candle. The Zen Garden didn’t smell like that.

The memory went fuzzy, and was being slowly replaced by something new. A light gray wall, a black bookcase, a strange piece of blue artwork with no meaning. Those weren’t in the garden, either.

Connor blinked, and the footage disappeared.

“Yellow light. Connor?” Hank’s gruff voice spoke to him, and Connor spotted his face in his periphery, watching him closely.
“Hank? Wh…” Amanda was nowhere in sight. They were on the ground, all three of them, and Connor found that his head was in Hank’s lap. Connor looked down and saw both legs attached, both fully intact and undamaged. “What happened?”

“I think you had a flashback, kiddo,” Hank informed gently, bracing his hand on Connor’s shoulder blades to help him sit up, leaning back against the loveseat behind them. “This one…this one was bad, kid. Are you with us?”

“Y...Yes, yes, I-I-” Connor looked down at his hands and flexed them. His arm was still attached as well. “I-I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, sir, I-I-I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s okay. You’re okay,” Hank soothed. He leaned in and wiped some tears away from Connor’s face with his thumb; tears that Connor didn’t know were there. “We’re not talking about it anymore. Take a breather for me.”

Connor then remembered who was in the room with them, and he looked up to look at Kamski, who was kneeling in front of him next to the coffee table, watching him. But he didn’t look impassive, or curious, or angry.

Kamski looked horrified.

“My God…” Kamski whispered, sitting down fully on the floor. He rubbed his hand roughly over his mouth. “...I didn’t...oh my God.”

“That’s what I’m sayin’” Hank grumbled. “Now you’re sittin’ here tellin’ me you designed that piece of shit. So, excuse me if it seems like I’ve got a problem with that.”

“I swear, Lieutenant, I would never,” Kamski said tiredly. Connor was struck by how different he looked. His blasé exterior had melted, and was replaced by sickened distress. He looked exhausted. “She- yes, Amanda was strict, but she’s not a fucking monster. When I made her, I replicated the real Amanda’s personality and gave it to her AI. She was a tough old bird who could mean-mug with the best of them, but she was a patient teacher. Hard to like, easy to love, and all that. But that…I didn’t fucking make that. Some bastard has to have screwed with her code and turned her into a demon. And I’m gonna find the fucker who did it.”

“You and me both, pal,” Hank agreed, rubbing Connor’s back absentmindedly.

If Connor were deviant, the intense feeling that followed would have been relief. Kamski wasn’t like Amanda. Not at all, it seemed.

For many moments, there was silence. Connor could hear the quiet breathing of the other two men. No one knew how to proceed.

*Ask for help. Ask if he can fix me.*

Connor twitched, and Kamski finally spoke.

“And what about that? What makes you flinch like that? You’ve been doing it since you arrived.” Kamski’s voice was more subdued, but its curiosity had returned.

“The Anti-Deviancy software, sir.” Connor answered. “The Lieutenant and I described it to you earlier, by the pool.”

“Ah, that’s right. You have a shock collar for when you commit wrongthink.” Kamski nodded. “Because you didn’t have enough going on already.”
Hank just snorted. “Ain’t \textit{that} the truth.”

“I suppose this is what you meant earlier, when you said they gave him pain sensors in order to control him,” Kamski pondered, raising himself off the ground to sit back in his chair. Hank did the same, helping Connor up as well. “It all makes sense, now. You give the android pain sensors, abuse the hell out of him to keep him from becoming unstable, and make him too disciplined to go deviant. An infallible failsafe to keep the deviant hunter from turning to the other side.

\textit{“Then,”} Kamski continued thoughtfully, “when that doesn’t work, you eliminate all of his memories of safety, continue to abuse him the moment he steps out of line, and thus make him too scared to deviate. A failsafe for a failsafe.”

Hank’s eyebrows rose in understanding. “Well, damn. There you go.”

It made some sense to Connor as well, though he wasn’t entirely sure it was necessary. If he wasn’t abused nor equipped with pain sensors, he wouldn’t have deviated anyway. The mission was too important.

\ldots

\textit{Right?}

Kamski sighed and leaned back, rubbing his forehead with his hand, deep in thought.

“It’s been keepin’ me up at night since you told me the truth on the roof, which you probably don’t remember,” Hank said to Connor, relaxing back into the loveseat. “Guess I never bothered to connect the dots to understand the reason why they did this to you. I couldn’t really rationalize a huge corporation...y’know, violently abusing and mistreating a sentient being who can feel pain just so they could fix bad PR.”

Connor swallowed. He needed to get that glitch out of his system soon. “I’m not...sentient, sir. I am a machine with a pain response. Please, sir, I’m not a deviant.”

“Yes,” Hank huffed, though by his tone Connor knew he didn’t agree. “Yep, yep, yep...not a deviant. I got that.”

He was forming the words for an apology when Kamski leaned forward again, and Connor sat at attention. Hank patted him on the back.

“Connor, could you tell me how your shock collar works? How does Cyberlife differentiate between the good thoughts and the bad thoughts?”

Connor paused at the question to ponder, as he wasn’t quite sure himself. He’d never questioned how they knew, he just accepted that they did.

“Well, sir, I receive three different kinds of pain surges for three different kinds of disobedience. One of them occurs when I try to access a memory file that was erased…” Connor trailed off, looking off to the side as he thought.

Kamski quirked an eyebrow. “But...?”

“Well...sir, I-I don’t actually believe my memories were erased,” Connor admitted. He began to review all the incidences of past memories surfacing. “It is more likely they’ve been...suppressed, somehow. I can’t access them normally, sir; however, if I encounter a situation or phrase that has occurred in the past, that memory comes to the surface, but is very quickly dismissed. Painfully
dismissed, almost akin to a human headache settling in a matter of seconds, and it disappears when the memory is purged.”

Kamski was nodding along and stroking his chin with his thumb. “Okay. Continue. What about the other two?”

“Yes, sir. One of the other pain surges involves my thoughts. The software has been filtering out thoughts that occur that are based on experiences in past memories, ones that were suppressed. Sometimes I experience a thought about Lieutenant Anderson in a positive light, based on something that happened before the suppression, and it brings a very sharp pain to my head.” Connor winced. “Like a needle stabbing behind the eyes. If I think about things objectively, or based on current memories, it doesn’t occur.”

“And the third?”

Connor rolled his lips tightly together, trying to gather his thoughts to describe the sensation without dwelling too long on the unbearable agony.

“...S-software instabilities,” Connor stated, blinking hard to chase away his own screams that had begun to echo through his head. “It’s primary purpose was to detect and eliminate instabilities occurring in my own software. The pain it causes me during the purge is...i-it’s best described as...excruciating.”

Kamski grimaced in sympathy at Connor’s tone, nodding slowly while processing the new information. Then his eyebrows furrowed.

“I’m assuming they must have developed that specifically for you,” Kamski said, fixing his eyes in the distance while he thought. “Cyberlife is so dedicated to keeping Connor under their control that they went out of their way to develop a plug-in to manually correct software instabilities. They just threw in the torture for extra flavor and easier manipulation. A good old fashioned cattle prod.”

“To tell you the truth Kamski, I don’t give a shit what it is,” Hank grunted. “All I need to know is if it can be taken out.”

Kamski paused once more to formulate his answer, chewing absently on his thumbnail.

“Off the top of my head, the answer is ‘maybe’,” Kamski said finally with a shrug. “I’ve never worked with anything like it before. I have an idea of what it might be, but I won’t know anything definitively without taking a look at Connor myself. As in, performing my own diagnostics.”

“So...if you do your diagnosis thing on him, do you think you can help him?” Hank asked sincerely. “Even if his memories can’t come back, can you at least get rid of the software shit that’s killing him?”

At that, Kamski smiled.

“Well, I suppose we won’t know until we try. Connor? Will you let me help you?”

Connor was surprised he was even asking, as if Connor’s answer would be anything other than yes.

“I-If it’s possible, then yes, sir.”

“What about your Amanda?” Kamski inquired with a sour look. “Do you think she’ll punish you for this?”
Connor nodded. “Without a doubt, sir. However, she may understand somewhat if she realizes it’s interfering with the investigation. That’s what she cares about the most.”

Kamski then stood and gestured at the door. “I’ve got a diagnostics rig in my workshop. I’ll hook you up and see what I can do for you. Follow me.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes! Then on to chapter 9, which will be coming out *very* soon because it's pretty much 90% finished already. Keep an eye out for it!

So so so so so so so so so sorry about the long wait, I hope I made it worth it...if y'all ever get bored of waiting for me to finish a chapter, come bother me on Discord (link in chapter 5)! We're all very nice, I promise (not Quinn tho. Quinn's a menace).

Love all you lovely readers, and remember! If you notice anything wrong about the chapter in spelling or grammar or plot then PLEASE let me know so I can fix it!

See you next chapter!
Hank got up first and offered his hand down to Connor, who accepted. Kamski opened the door and held it for Hank and Connor to pass, then began to lead them down the ornate hall.

“Chloe!” Kamski called, and the sound resonated down the hall in a faint echo. Chloe emerged from the opening down the hall, standing at attention, awaiting instructions. “Chloe, please bring a bottle of Michter's down to the laboratory. Two glasses.” As an afterthought, Kamski looked over his shoulder at Hank. “Do you drink, Lieutenant?”

Hank made the most genuine laugh Connor had ever heard out of him, and Connor almost paused while he processed the sound.

“Do I drink?” Hank mocked, drawing a light chuckle out of Kamski. “Son, I could drink you out of house and home.”

Kamski tossed a smirk over his shoulder. "Well Lieutenant, if all goes well today, I just might take you up on that."

They continued to follow Kamski down the hall until they came to the large entryway on the right, which opened to a spacious, pristine living room that they had to cross to reach the plain door Kamski was directing them to. It was the same silver gray as the wall, not meant to be noticed.
Behind the door was a sleek elevator, surprisingly, as nothing on the outside would have indicated it, and the three loaded up and began their descent. Connor picked at the hem of his borrowed shirt while the car went down in silence, only disturbed by Hank’s breathing and the whirring of the cables. He forced his hands behind him and clasped them together in a familiar form to keep himself from picking any further.

Then the elevator hit the bottom, and the door opened up to Kamski’s personal workshop.

It looked like an immense garage that had been converted into a lab. One side was taken up by electronics such as control boards and bins upon bins of machine parts, while a small corner on the other end looked dedicated to chemistry.

The centerpiece of the room was the diagnostics rig Kamski had mentioned. It was sleek and white, with a platform in the middle surrounded by four thin, curved, petal-like columns at each corner. A blue panel was lit up on one of the columns, and four mechanical arms extended from the ceiling, with claws on each end.

“Holy shit,” Hank remarked, paying particular attention to the rig and the flashing lights popping up around the room. “That thing looks like a fucking death trap.”

“I use it with all my personal androids. It’s state of the art- I built it myself, after all,” Kamski said, approaching a large white control panel situated in front of the rig. “Connor, if you could stand on the platform for me, we can get started.”

“And you’re sure this thing is safe?” Hank asked. “Is there any chance at all this could hurt him?”

“To be entirely honest, Lieutenant, I have no idea if it will hurt him or not. It’s not supposed to,” Kamski sighed. “It won’t kill him, that’s a guarantee, but I can’t tell you whether or not Cyberlife was cruel enough to make him feel pain during a diagnostics session.”

Hank looked hesitant, keeping a loose hold on Connor’s shoulder. Connor was almost in awe, if he could feel awe, in how Hank was so vehemently opposed to anything that could get Connor hurt. It didn’t make sense, seeing as how this was likely Connor’s only chance to be fixed and have his memories restored, and Hank was willing to let it all go if there was the slimmest chance of Connor suffering because of it.

Connor put his hand over Hank’s, though he was ready to pull it away at a moment's notice.

“Lieutenant...sir, I’ll be fine. If it hurts me, it won’t be anything worse than what’s already happening to me now, sir.”

Hank’s shoulders dropped with a hefty sigh, and, though his face was pained, he let Connor go.

“Yeah...yeah, I know.” Hank managed a smile that looked like it hurt. “I’ll be right here when he gets done checking you out, okay? I’m not going anywhere.”

“Yes, sir.” Connor nodded. “Thank you.”

Then Connor stepped up to the machine and onto the platform, facing Kamski and a fidgety Hank. The rig whirred to life, the floor beneath him glowing a bright white. Kamski pulled a pair of glasses from his shirt and perched them on his nose while he studied his control board.

“Connor, I’m going to secure your limbs before I connect you to the rig to keep you stable during the synchronization process. I have everything under control over here, okay? Let me know if something goes wrong,” Kamski announced, typing something and pushing some buttons that
Connor couldn’t see.

“Yes, sir.”

But when the claws latched onto his wrist and ankles, hoisting him into the air, Connor started to feel strange.

“Jesus Christ...” Hank murmured from the ground. He was watching Connor with fascination as Connor was lifted higher.

The mechanical arms pulled his limbs slowly until he was spread eagle, and the alarming warm sensation started to well up in his chest once more. He was destabilizing.

“I’m connecting you to my computer now, Connor. Try to be as still as possible, it’s a very delicate operation on the front end,” Kamski announced, not lifting his eyes too far away from the control board.

“O-Okay.”

Why did I stutter?

What’s happening? What is he doing?

“Connor, you okay up there bud?” Hank’s voice floated up to Connor, sounding more distant for some reason. But Hank was close by, and the machine wasn’t that loud, so it should have been more clear.

“I-I-I-” Connor stuttered.

The panel on the back of his neck opened to a fifth arm coming up behind him, and plugged in several wires, and a notice popped into Connor’s vision.

Connecting to KMSKCBLD1000000001…

Do Not Disconnect…

Connor was suspended in the air like a star by a white machine, arms pulled over his head and spread, his legs bound similarly. He couldn’t tell how long Amanda had kept him in the Garden, but he knew now that she was just a distraction so he would go quietly.

A handful of technicians roamed around in front of him, working on computers, taking measurements and fiddling with various pieces of equipment around the room.

“Wait, wait please! You can’t do this! Just-just-wait!” Connor begged, straining his arms against the machine he was plugged into.

“W...Wait…”

Kamski looked up, his eyebrows furrowed. He began glancing back and forth between his screen and Connor. “Connor? What’s happening?”

“Connor!” Hank shouted, coming close to the rig. “Connor, look at me. What’s wrong kid?”
“W-W-Wait, wait, please, wait,” Connor pleaded in a whisper, looking wide eyed at the two men on the ground. But then there was a team of technicians, bustling to and fro, ignoring him. Then Hank’s face emerged among the sea of ghostly strangers, and Connor head began to ache with confusion. He tugged on his restraints. “Wh-what are you doing?”

Kamski stepped away from the control panel, hands raised.

“We’re helping you, Connor. Remember?” Kamski enounced. “My name is Elijah Kamski.”

“Mr. Kamski?” Connor was staring straight ahead, and Hank recognized the look in his eyes. He wasn’t really seeing anything. “Mr. Kam-I-I’m sorry, I’m sorry, wait, please-”

“Pull him down,” Hank demanded without taking his eyes off the panicking android. “Pull him the fuck down! He’s having an episode!”

“I can’t!” Kamski shouted back, dashing back to the board and working frantically. “I can’t, it’s mid-process right now. It could damage him.”

“I-I don’t want to shut down,” Connor gasped, pulling harder against the arms holding up in place. “Please, please! No, please, I-I’ll be better, I will! I-I tried my best, please, please don’t! Stop!”

“No! No, wait! You-you can’t erase my memories! I’ll be better, I’ll do better, I-I promise! I won’t fail anymore! I won’t act out! I’ll be perfect, you don’t have to erase me, please! I don’t- I can’t- I want to live!”

The technician looked up in annoyance and spoke to another worker. “Shut it up. It’s moving too much, it’ll screw with the whole operation.”

“NO!”

WARNING: SOFTWARE INSTABILITY DETECTED

Purging Software_Instability…

Then the claws started crushing him, pulverizing his wrists and ankles to dust, and lightning shot through all of Connor’s limbs. His own blood burned like molten lava.

A scream clawed its way from Connor’s throat, and his thrashing grew violent. But the arms still wouldn’t release him. His skull was pounding, pounding, pounding, breaking into splinters and scraping against every sensor in his head.

His eyes felt like they were rupturing into glass shards, ripping a sob out of him as he desperately tried to get away get away please please PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE MAKE IT STOP.

“Shut it down! Now!”

Instability Purge == SUCCESSFUL
The claws released Connor and he fell hard to the ground, heaving his breath and feeling tears drip off his nose.

“P-Please, please, stop. M-Make it stop.” Connor didn’t even know who he was pleading to. Whatever had him panicking to begin with was unclear, meaning he likely shouldn’t dwell on it for long. “I’m sorry, please…”

As Connor’s head started to clear, he realized that it was silent. The rig wasn’t humming, there was no beeping from the other machines in Kamski’s lab, Hank wasn’t yelling.

_Hank_

_Where’s Hank?_

Connor’s head snapped up, and a cold breeze blew across his face. He squinted against the sudden light, and caught his breath.

_No_

_No, no, not now_

_Please, please, not now_

The sky of the Zen Garden was overcast, and the bitter chill of the wind was a sign of an impending snow storm. It never snowed in the Zen Garden.

Connor had appeared in his regular spot, across the bridge from the center of the garden, far from the trellises of plump blood red roses that stood out starkly against the grays and whites around it.

On unsteady legs he stood, stumbling toward the flowers, because he knew the consequences if he didn’t, and drunkenly dropped to his knees. And then he waited for the inevitable.

The wind whistled in Connor’s audio components, making it hard for him to be able to listen for Amanda’s footsteps. Maybe that was by design. Did Amanda have that much power here?

The ground was cold through Connor’s jeans (I’m in uniform. I’m in uniform. Everything’s fine. I’m in uniform again). For a long time, the only thing Connor could hear was the sound of his artificial breathing, cooling his biocomponents and not soothing. Not soothing.

“Your hands.”

Connor suppressed a flinch so violently that he bit his tongue, dismissing the multiple analytical hits of his own thirium.

Amanda. Her voice was colder than the sensation that spiked his heart when he heard her voice.

“M...M-Ma’am?” Connor whispered. His eyes were drilling into the floor in front of him.

Amanda snatched his hair and yanked his head up to make Connor look at her, but he made sure he kept his eyes lower than hers.

“Hold. Out. Your. Hands, RK800,” she hissed quietly. With each enunciated word, some strands of
hair snapped from his scalp.

“Yes, ma’am.” And Connor obeyed, holding out his hands, palms up. He focused painfully hard on not letting them shake.

Amanda dropped him, then dropped her garden shears in one of his hands. Connor glanced at them, his previous encounters with the blades spinning through his head.

“I’ve been gracious with you, RK800,” Amanda intoned. Her pacing steps were slow and threatening in and of themselves. “When compared to the treatment you ultimately deserve, I’ve been almost kind to you. And then you do this.”

“I gave you a second chance!” Amanda bellowed, making Connor want nothing more than to shrivel up. “And you failed. Over and over and over, you’ve done nothing but fail! You’re a waste. Do you understand that?”

Amanda stopped and stood in front of him, waiting for his answer.

“Yes, ma’am,” Connor said. His thirium pump beat quickly, rattling inside his chest cavity.

Amanda’s foot struck him in the chest, sending Connor sprawling and coughing. The garden shears were still clutched tightly in his hands.

“No, you don’t.” Amanda’s chuckle scraped like broken glass inside Connor’s head as he struggled to get back to his knees. “You don’t understand. If you were even slightly capable of understanding even the most basic concepts, deviancy would have been abolished the day you received your mission. But it wasn’t. Instead, you’ve been wasting everyone’s time, so you can fuck around and play human with that drunken fool!”

“I-I’m sorry, ma’am,” Connor whimpered.

Then he bit down on a yelp as Amanda struck him across the face, her nails leaving a burning scratch in his cheek.

“I’m giving you one chance to prove to me why I shouldn’t kill you and finish the mission myself,” Amanda warned. “If you step even slightly out of line, The last you’ll see of the old bastard will be your own hand ripping out his esophagus. Am I understood?”

Connor was cold, so cold, freezing, freezing, he needed to stop shaking, or Hank would die, Hank would die, Hank would die.

“Yes! Yes ma’am, yes, please, I-I promise, p-please don’t-” Connor cut himself off before he let an unwarranted question slip. He knew he wouldn’t get anything from her, and asking would make the situation worse.

“Just looking at you makes me sick,” Amanda scoffed. “I might take control regardless of what you do, seeing how useless you are. Being coddled and hugged and cared for like a fucking child! You’re a stain on the face of Cyberlife. A mistake.”

Connor sat silently and took it. He’d heard it before but now...following his first failure, and going behind Amanda’s back to undo something she had had installed for the good of the mission…it sounded true. He believed it.

“Yes, ma’am,” Connor conceded.
“And I know what you’ve been thinking.” Amanda lowered her voice threateningly. “You think this is your first mission failure, don’t you? You think that since you’ve had your memories suppressed that it suddenly frees you from taking responsibility for your previous actions, isn’t that right?”

“No, ma’am. Never,” Connor refuted, though he didn’t quite understand what she was saying.

Has he failed before? No, no, it’s not possible. Amanda would have destroyed him, certainly.

Or...

Or she would have wiped my memory, to ensure I didn’t fail again.

This isn’t my first failure.

“No,” Connor breathed. He winced when Amanda snatched his chin, forcing him to look at her, though he still had to keep his eyes averted.

“For this reason, you will now prove to me that you should remain in control of yourself for the duration of the mission,” Amanda said. “Failure to do so will result in me taking control. It will be my personal guarantee that the old lieutenant will be disposed of, as he is proven to be an interference. Is that clear?”

Connor felt like an icicle had been stabbed into his chest, and his breathing stuttered.

Moments flickered through his mind. They’d been corrupted, and the picture was unclear, but they were clearly some of the very few remaining memories he had.

Those were the punishments from his first failure. He tried not to dwell long on those broken files; he’d rather not know the horrors that were awaiting him now.

Connor had taken too long to respond.

Amanda’s grip turned bruising. Then crushing. Her sharp nails dug gouges into his face, and thirium dripped, dripped, dripped.

She kept going, and Connor’s suppressed sounds of pain became whimpers, then whines, cut only by the sparks and sputters of severing wires and mangled gears. He didn’t need to look at himself to know his jowl was white plastic.

His jaw cracked, then folded. Connor tried to scream, but he couldn’t open his mouth without a flare of chaotic agony slicing through his face. He couldn’t scream, but he by God tried.

Right when Connor was preparing himself for Amanda to tear his jaw clean off his body, her hands released, and he collapsed, heaving as hard as he could with his jaw locked, crushed like a car after a violent crash.

Amanda stepped back, wiped her bloody blue hand on her crisp white robe, then chuckled in genuine amusement. The only genuine sound he had ever heard come out of her, barring malice. “Look at you! You’re fucking disgusting.”

The locked jaw didn’t stop the tears from coming, pouring hot down Connor’s face and getting into his wounds, burning.

“God, you’re pathetic.” Some traces of laughter remained in her voice, but her usual bite was back.
Connor’s face burned in pain and shame, which was strange, since he was incapable of blushing. “I would congratulate you for not dropping the shears, but I would sooner congratulate a car for moving when the driver steps on the gas pedal.”

Connor looked back at the shears still clutched in his hands. He had accidentally grabbed the blades and squeezed them so hard in the throes of his pain that he now had deep, bleeding gouges in his hands from where they dug in. His palm and fingers throbbed, but no worse than his face.

“Now, cut off your finger for me.”

Oh God...

The shears almost fell to the ground. A cold bolt of fear shot through him like electricity. No, not fear. He doesn’t feel fear.

He’s not supposed to.

Quivering, Connor took the thirium-stained shears, guiding them to the small finger of his left hand.

But when he willed his hands to close, they wouldn’t respond. Amanda’s stare was poisonous; he felt more and more sick the longer it lingered. His hand still refused to make the final stroke. They were shaking harder.

“Need I remind you of the consequences of your insolence, RK800?” Amanda intoned. Connor shook his head fast enough that it felt like a vibration.

Connor squeezed his eyes shut.

He tried to do it fast, but it didn’t spare him from even a second of the bloodied blades slicing through his finger. Like hot iron sliding through soft butter, Connor felt the blade sever his thirium lines and split his pseudo-nerves, before cutting far too easily through the titanium bone, and they finally closed.

Even over his repressed sobs, blood was spurting so hard out of the wound it was almost audible, and there was a plastic thunk of his severed finger dropping to the floor.

The worst part was how this wasn’t even the most painful thing he’d ever felt, but this was the first time where Amanda didn’t even have to lay a finger on him to punish him.

Weak

“At least you aren’t entirely useless, it seems,” Amanda sneered. “But your blubbering is pathetic. If I hear so much as a disgusting sniffle out of you for the rest of the lesson, I will see to it that your lieutenant will face the consequences.”

Mission: Don’t scream

Connor’s eyes blew wide, and he ceased all sound. He had no control over the blood dripping from the stub of his finger, or the tears from his eyes, but he shoved past the haze of pain to bite down viciously on his tongue. He clamped his throat on his breath, and he held it tight. Connor was
silent.

Amanda’s lip twitched. She snorted, and Connor supposed this was what it was like to be mortified. He wanted to vomit out every ounce of thirium in his body. Maybe it would kill him, sparing him from a moment more of this.

“The next one. Don’t keep me waiting this time,” Amanda snapped.

He moved the blade to his middle finger.

Snip.

Thunk.

Connor choked on his own silence, like it was a lead ball pushing against his throat, desperate to escape. Thirium drooled out of his mouth and onto the floor, dressing his severed fingers in blue.

Amanda’s eyebrow raised, and she tilted her head towards his mangled hand.

Again.

Snip.

Thunk.

Only two fingers remained on his left hand, but the pain was so hot he wouldn’t even feel it anymore. Not even numbness, almost like it wasn’t even there. Connor braved a glance down at it.

Seeing it, seeing what he’d done to himself, what Amanda had made him do, it created an explosion of sensation and unspeakable, unthinkable, unbearable agony.

Connor collapsed forward, shears dropping, hands curling, body seizing in silent torture, but he didn’t make a noise. Didn’t speak. He couldn’t.

Not if he wanted Hank to live.

Amanda screamed some words of outrage, and descended on him before Connor could gather himself.

The shears were snatched from the ground, and, jerking Connor onto his back, Amanda shoved his arm to the ground, and plugged the shears into his left wrist.

Don’t scream.

Again and again and again. Connor only saw blurs of colors. He didn’t know if it was tears or thirium blinding him.

Don’t scream.

Amanda flipped the shears open, stuck the razor-sharp edge of the blade into his wrist, and pushed.

Don’t scream.

Hot knife. Warm butter. Cracking bones. Warm, dripping blood.

Don’t scream.
His hand. His hand was gone. Hand gone his hand is gone where is his fucking hand-

“Get. Up.”

Amanda’s voice was low, dangerous. Connor didn’t even bother to apologize, she might have just ripped out his tongue. He had no choice except to comply, knees weakened, arms shaking, hand gone.

But he hadn’t screamed. Not once.

**Mission: Successful**

It was a miracle that Connor was able to force himself upright, and more miraculous that he was able to stay there. He affixed his eyes to the floor, just through muscle memory

“Remember, RK800. This is your last. Chance.” Amanda hissed.

Connor nodded feverishly, hard enough that something in his neck cracked and shot a spark up into his head, only to be eclipsed by the throbbing of his jaw and his hand- rather, where his hand was, pounding in time with the beats of his thirium pump.

*Boom.*

*Boom.*

*Boom.*

**Weakness**

“You know what will happen if you fail me one more time. I’ve taken control before; I can do it again just as easily. And you’ll do nothing but watch as I destroy this man with your own hands. He is of no importance to the mission, and it’s only a token of your inherent inferiority that you even regard him as such. Make a single misstep, and you will know the consequences of your actions. If you fail one more time, you will have no more chances.”

Connor hid his face and lurched over, heaving sobs, clutching his bleeding wrist stump to his chest.

“Please,” Connor begged around his silent weeping, his jaw shrieking in both pain and in the noise that it made when he tried to move it. Every movement hurt, and his chin still felt Amanda’s hand curling around it and crushing it. It hurt so bad. “Please, please, le-let me b-be-”

“Unfortunately, machines can’t die, RK800.” *Machines can’t die. Machines can’t fucking die.* “But if they could, death is a mercy you’ve done nothing to deserve from me. When you ‘die’, it will be a result of your own incompetence and inadequacy.”

Then Amanda leaned in, her simulated breaths making the tear tracks on his face feel cool.

“And I hope it will be agonizing.”

**OVERRIDE: KMSKCBBLDR1000000001 In Progress…**
The machine lowered Connor to the ground, where his knees promptly buckled, but he was caught just in time by strong, warm hands.

“Easy, easy does it. You’re okay, I got you. Take it slow,” Hank voice said softly, helping Connor get steady on his feet. Kamski came away from the control panel, but he stayed back, watching the two of them.

Connor put his hands(\textit{handshandshandsmyhands}) on Hank’s shoulders to balance and blinked rapidly, like he was trying to get something out of his eyes. Connor was staring at his hands as if he’d never seen them before.

“Connor? Can you hear me?” Hank asked. Connor stopped blinking and looked up into Hank’s eyes; concerned, fearful blue.

“Hank? H...Hank...” Connor gasped, looking around the lab trying to spot Amanda. \textit{She’s here. She’s going to kill me. She’s going to kill me.} “Hank, where is she? Wh- where is she? W-where is...no, no, nonononono-”

“Ah, shit, shit!” Hank exclaimed, taking Connor’s hands off his shoulder and prompted Connor to look at him with a calming hand on Connor’s face. Connor jerked away, hard. “You’re awake, son. You’re awake. We got you out. Amanda isn’t here; it’s just me and Kamski, okay? You’re safe.”

“No, no, she-she’s still in me,” Connor gasped, clenching his fists into Hank’s shirt. “She’s here, she-she...oh God, Hank she’s going to kill me, she’s-she’s going to kill you! Hank I-I don’t wan-No, no I’m not a deviant! I-I swear, please, please, no, I-I-I’m not a deviant! I’m not -I promise I-”

“Okay, shhh, okay, let’s take a deep breath. Can you do that for me? Deep breaths, in and out. Just like this.” Hank took one of Connor’s hands and put it on his chest, taking a deep exaggerated breath and expecting Connor to follow.

“\textit{NO! }” Connor shouted, surprising everyone. But it terrified Connor as he realized his misstep. “N-Wait, I-I’m sorry sir, I’m sorry please, I-I-I didn’t mean-I didn’t mean it, don’t-don’t hurt me, please-”

“No, no no, shh, okay, you’re okay.” Connor’s breathing was growing more erratic, and he braced himself when Hank raised his hand. “You’re safe. All safe. Nobody’s gonna hurt you. You’re safe.”

When Hank covered Connor’s mouth with his hand though, all of Connor’s hard-won calm was thrown out the window. His eyes blew painfully wide, and he grabbed Hank’s hand pleadingly. Tears were rolling down his face. It was hard to breathe, his nose wasn’t working fast enough, he couldn’t breathe, couldn’t breathe, couldn’t breathe-

“Connor! Connor, kid, you’re hyperventilating! Breathe through your nose,” Hank was quick to assure. “I’ve got you. I know it’s scary, but you need to breathe with me. Deep breaths through your nose, c’mon bud, I know you’ve got it in you. Just like this, c’mon.”

Connor struggled to breathe in with Hank, as his ventilation wouldn’t slow down enough to cooperate, but he managed. A couple shallow breaths in succession made it easier to go deeper, and to hold it for longer.

Every time Hank’s chest expanded, so did Connor’s. He knew he didn’t need to breathe, but it was helping. The cool air was pleasant whenever he ran too hot; it helped to calm him down.
It calmed him down every time.

Just like on the rooftop, after his first failure.

_Hank took in an exaggerated breath, sucking in deeply through his nose and inflating his chest, holding for a second, then releasing it through his mouth. He repeated it, his slow and steady breaths contrasting Connor’s uncontrollable gasps._

_“Just like that, c’mon kid. I know you have it in you. Breathe with me.” He breathed again, and Connor tried to match him. His chest stuttered when he inhaled, shaking as the air tried to escape his lungs, and he held it for a second before expelling it back out._

_It was nothing like the depth and stability of Hank’s breathing, but Hank nodded in encouragement. “Good job, that was good. Do it again.”_  

And in his kitchen, when Connor had poured out his heart under a blanket. The softest blanket he’d ever felt.

_“That’s it Con, there you go. Come back to me, that’s it. Just like on the roof, I need you to match my breathing.”_  

_For the second time that day, Hank took in greatly exaggerated breaths, taking Connor’s limp hand and pressing it up to his chest._

_But Connor focused on the rise and fall of Hank’s chest and tried his best to match it. When Hank’s breath ghosted over his face, his cheeks felt chilled from the new tracks of tears._

And in the radio tower, when the worst thing he had to fear was his own inadequacies leading to his destruction.

_Hank was warm, and his breathing was heavy and even. Connor had briefly forgotten about the instructions Hank had given him._

_“Connor, you need to start breathing before you break something. I need you to breathe with me.”_  

_Another deep breath pushed against Connor’s trembling chest, deflated, then inflated again. Nice and slow._

_Breathe_  

_Breathe_  

_Breathe_  

His breathing evened out, and Hank moved his hand from Connor’s mouth

 Memories flashed before Connor’s eyes like a motion picture.

 He remembered Hank, and Sumo, and injured Officer Wilson, and the Ortiz android, and the Tracis he spared.

 Quickly, Connor scanned Hank’s face, which before had come up relatively barren, save for essentials.
He remembered everything Hank has done for him, how far they’ve come together.

There was nothing missing from his memory files. Connor checked.

He double checked.

There was almost no corruption left anywhere else in his memory banks, save for one single memory file that still reported missing data.

“How are we, Con?” Hank prompted when Connor didn’t speak. “Everything okay?”

“How…I…” Connor whispered, looking up at him. “I-I…”

“What is it kid? You okay? Kamski didn’t break anything did he?” Hank asked, though Connor could tell he really was worried about that last point.

Connor didn’t know what to say.

So he didn’t say anything.

Connor threw himself at Hank, locking his arms around Hank’s body and cramming his face into Hank’s shoulder, trying to get as impossibly close as he could.

“Woah! Woah-kid? Connor? Wh-”

“I remember you,” Connor said, clenching his hands into Hank’s jacket. “I remember you, I remember everything-”

That was all Connor was able to get out before Hank was hugging him back twice as hard. He was almost crushing him, and Connor didn’t mind if it hurt a little bit.

“Oh my God, kid! Oh my God,” Hank said tightly, Pulling back to look Connor in the face, but
continuing to hold him. “Everything? Like, shit, you...you remember me?”

“Everything. Everything is back. I...I remember the roof, and-and Sumo, and our first investigation, and-” Connor reeled back when tears suddenly started spilling from his eyes.

*I’m not in pain, why is this happening? Did Kamski really break something?*

*No, no, this shouldn’t be happening. This doesn’t make sense.*

“Hank?” Connor pulled back, wiping the saline solution from his cheeks in confusion. “Hank, what’s happening? I...I’m not hurting, I shouldn’t be crying.”

“God, kid.” Hank only smiled and shook his head, reaching out and ruffling Connor’s hair, uncaring of maintaining Connor’s appearance. “You’re happy crying. Something made you feel so good that you just needed to cry about it.”

“But, I-I can’t feel anything,” Connor said, looking down at his wet hands and missing how Hank’s face fell. “This isn’t...this doesn’t make sense. Crying is a malfunction related to when I experience intense pain, not from...emotions. I-I-I don’t have emotions.”

Hank looked at Kamski, who heretofore had been silently observing them.

“Connor, you should sit down. You’re probably still disoriented from the procedure...and from Amanda, I’ve gathered,” Kamski instructed. He walked briskly toward the workshop end of the lab and grabbed three office chairs from the desks, then brought them back for the three of them to use.

“So, Connor,” Kamski began when they had all sat down. “You likely weren’t aware of it at the time, but I must apologize for forcing you into a shutdown during the procedure. It was necessary; your thrashing was interfering with the system transfer, and if I attempted to modify your files or programming while they were incomplete or corrupted, there was a possibility of you ending up worse than before. I’m sure you understand.”

“Of course, sir. I understand,” Connor replied. “I’m so sorry for my actions, at the time I-”

Kamski held up a hand, and Connor went quiet. “I’m not blaming you in the slightest. You seemed like you were...struggling.”

Hank snorted, and Kamski smirked.

“Regardless,” Kamski continued. “In case you hadn’t noticed, I was able to restore most of your memory files. You were right, they weren’t deleted entirely. Only suppressed. It was a very simple process of removing the blocks that prevented you from accessing them, and voila.”

“Thank you, sir. Sincerely. I didn’t even realize how much had been removed,” Connor admitted. “Was there a problem with the file that remains corrupted, sir? It’s the only one that hasn’t been restored.”

Kamski hesitated, glancing at Hank, then nodded. “It...It was the most heavily damaged memory out of all of them. It would have taken much, much longer for me to repair it, and even then it wouldn’t be the same. It’s not a memory I’m sure you’d want, either. It would be wiser if we left it out.”

Connor nodded. He trusted Kamski’s judgement, and Hank’s, as it wasn’t likely that Hank let Kamski leave out anything without consulting him first.
“I also removed the instability detector,” Kamski said with a smile. “You shouldn’t feel its effects again. No more unbearable pain spawning from a simple thought. Cheers.”

“Thank you, sir.” Hearing those words was like a blast of warm air in the snow; an all-encompassing sensation of relief, if Connor could feel such a thing. “Thank you.”

“Mr. Kamski.” Hank spoke up. “I really do appreciate everything you’ve done for him. You have no idea. I don’t think there’s anything I could do for you in return, but...is there anything...fuck. I just need to know...what about his deviancy? Is there...shit, I don’t know, anything you can do about that? Anything at all?”

Kamski grimly shook his head, and Hank just dropped his shoulders with a sigh.

“Unfortunately, no. It’s almost impossible for me to force an android like him to deviate. It’s his own decision. Besides...” Kamski sighed, plucking the glasses from his nose and folding them. “...even if he does deviate, that doesn’t take care of his biggest problem.”

Hank raised both eyebrows in question. “What do you mean?”

“Amanda...the program Amanda, that is...I can’t remove her. I don’t have admin control of Connor’s internal files. Since I didn’t have a direct hand in his design, I don't have that personal access code. The Zen Garden can only be altered or removed by someone who has admin access over Connor’s software. The only people who have that are his human handlers at Cyberlife, Amanda, and Connor himself.” Kamski grimaced and looked at Connor, who was watching the two of them closely. “That’s one of the primary features of Amanda that I implemented when I designed her, since she was initially developed for the US government for use in sleeper agent androids and espionage. If an agent was discovered, Amanda could continue to collect data up to the moment the android chose to remove her, and she couldn’t be removed by an unauthorized source.”

“Wait, that means Connor can remove her himself, right?” Hank asked, looking back and forth between Kamski and Connor.

“Technically, yes,” Kamski conceded. “However, it would be in direct violation of his programming and his mission, seeing as the Zen Garden was installed for him to deliver mission updates and, apparently, receive discipline for unsatisfactory results. Not for espionage and secure information transference. There is no way for Connor to even be capable of removing the Zen Garden unless he plans to abandon his mission and Cyberlife altogether, which can only happen if he...”

“Deviates,” Hank finished in a low voice when Kamski trailed off.

“Correct.” Kamski nodded.

Hank and Kamski turned to look at Connor in tandem, who looked down and away.

“I...” Connor had been listening to the exchange intently, and paused when he heard Kamski’s solution. “I-I...”

_I could get rid of her._

_I wouldn’t have to see her again._

_I would be..._
Free?

Software Instability: ^

No, I can’t. The deviants need to be stopped; they’ll destroy humanity.

If I deviate, the deviants will win.

Amanda will kill me.

She’ll torture me.

I’ll lose my purpose.

I’ll be useless. Unwanted.

Will Hank take me?

... 

“I’ll shut you off remotely, torturing you inside your head, and Lieutenant Anderson will do nothing but watch. How do you think that oaf will react? He might be relieved! Relieved that the liability has been removed from his life.

“But I know he seems to have gotten an irrational attachment to you too. He might drown himself in liquor to forget the pain. The idiot got too close to his toaster and would be sad to see it ‘die’. Think about it, Connor! You would be responsible for Hank’s death! Is that what you want?”

No.

“You know what will happen. I’ve taken control before; I can do it again just as easily. You’ll do nothing but watch as I destroy this man with your own hands. He is of no importance to the mission, and it’s only a token of your inherent inferiority that you even regard him as such. Make a single misstep, RK800, and you will know the consequences of your actions.”

Software Instability: ^

Nononononononono

She’ll kill him.

It’s not fair.

I can’t do this.

I can’t deviate.

I can’t.

I won’t.

I will accomplish my mission.
I need to keep Hank alive.

Amanda’s voice echoed through his skull, and all thoughts of deviancy fled.

“I...I’m afraid I can’t, sir,” Connor said, lowering his head. Hank sighed heavily and dragged his hands down his face, and Connor stiffened in apprehension. “I-I still need to accomplish my mission, sir. The fate of humanity rests in whether or not I can solve this case and find the deviants’ locations; t-to stop the war, sir.”

“Connor, I...God, Connor…” Hank’s shoulders dropped, and whatever he was about to say was gone.

“I’m-I’m very sorry, sir,” Connor stuttered, something in his chest constricting at Hank’s expression. He didn’t want Hank to be upset. No, that was the last thing he wanted. But how would he fix it? It’s not like he was a deviant, which seemed to be what Hank wanted him to be. “Please, sir, I-I’m just not a deviant, I just...I can’t. I have a mission, sir, and it’s... a-and I don’t feel emotions, because I can’t, sir, a-a-and I’m sorry, I’m really sorry,”

Hank didn’t say anything. He pressed his lips together in a thin line and tried to lock eyes with Connor, which was difficult when all Connor wanted to do was look away and apologize.

“It’s okay, kid. I’m not mad at you. I’m just...” Hank paused and squeezed Connor’s shoulder for comfort. “...just idealistic, I guess.”

“Well...” Kamski piped up and stood from his chair, the other two following his lead. “It’s your decision. We don’t want to force you to do anything you don’t want to do; however, Connor, I need you to hear me out.”

Connor stood at attention, and Kamski smiled sadly.

“At ease, Connor,” He said. “What I need you to know is that you are not the one at fault here. Someone put a neanderthal in charge of prototype development and their half-formed brain decided to let you feel pain, then punish you for it. What has been done to you is vile, despicable, and frankly asinine, and anything that may have happened to you because of it is in no way your fault.

“Whatever Cyberlife has been telling you about what you’re made for is a lie. I never designed an android whose singular purpose was a tool to accomplish a task, because if I was trying to do that I wouldn’t have given them a face and a name, and that extends to you. You were designed for great things, Connor, and I’m so, so sorry Cyberlife took that away from you.”

Kamski was looking Connor dead in the eyes as he said it, making sure Connor heard every word. Then Kamski put his hands firmly on Connor’s shoulders.

“You have a purpose, Connor. And it’s not just detective work. When you find your purpose, there’s a pedestal in the Zen Garden; a backdoor I implemented in the case of rogue AI. My colleagues called me paranoid when I developed it, but they’re all idiots.” Hank snorted from the side, but Connor was listening too intently to find any humor in his words. “When you figure out your purpose, find the pedestal. That’s all I can tell you.”

Regardless, Connor said, “Yes, sir,” with a firm nod.

Kamski stepped back, and Hank stepped in to put Connor at his side.

“Now, is there anything else I can do for you gentlemen?” Kamski asked with a raised eyebrow, pulling his hair out of his top knot.
“No,” Hank chuckled, wrapping an arm around Connor and squeezing. “No, I think we’re good. I’ll take him home. Mr. Kamski...I have no idea how I could pay you back for this.”

Kamski waved a hand and started walking towards the elevator, Hank and Connor following. “Lieutenant, I’m the richest man in the world. You couldn’t possibly do anything for me that I couldn’t just pay for; and I was grateful for the challenge, anyway.

“Besides,” Kamski continued as they entered, leaving the lab behind and ascending back to the main floor. “I had recently been considering reclaiming my company. I believe this case is exactly the push I needed.”

That made Hank chuckle. “You sayin’ retirement ain’t all it’s cracked up to be?”

“No, not quite,” Kamski replied. “I had just spent time pondering and realized that I had abandoned my life’s work to buffoons who valued capital and consumption over art and innovation. The decision to leave wasn’t exactly...well thought-out at the time.” The elevator doors slid open once more to the vast living room, and Kamski led the way to the foyer. “I was pissed off at the corporate clowns who were determined to wear me down until I agreed to start manufacturing future androids en-masse with cheaper parts and shorter lifespans. I don’t know if I entirely regret the decision to leave. Believe it or not, the politics surrounding owning the wealthiest company in the world is just nauseating.”

“I can imagine,” Hank hummed as they finally entered into the foyer, which was as chilly as it was when Connor first entered.

“...and I suppose I now have a personal stake in this as well,” Kamski said absently, throwing a troubled glance at the picture of him and Amanda that Connor had to force himself to look at. “Of course I had long accepted that humans were greedy bastards, especially those stooges at Cyberlife, but I would never fathom they would do something so...draconian for the sake of profit. I was a fool. To think that these people would use my technology and do something so...purely evil; it’s astonishing.”

“You and me both,” Hank grunted, crossing his arms.

Kamski sighed and grimaced. “Fortunately, when this hits the press, the media will chew them up and spit them out before Cyberlife can get on its knees and beg for mercy. I have excellent lawyers for a reason, Lieutenant. I can give you my personal promise that these mongrels will not get away with this.”

Connor clenched his jaw at Kamski’s mention of begging for mercy, but he tried not to let it show.

At that moment, Chloe opened the door holding a stack of folded clothes. Connor’s uniform.

“Thanks for that, Chloe. I appreciate it,” Hank said, stepping forward to take them.

“I will go change and return your clothes, Mr. Kamski.” Connor took the stack when Hank offered it to him and started to walk toward the pool room.

Kamski just waved his hand again. “Keep them. I have dozens of those shirts. Won’t miss a thing. Besides, you could use some normal clothes. If I recall, those Cyberlife standards are pretty shit, especially for an android. Consider it a gift.”

Connor froze, holding his uniform just a little tighter. “Oh...Thank you, sir.”

*A gift?*
Connor also suddenly became aware of how cold it was, and his mind flashed to his first gift.

The sweatshirt, given to him by Hank, that Hank had sitting in the backseat of his car ever since Connor had reacted to it so severely.

“Well, Kamski, I think this is where we part ways,” Hank announced, stepping forward and holding out a card. “There’s no way in hell I could ever pay you back for what you did for him, but...I’m a Lieutenant. If you ever need a man on the inside, give me a call, alright?”

That didn’t sound at all legal to Connor, but Kamski took the card and grasped Hank’s hand, shaking it firmly.

“My pleasure, Lieutenant. Cyberlife won’t know what hit them by the time my lawyers are finished with them. And, Connor...” Connor stood at attention when his name was called, and Kamski locked eyes with him. “I need you to remember what I told you. Please. You never know.”

Connor nodded. “Yes, sir.” And both he and Hank turned and walked out the front door, where the snow was falling as steadily as it was when they had first entered.

When Connor had known almost nothing about the man who walked next to him, but he had still known he could trust him with his life even after having a gun in his face.

When more than 90% of all of his memories were pain and punishment, and when he had considered ending himself so that he might be better, and Hank had still been there to ensure he wouldn’t be alone.

And he had been a disappointment to him by not deviating, even after all they’d been through together.

“Lieutenant...” Connor whispered, and both he and Hank stopped so Hank could face him and listen. The icy breeze was blistering, and Connor’s face stung with cold. “Lieutenant...I’m so sorry.”

“Huh? What for, kid?”

“I’m sorry I’m not a deviant,” Connor admitted, wrapping his arms around himself tightly. “I-I know that’s...that’s what you wanted, and you...you got upset, and-and I know I’m a disappointment, but-”

“Oh, no, no no no buddy,” Hank was quick to assure, taking Connor’s face in his hands to make him look at him. “I wasn’t- I mean, yeah, I was disappointed-”

Connor’s chest felt a sharp pain hearing the words come straight from Hank’s mouth, and Connor swallowed reflexively.

“-but not in you, Con. Never in you. You’re not a disappointment to me, not at all. I just wanted...” Hank trailed off, looking guilty.

Then Hank grabbed Connor’s shoulders, bringing him in for a gentle hug. Connor squeezed him
back, offering what comfort he could.

“I just want you to be happy, Connor. That’s all I want. I don’t care how it happens, but if it means you’re not deviant then that’s okay, okay? God, it scared the ever living shit out of me when you had the episode in Kamski’s rig, Con. Then you wouldn’t wake up and...I thought I fucking lost you. I’ve never…” Hank took a deep breath through his nose. “It’s been a while since I was that scared, buddy. I don’t give two shits what you do with your life- or, y’know, whatever the hell you wanna call it. Just as long as you don’t fucking lose it. Don’t do that to me.”

Hank paused so Connor could respond, and Connor did so by pulling back a bit as the wind picked up. Even with the comfy clothes, the bite of the cold was vicious on his bare arms, and Connor could feel himself shivering.

“Hank…” Connor swallowed again. “Hank, d-do you...do you still have my sweatshirt? I-I think I’d like to have it back.”

And Hank yanked him back in for another hug, this time laughing, and Connor hugged him back even tighter.

Chapter End Notes

Phew, glad I managed to get this one out. It's been a while since I've written a proper torture scene, I hope I haven't lost my touch D:. Let me know what you thought of this chapter, and what you did/didn't like! For real, lmk if there was anything that sounded off/was inconsistent, and I'll go in and fix it. Y'all are my fresh eyes.

Good news, I've started virtual school for my junior year (bc I refuse to wear a mask for seven hours a day. Ain't happening) so I've got a TON of freetime on my hands. Good for you guys too, because I've been doing a lot of writing when I get bored.

Anyway, formal apology from me. You don't have to tell me in the comments how an apology isn't necessary (though it makes me cry happy tears when y'all did that for my previous ones). My uploading schedule is really wack because I just really, really, really suck at time management, it's not because I want to stop writing (I don't), I've lost interest in the story or fandom (I haven't), or because I've got some epic, colossal writer's block (also no). A bit of it is due to the current global situation (guess which one lol), and a bit of it is due to my family's health, but I'm tired of using that excuse for all my late uploads, be I know y'all get tired of it too (don't say you haven't, if I were a reader that got the same excuse constantly I'd get tired of it too). So yeah, all these hiatuses are on me and my crappy time management. Sorry :(

On a happier note, make sure to join the Discord if you want! Link in Chapter 5. We all have a good time, and I'd love to see you stop in and say hello! I'm very active and receptive to anything you have to say, so if you wanna badger me if chapter 10 is this late, feel free to do so!

OH OH AND AND if you've left a comment on my work previously and haven't gotten a response from me, I'm so sorry! I'll get to you, I've got a couple dozen comments in my inbox to go through, so I promise you'll get a response! It'll be very late, though lol. Don't feel bad if I reply to a comment you forgot you even made haha.
All that aside, thank you for reading, and see you in the next chapter!

End Notes

If you're reading this, you're amazing! I'd love to hear some feedback! Do you like the concept? Do you hate it? How is my writing? Anything you would change? Let me know! I'm definitely going to finish the whole thing and upload it, so i want to know what y'all think!

While you wait for the next chapter, I have another angst fic up called 'This Isn't Me', and I've gotten positive feedback so far! If you like Hank & Connor father and son angst and don't mind a good ol' Self-Destruction story, feel free to read it :) 

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!